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Going to School on University Hotels
Matthew Arrants

There is a relative building boom in university-owned hotel development. Today, approximately 85 hotel facilities are owned by colleges and universities, with another 14 in the development process. These facilities are unique in that they are owned directly by the schools and are closely integrated with the campus. This relationship raises specific issues to be examined that may be different from issues facing more traditional owners such as developers, real estate investment trusts, and private equity funds.

The Food Photography Trend:
A Discussion of the Popular Trend and Tips on Taking Great Pictures
Laurel Greenfield

There is an explosion of food photography on a multitude of social media outlets, including Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, and Pinterest. This article explores the origins of this trend and gathers “foodtography” advice from restaurateurs and photographers.

Back to the Front:
Improving Guest Experiences at The Langham, Hong Kong
Michael Oshins

The Langham, Hong Kong senior management team challenged themselves to explore new ways to improve customer service, increase employee satisfaction, and break down front-of-house and back-of-house silos while still keeping an eye on managing costs. To accomplish this, The Langham redefined the role of housekeeping supervisors, expanding their responsibilities and changing their titles to Guest Experience Managers. Responsible for implementing and overseeing the change process, Dean Dimitriou, executive assistant manager of rooms, explains the innovative approach and its impact on hotel operations.

The Healthy Hotel
John D. Murtha

The general manager of the longest continually running hotel in America, Massachusetts Lodging Hall of Fame member, and Adjunct Professor at Boston University School of Hospitality offers his insights and advice on how to keep a hotel team healthy and happy.

Southern New England’s Middle-Skill Gap:
Dilemma for the Hospitality Industry
Erinn D. Tucker

In various parts of the United States, there is a significant workforce shortage because of an inadequate supply of workers with in-demand skills. Even though many Americans are graduating from high school and college, employers are concerned about the preparation and specific skill set of new graduates. Unless major improvements are made to the American educational system, American employers will be unable to find enough qualified workers for the growing numbers of middle-skill jobs.
Boston Hospitality Review

Volume 2 | Number 2 | Spring 2014

ISSN 2326-0351

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Published by
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There is a relative boom going on in college- and university-owned hotel development. Across the country there are approximately 85 hotel facilities that are owned by colleges and universities, with another 14 in the development process. These facilities are unique in that they are owned directly by the schools and are closely integrated with the campus. Schools with hotels in development range from small liberal arts colleges such as Swarthmore College to large universities such as Florida State University.

It is critical for schools, their partners, and service providers to understand that college- and university-owned hotels are different from those that are owned by traditional owners such as developers, real estate investment trusts, and private equity funds. Traditional owners develop risk and financial return expectations and then identify a hotel to develop or acquire. Conversely, colleges and universities identify the type of hotel they want to develop or acquire, and then evaluate the risk and return expectations.

Unlike typical developers and owners, colleges and universities are not always driven by profit. Their primary objective with any hotel asset is to support, protect, and improve their core mission. College and university hotels do this by providing an
amenity and accommodations for campus visitors, accommodating demand generated by school-related programs, controlling land for future redevelopment, and serving as a venue to support hospitality-related educational programs.

While most college and university hotels are owned by the school, ownership structures and reporting vary widely. Some schools have foundations that own the hotels, while others create separate entities. Within the organizational structure of the schools, the hotels can report to a wide range of bodies, including the Board of Trustees, asset management and real estate, the business school, the vice president of administration and finance, or the vice president for auxiliary operations.

Due to their unique objectives and locations, college- and university-owned hotels often cost more to build than those developed by independent, for-profit developers. Factors that drive up development costs include:

- The use of union labor: Most schools are unwilling to risk any negative press they might receive for using non-union labor.
- Expensive exteriors: Colleges and universities often have consistent campus-wide designs that might include features such as brick or stone facades or slate roofs, all of which serve to increase construction costs as compared to more typical new development.
- Extensive meeting space: Some schools develop full-service hotels with extensive meeting space in order to support their campus needs rather than to drive profits.
- State of the art technology: To positively reflect their larger brand, colleges and universities often require the latest and greatest guest-facing technology (e.g. RFID locks).
- Additional public space: Some recent school hotels have been built.

The colors and style of the Hotel Commonwealth's lobby reflect Boston University.
with oversized lobbies and public areas (e.g. the Morris Inn at Notre Dame and the Alfond Inn at Rollins College). These spaces are intended to serve as “the living room of the university.” Operating expenses can also be impacted by the school’s objectives. When weighing the protection of the school’s brand versus increased costs, colleges and universities will almost always choose protection of the brand. Therefore, a school is generally willing to offer higher wage and benefits packages to its employees than a more typical owner might, rather than risk a labor action that might tarnish its reputation. Additionally, because profit is not their primary motivation, many schools do not actively asset manage their hotels. Therefore there is no pressure on management to control costs.

Lastly, revenues are also often impacted by the lack of focus on profitability at college and university hotels. They face the unique situation of generating the majority of the demand for their hotels. This can create a significant challenge in setting prices for school-related demand. Departments are expected to use the school-owned facility whenever possible, but that could have a negative impact on their budget if more economical alternatives are available just off campus. Additionally, school-owned hotels must be careful not to appear as though they are price gouging during periods of strong demand (e.g. graduation and sporting events).

Many schools attempt to integrate the hotel with the rest of the university to leverage existing operations, relationships, and facilities. For example, most large universities have extensive in-house resources that can provide services and support for marketing, advertising, and public relations. They also have resources that can support the engi-
neering function of a hotel such as plumbers and electricians. Lastly, due to their size, some schools have their own power plant, or receive volume pricing that can benefit the hotel operation. When considering these economies of scale, it’s important to understand the strengths of the school and the needs of the hotel. For example, the school may have great web designers in house, but they have no experience with hotels. That could present a challenge for the operator who is ultimately going to be responsible for the site.

In order to ensure a successful hotel, ownership, their partners, and service providers must all have a clear understanding of the school’s objectives and the implications of those objectives. All parties should communicate in the planning, development, and operating phases in order to clarify ownership’s objectives. Then all decisions related to the hotel’s development and operations should be considered with an eye on the ultimate objectives.

Supplemental Information
Pinnacle Advisory Group was hired by Boston University (BU) in the mid 1990’s to assist evaluate demand and make facility recommendations for a proposed hotel in Kenmore Square. At the time the area was known for its noisy bars including the famous Rathskeller where many famous bands got their start in the 1970s and 80s. BU had two primary goals: to improve the area, which is considered the commercial gateway to the Charles River Campus, and to provide accommodations for visitors to the school. The four-star hotel that was built as a result, the Hotel Commonwealth, is credited with helping to transform the area. Kenmore Square is now a well-known culinary destination, thanks in part to the hotel’s leased restaurants. The property recently sold for $79 million with a land lease in place, allowing the school to return funds to the academic mission while maintaining control of the underlying land.

Matthew Arrants, ISHC, is the Executive Vice President of Pinnacle Advisory Group. Prior to joining Pinnacle, Mr. Arrants worked in operations with Four Seasons Hotels and Rock Resorts. He holds a master’s degree in hotel administration from Cornell University, and a bachelor’s degree in political science from Hartwick College. Email marrants@pinnacle-advisory.com
The Food Photography Trend: A Discussion of the Popular Trend and Tips on Taking Great Pictures
Laurel Greenfield

It seems that people are more willing than ever to share their lives as a series of photos on the Internet. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram make it easy to share every little detail with our friends and family and even with people we don’t know. We share photos of major life events like graduations and engagements alongside photos of friends and the occasional cute pet photos.

One trend that has recently gained momentum is the sharing of food photos. Our newsfeeds are bombarded everyday with everything from photos of homemade waffles to colorful rows of sushi. A quick search for “food” on Instagram or Pinterest will leave you with millions of posts and pictures to sift through and drool over. With one click you can find photos of sticky cinnamon buns overflowing with icing alongside pictures of gooey macaroni and cheese among other delicious looking dishes.

According to RJMetrics, an eCommerce analytics company, “Food is the fastest growing and most viral category on Pinterest.” There are even apps and websites designed strictly for sharing food photos and experiences. Foodspotting for example is an app, which allows users to search out the very best of a certain dish in their area based on what others have shared, while foodgawker.com has thousands of photos and recipes compiled from food blogs and websites inviting site visitors to “feed your eyes.”

Flickr, a photo sharing website has a “food photography club” where artists and food photo enthusiasts can discuss the latest trends in food photography. Discussions
range from lighting to various types of camera lenses.

So, why has food become such a popular photography subject with the masses? To put it simply, as Boston-based food and lifestyle photographer Heath Robbins says, “Food is life … It connects all of our senses together … and connects people, connecting friends, and moments in time.” Food is something everyone can relate to. Each of us has had at least one unforgettable experience with food and many of us associate specific dishes with certain family members or vivid memories. Seeing photos of our favorite childhood foods can transport us just as easily as seeing the dish in person.

People take photos of their food not only for themselves, but also to share with others. “The ability to go out and get a nicely presented meal has become more obtainable,” says Gian-Patrick Maggio, sous chef at Russell House Tavern, “Which in hand makes people want to photograph it as a remembrance … and also kind of showing off to friends.” There are always new restaurants to try and sharing photos of your experiences is a new way to share where you have eaten.

Not everyone is a fan of taking photos of food at restaurants however. According to the Huffington Post, several New York City restaurants have banned customers from taking photos of their food to post to social media. Faith Salie of CBS Sunday Morning says sharing photos from restaurants can seem “Less like sharing and more like bragging. If you really want to share your meal, make one.” She continued, “Our moments, like our meals, are meant to be consumed at

(left) Chocolate and creme Brulée ice cream
(Movenpick in Manly Beach, Australia)

Cappucino (Black Star Pastry in Sydney, Australia)
their most delicious, not put on hold while they congeal.”

Restaurants often post their own photos to their Facebook and Twitter pages as well. Some restaurants even have designated social media staff members who maintain and add photos to the restaurant’s social networking accounts to ensure the restaurant has a constant online presence. “The danger … is that everyone thinks they don’t need better pictures for marketing,” says Robbins. “Restaurants are shooting dishes under fluorescent lights… and it’s not appealing enough to draw in new customers.”

The sheer number of food photos available on the Internet and on apps like Instagram can be overwhelming, but those photos can serve as inspiration as well as eye candy. “I love seeing photos of food simply because I can learn and gain new ideas and possible techniques,” says Maggio. You can read a recipe with detailed instructions on how to make the perfect chocolate cake, but a beautifully composed photo of the finished product is more helpful and much more inspiring than words alone.

If you are looking to improve upon your “foodtography” skills, here are some tips from the pros.

- Your food “should be styled well and it should be clear what the dish is or there will be no interest,” says Robbins. “Look for that one bite that makes your mouth water.”
- The lighting of a photo is also a key role in its quality. “Bad lighting, particularly front lit with an on camera flash,” can make for a bad food photo, says Robbins, “It needs to be lit well … so the ‘flavor’ is believable.”
- Natural light is the best source according to Phoebe Melnick, director of photography for the Spoon University chapter at BU.
- Another simple rule is to make sure your photo is fully in focus. “You
don’t need to blur out half of the picture to make it interesting,” says Melnick, “don’t make it too artsy.”

- Vibrant colors and contrast in the foods you choose can really help draw in the viewer. “From a chef’s perspective, the best way to have a good food photo is … having something on the plate that really pops,” says Maggio.

[top left] Gluten free vanilla cupcake (Babycakes NYC in New York City)

[top right] Pear tart, rhubarb tart, Persian love cake, and ginger cake (Brickfield's Bakery in Sydney, Australia)

[bottom] Salmon cream cheese and dill on gluten free toast (Olive Green's Café in Sydney, Australia)
Understanding food and cooking also help when trying to take a great photo. “Study food first … Learn to cook,” says Robbins. “If you can’t cook or really understand food you won’t be a great food shooter.” You do not need culinary school degree to take a great picture, but experimentation and playing with different styles and techniques can add depth to your knowledge of food.

Be aware of your dinner guests while taking photos in restaurants. Snapping a quick picture is fine as long as the restaurant does not have a no photo policies. “Don’t stand on any chairs and don’t make other people wait too long,” says Melnick. “If their food is getting cold you need to stop!”

Great food photos evoke memories and tell stories. Excellent food is meant to be savored in the moment, but a great food photo can add another element to the experience, turning the ephemeral experience of a meal into a tangible memento that you can savor and share over and over again.

(top left) Shakshuka, a Middle Eastern dish of eggs poached in a spicy tomato sauce served with house-made pita bread (Sofra Bakery and Cafe in Cambridge)

(top right) Fried brussel sprouts (Namu Gaii in San Francisco)

Pan fried Daikon cakes studded with pork and served with plum sauce (Bubor Cha Cha in Chinatown, Boston)
“Generally speaking, food is a ‘happy’ thing,” says Maggio, “and seeing a delicious piece of food brings a smile or a happy memory to you. At the end of the day how can you not like food?”

Laurel Greenfield is a senior in the School of Hospitality Administration. After graduation, she will follow her passion for food by beginning her graduate in studies in Gastronomy. She is the copy editor of the BU chapter of Spoon University. Laurel is also a painter, with food being her primary subject.
While classroom interactions, readings, group projects and homework can help students develop new insights and understanding, nothing beats experience for the ultimate learning opportunity. With that in mind, Boston University’s School of Hospitality Administration developed Tourism in China, a class that strikes a balance, with classroom learning provided for the first seven weeks of the semester followed by a 10 day trip to China during Spring Break. This past March, 24 students and three faculty members followed up the classroom portion of the class by traveling together to Beijing, Shanghai, and Hong Kong. In each city, they undertook field research as they visited, studied, and explored tourist destinations and luxury hotels.

During their trip, the students and faculty toured the front and back of house and met with members of the executive management team of The Langham, Hong Kong in Kowloon. Langham, a luxury hotel chain, is held by parent company, Great Eagle Holdings Limited. That company is headquartered in Hong Kong and boasts whole or partial ownership of 14 hotels under the Langham or Langham Place brand. Boston, for example, is home to the Langham Hotel Boston, located in the former Federal Reserve Bank. The General Manager of Langham Hong Kong, Bob van den Oord, served as resident manager at the Boston property a decade ago.

A highlight of the visit to The Langham, Hong Kong in Kowloon was the opportunity to learn about the hotel’s creative approach to operations. Several members of the executive management team spoke with the BU students and faculty about how
they have worked to improve customer service, increase employee satisfaction, and also break down front-of-house and back-of-house silos.

To accomplish this, The Langham, Hong Kong redefined the role of housekeeping supervisors, expanding their responsibilities and changing their titles to Guest Experience Managers. Dean Dimitriou, the executive assistant manager of rooms, was responsible for implementing and overseeing the change process. In a one-on-one interview with faculty member, Dr. Michael Oshins, who traveled to China with the BU contingent, Dimitiriou answered questions about this innovative approach and its impact on hotel operations.

[Oshins]: What made you think of the idea to create Guest Experience Managers? Have you seen or experienced the dual role of housekeeping supervisor and experience manager at previous properties or companies?

[Dimitriou]: We came up with the concept internally. We brainstormed with the team on how we can further increase our engagement with our guests and collect more preferences to place on their profile. After a number of meetings, we all came to the conclusion that as our guests spend a considerable time in their rooms, why not bring our guest relations service to the guest floors.

The Housekeeping Floor Supervisors went through an intensive training including butler service, engagement training, and guest relations knowledge. With a slight adjustment on the headcount, we were able to reduce their room check responsibility from 60 rooms per day, to 50; therefore allowing them to spend that extra time to welcome our guests and engage with them during their stay.

In short, Guest Experience Managers ensure tailor each guests room setup based on their
preferences, offer a warm welcome upon arrival, offer a personal room orientation, offer personalized unpacking service, a welcome beverage on arrival, a point of contact during their stay, engage with the Guest during stay, collect preferences from the guest (e.g. how they like their room setup or extra items they like in their minibar etc.), leave personalized notes in their room post engagement and offer a fond farewell on departure.

What was the process and execution for making the change happen?

With every project we work on, we follow a process, known internally as “Langham Logic”. This process involves:

- Defining the situation at hand: What is the purpose of the project, the problems and opportunities, and the duration
- Measure: Looking at past data, collecting current data for a period of time, understanding the processes involved, understanding where we are now in the current process, and benchmarking measures
- Analyze: Looking at the core areas of the process we are trying to improve
- Improvement solutions and an action plan
- Control: What the results are and ongoing measures to monitor performance of the process and continued effectiveness of our solution and analyzing the before and after impact.

Do you have any data showing tangible results?

Our main guest satisfaction measure, a guest survey completed by guests post departure, has shown a 7% post implementation of our
Guest Experience Manager Roles. We also receive up to 30 guest comments per month from guests reflecting how impressed they are with the service received by these Guest Experience Managers.

Guest Experience Managers themselves gain an increased sense of accomplishment now having the ability to impact a guest’s stay through engagement; where in the past they only relied on ensuring their rooms were immaculate in terms of cleanliness.

How has the change impacted finances? Have the costs of implementation been high and have you seen a result in the bottom line?

A dollar figure cannot be placed against the increase of guest satisfaction; however we have seen a 50% increase in enrollments into our loyalty program based on our guests satisfaction during their stay, which is in turn resulting in an increase in the repeat guest ratio. So the increase in guest satisfaction is increasing the number of loyal guests we have and the fact our repeat guests not only will enable us to secure future repeat business, their off spend and average rate is typically higher than average.

The costs involved for this project were very minimal in proportion to the positive impact they have on our guests. By simply adding two additional people to the Housekeeping Floor Supervisor Team, we were able to allocate 50 rooms per supervisor and re-title them to Guest Experience Managers and kick-start the project.

What are the future plans for the Guest Experience Managers? Will the program continue? Are there plans to expand it or roll it out to other properties?

Currently our Guest Experience Managers service our Loyalty member guests. Future plans for this year are to service all arriving guests with the goal to roll this position out to other Langham Properties in the future.

Could this work outside of Hong Kong in the United States?

By providing the right training, re-working the job description, re-distributing the workload, and communicating the development opportunities for colleagues and their potential impact on their guests—yes I do think this is possible for any hotel to implement.

Can you think of any anecdotes from customers that demonstrate the impact that the change has made?

A regular guest of ours booked an Italian restaurant in town the second time he visited with positive feedback. Our file for him also shows that he likes outside seating, drinking out of a large red wine glass for his white wine, and likes to eat his ice cream with a soupspoon. Therefore on all future visits our concierge team sends him a pre-arrival email asking whether he would like us to book him in at his favorite restaurant. We also highlight any new Italian restaurants that have opened. We ensure that the restaurant knows his preferences and has his large wine glass, soupspoon for his dessert, and outside seating. We also tailor his guest room with extra soupspoons in his minibar and large wine glasses for his wine. Each time he says he is blown away with our attention to detail.

What do the Guest Experience Managers think about their new jobs and duties?

Lesley, one of our very bubbly Guest Experience Managers feels she is ecstatic with the
fact that the hotel has given her the chance to engage with guests. Prior to the new role there was not an expectation that housekeeping should engage with the guests. Now, housekeeping is guest relations on the floor. I now keep in touch with some guests even after they leave. They just want to feel at home and I make sure they do. One guest was lovely—she called me all day for each item and she was delighted I was like her personal butler.

*Can you give some details for the three training areas? Let’s start with butler training.*

This involves anticipating guests needs, paying unrivalled attention to detail, and providing seamless and distinctive service. We strive for unparalleled service transcending the expectation of guests, indulging guests with thoughtful touches of luxury, and a memorable experience through personal service.

*What about engagement training?*

Engagement training with regards to various topics of discussion based on guest purpose of visit (e.g. leisure, business, tour group etc.), using guest preferences on file to tailor room setup and leave a little note for the guest. For example, if a guest loves Diet Coke, we place extra Diet Coke in the minibar and leave a note. We also collect notes about the guests’ hobbites or personal preferences, for example if they like a specific football team or enjoy going to the theater, we leaving relevant information relating to that in their room.

*And what about training for guest relations?*

Guest relations training involves training on our 1865 loyalty program and how to manage guests profiles in the Opera system. We also train employees in how to ensure guest recognition through the hotel amenity pro-
gram, repeat guest recognition program, special occasions and general adherence of guest loyalty program benefits.

**What technology have you used to support the program?**

Our Opera system is used to record all out guests preferences as well as our main operating system. The guest preferences also migrate to our 1865 intranet, which has a two-way interface with all our properties to allow the sharing of guest preferences.

**How long did it take from original brainstorming to rolling out the Guest Experience Managers?**

Brainstorming how to improve the guest experience started in 2012 and additional expenses and payroll was budgeted accordingly for 2013. The process involved the entire housekeeping supervisor team, guest relations team, Chief Concierge, Executive Housekeeper, Club manager, Front Office Manager, F&B Manager, and Rooms Management. Roll out of the new positions took approximately 16 months due to time taken to budget and source the right candidates to fill the two vacancies required to start the new roles.

**What was the process or buy-in meeting with the housekeepers?**

It is a non-union position and very much involved the buy-in from the housekeeping team. ■

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**Michael Oshins** is Associate Professor of the Practice of Leadership in the School of Hospitality Administration at Boston University. He is former Vice President of Integer Dynamics, a hospitality consulting firm focused on operational productivity and technology. He holds a doctorate in human resource education from Boston University and a master’s degree in hotel administration from Cornell University. Email: moshins@bu.edu
Doctors say that people who exercise, eat right, reduce stress, and have a balanced outlook on life stay healthy and live longer. So, could it be said that teamwork, having the right resources, maintaining a stable operation and fostering a productive culture will make a hotel healthier and more successful over time? Yes. A focus on keeping things “healthy” offers useful perspectives for hotel managers looking to enhance the culture and results of their operation.

Setting the Tone

The hotel I manage is home to a lot of history and more than 30 associates that belong to our 30+ Club signifying 30 or more years of service to the property. Their tenure is an important element of the atmosphere, culture, and success of the hotel. Part of my job is to make sure this special staff attribute is nurtured, applauded and contributes to the overall “tone” of the operation.

What’s a “tone”? It’s a style, a manner of being, or as Merriam-Webster says: “The state of a living body or of any of its organs or parts in which the functions are healthy and performed with due vigor.” Establishing a tone that infuses the operation with health and vigor is a critical step in cultivating success over time.

The GM is the one to take the lead on this, enrolling his or her management team in the tone-setting process. It starts with having shared goals and tactics for achieving outcomes. Then, it means fostering an atmosphere where people feel comfortable, recognized as individuals by everyone in the hotel (especially the GM) and acknowledged for their contributions.

A simple thing like noting an associate’s birthday goes a long way. As often as I
can, I do so in person with the associate at their workplace, along with sending a card to their home. I also make a point of congratulating sales managers when they hit their monthly goal, or gently urge them on when they miss it. At those times, I find it works better to be a cheerleader and leave the coaching to their director.

Setting the tone includes being fair and consistent in all dealings with associates and guests, being easily accessible to everyone and telling the truth, even when it’s not easy to do so. But, it also means injecting some humor into the operation. The hotel business—and, it is a business—can be stressful at times, so keeping things light when the pressure’s on allows people to relax and perform better.

A Balanced Diet

Doctors also recommend a balanced diet as a way to stay healthy. The same advice works to keep hotels healthy. What constitutes a healthy diet for a hotel? In my view, it comes down to a balanced “feeding” of the primary constituent groups served by the property, including the owner, the guests, and the staff.

In order for a hotel to prosper over time, it must generate a reasonable return for the ownership entity that risked its capital in the first place. You need to pay bills on time, keep the property in great physical condition and acquire, develop, and retain a professional staff. This all requires sustained profitability.

The guest also needs to gain something from the hotel’s operation. Travelers expect personalized service, cleanliness in everything, modern systems, and good memories of their experience. You may very well be leaving some money on the table to generate high levels of guest satisfaction, but that comes with the territory when you’re looking for a balanced diet.

Your staff must be well served in the process, too. Fair rates of pay, good benefits, opportunities for training and advancement, personalized acknowledgement of their contributions to the operation, and consistent application of rules and regulations are essential elements of generating high degrees of employee satisfaction and low turnover. Again, some profit may be foregone to make sure that the staff is happy and taking good care of your guests. But it’s worth it.

Dual Health Benefits of MBWA

A few decades back, we learned that unstructured management by wandering (or walking) around (MBWA) was distinguished as a valid way to improve the morale and productivity of an organization. I think that MBWA is intuitive to most hoteliers because we know the best way to understand what’s happening in our hotels comes from being “on the floor” and responding to what we directly observe, rather than from reports, documents and other sources after the fact.

Japanese businesses use the notion go to gemba (“the real place”) to highlight the concept of having managers spend their time where the work is done. This approach asserts that direct experience best informs problem solving and process improvement.

MBWA is a great way to catch your associates performing well so you can acknowledge their contributions immediately or provide feedback for improvement, when needed. It also works to increase the amount of time you spend with guests, in the lobby and elsewhere throughout your property. One should use time spent at “the real place” productively and not simply to get out of the office.

The second benefit of MBWA is the health benefit to you, personally, from being on the floor. Some fitness experts claim that staying healthy requires a steady diet
of 10,000 steps per day, which for a person of average height is about 4 ½ miles of walking. You may not be able to walk that much each day on-property, but practicing some level of daily, unstructured MBWA can reduce stress, keep you healthy and strengthen your operation.

**Checking In**

Another benefit of MBWA is that it’s probably the best way to experience how your associates are performing. You can then praise or coach them in “real” time. But there’s an important distinction in how to approach this task. It’s the difference between checking “on,” and checking “in,” with your staff.

I suggest that checking “on” is based on an unstated belief that the person being monitored might have done something wrong—even unintentionally—that needs to be corrected. One checks on people to make sure they adhered to established standards and procedures, to verify that specific instructions have been precisely followed or requests have been fulfilled in an acceptable manner. Managers accustomed to checking “on” their colleagues use the phrase “inspect what you expect.”

On the other hand, checking “in” with an associate assumes no wrong-doing, but rather that you care about them and their work. Good morning! How’s it going today? Is everything okay? Can I give you a hand? Is anything missing? Did you get that report you needed? How’s our guest that needed some TLC yesterday? These are the questions posed by a manager checking “in” with, and not “on,” their associates.

The answers you receive and observations you make still alert you to problems that need to be addressed, but your comments based on the checking-in style will more likely be perceived by associates as support for their efforts, not criticism. I think this is a healthier management approach that works to ensure both guests and staff have a memorable experience of your hotel.

**Praising Praise**

Many hotels have an all-associate meeting, once a month or a quarter, sometimes known as a “Koffee Klatch.” At one of our...
recent meetings, most members of the executive committee presented their team’s accomplishments for the previous year. One member of the committee neglected to do so.

This particular division head knew immediately he’d made a mistake. His team had done quite a lot to improve the operation during the year and they deserved to be recognized in front of their peers. After the meeting, his team politely asked “Hey, what about us?” Be assured that the division head made up for the error at the next meeting.

I’ve normally found it easy to show gratitude to my staff for doing great work but wanted to know if there was evidence that doing so improves their well-being and results. I did some quick online research to see if any studies have shown a connection between showing gratitude and improved employee engagement. It turns out that lots of work has been done on this subject; here are some findings that I found interesting:

- Praising someone’s good work causes dopamine to be released in his or her brain. Dopamine is a chemical that is credited with generating feelings of pride and pleasure.
- Showing gratitude also increases feelings of goodwill in the person delivering the praise.
- People who don’t receive praise for their efforts report having the notion “What am I doing this for?” This implies that it’s not all about the money.
- Recognizing entire teams of associates for the value they add to the overall operation bolsters the enthusiasm of each member of the team and improves their standing within the organization. This is why we celebrate Housekeeping Week.
- Faint praise doesn’t work and neither do scheduled recognition ceremonies, at least not for very long. Appreciation and praise needs to happen on a regular basis under typical business conditions for it to be effective.
- Praise also needs to be very specific. A simple “great job” won’t suffice. Tell them exactly what they did that had you say “great job” in the first place.
- Rodd Wagner and Jim Harter, authors of 12: The Elements of Great Managing, said “Great managers meetings are excellent places to recognize great work or suggest ways of improvement to the group as a whole.
are extremely effective in figuring out the best form of praise for each person. Some managers worry that they can give employees too much recognition. But the research shows that it’s extremely difficult to do that, as long as the recognition is right for the person.”

Operating a busy hotel can be stressful at times so it’s in everyone’s best interest to avoid stress whenever possible. Here are some common business activities that most hoteliers wouldn’t typically describe as stress reducers but that I find work that way for my team and me:

**Accurate Forecasts:** If everyone in your operation knows what is really going to happen, then plans and resources will be aligned correctly. This is especially true when scheduling staff. Accurate forecasts lead to department schedules that appropriately match staffing with business levels, thus avoiding the last minute scrambling that occurs when solid information was absent during the scheduling process.

Purchasing activities also benefit greatly from accurate forecasts. Haven’t you ever had to jump in your car to fetch something for the chef that he or she needs right now but didn’t buy sooner because the forecast was “off?”

**Apropriate Meetings:** Most of us who prefer to be on the floor don’t like to be in meetings, so start relating to them differently—as opportunities to reduce stress. The more that you and your associates know about what’s going to happen, the better that everyone can prepare to deal effectively with those upcoming realities. Your guests will benefit as well, from the friendly service that is naturally offered by relaxed, “in the know” staff members.

**Handling Issues Immediately:** Issues and the stress they create aren’t going to disappear until you and your staff deal with them head-on, so you might as well handle things quickly and completely. It’s the next best thing to having done it right in the first place, the best stress reducer of them all.

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**Further Reading**

This material was originally published on my blog, “The Healthy Hotel”, at HOTELSMag.com. I hope that you’ll check out future postings and take the opportunity to share with other managers what you’ve done to improve the culture and results of your hotel.

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**John D. Murtha**, CHA, is a 38-year veteran of the hospitality industry. He is currently General Manager of the Omni Parker House Hotel in Boston, the longest continuously-operating hotel in America. He has been an adjunct lecturer in the School of Hospitality Administration at Boston University since 2001. He was recently inducted into the Hall of Fame by the Massachusetts Lodging Association. John graduated from the Hotel Administration program at the University of New Hampshire, where he is currently a member of the Hospitality Leadership Council and Advisory Board. Email jmurtha@bu.edu
In various parts of the United States, there is a significant workforce shortage because of an inadequate supply of workers with in-demand skills. Even though many Americans are graduating from high school and college, employers are concerned about the preparation and specific skills of new graduates. Unless major improvements are made to the American educational system, American employers will be unable to find enough qualified workers for the growing numbers of skilled jobs.

Policymakers and business leaders in New England are concerned about the ramifications of a potential shortage of skilled labor. Besides worrying about insufficient numbers of skilled workers, policy makers and business leaders are also concerned that the region’s workforce will not have the right mix of skills to fill the jobs created by the New England economy. While the region needs a mix of high, medium, and low skilled workers, it is the lack of workers needed to fill the middle-skill level that is of primary concern.

“Special attention needs to be given to attracting and developing a non-professional workforce,” says Dr. Sandra Casey-Buford, executive vice president of strategy and innovation for Decision Insight, Inc., an organizational transition management firm located in the Greater Boston Area. “It has been well noted that the non-professional and paraprofessional workforce in Massachusetts remains in the shadows of the hun-

Southern New England’s Middle-Skill Gap: Dilemma for the Hospitality Industry
Erinn D. Tucker

Sources: Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development and US Census Bureau
dreds of highly skilled professionals who graduate from the state’s mecca of colleges and universities.”

A recent research report for the New England Public Policy Center, *Mismatch in the Labor Market: Measuring the Supply of and Demand for Skilled Labor in New England*, identified the middle-skill category as facing the greatest imbalance between the supply and demand for labor in New England over the next two decades. Middle-skill workers are considered individuals with some college education or an associate’s degree. These workers often fill critical jobs in healthcare, education, information technology, and other industries such as the hospitality industry. These jobs require some specialized skills, and often involve interpersonal interaction that cannot be easily outsourced or automated. This description fits the hospitality industry to a tee. Great service cannot be outsourced; you must come to the service professionals who know what it is and how to deliver.

Recent labor market trends and future projections for southern New England (Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island) vary tremendously from northern New England (Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont). In northern New England, where population growth is projected to stagnate, policies aimed at attracting and retaining skilled workers will be a priority. In southern New England, where the population is projected to shift toward minority and immigrant groups, policies need to ensure that workers have the right skills to fill jobs created by the region’s economy.

Massachusetts is experiencing a shortage of middle-skill workers. In 2007, about 45 percent of all jobs were classified as middle-skill, but only 32 percent of Massachusetts’s workers had the education and training required to fill those positions. In reality, the gap was likely even greater in certain industries because many workers trained to the middle-skill level—and even those with bachelor’s degrees—did not have the specific technical skills needed. This means that thousands of well-paid and rewarding jobs are going unfilled in the Commonwealth. Middle-skill workers provide the fuel for industries, such as hospitality and tourism that are, and will continue to be, essential to keeping businesses in Massachusetts while also enhancing the state’s economic portfolio.

While, Massachusetts has made significant investments in education and training for its workforce, especially in K–12 education, basic skills, and incumbent worker training, the Commonwealth has underinvested in public higher education and vocational and technical training—two critical components of the state’s training infrastructure that must be better aligned to meet industry demand for middle-skill workers. It is recommended that Massachusetts develop affordable pathways to postsecondary education and training for all residents, including those with very low skills and incomes. Massachusetts should also address the gaps that often exist between adult basic education, postsecondary training, and industry-specific skills training.

Dr. Casey-Buford suggests that firms need to form more partnerships with two-year vocational schools and community col-
leges. “I find that many people don’t know what opportunities exist in lodging and related industries,” she said. “Therefore, partnerships should include career awareness seminars and workshops, internships, mentorships, scholarships, and sponsorships to grow a pipeline of well-prepared candidates.”

In addition, it is suggested that Massachusetts also make significant investments in programs that will train more residents who are laid off, or working in low-skill jobs, for better paying middle-skill jobs and careers. Specifically, the hospitality industry provides the greatest opportunity for this investment due to the multiple business segments it affects directly. The chart on the following page identifies, but is not limited to, the various segments of the hospitality industry.

Due to the effect the hospitality industry has on various business sectors and suppliers, this opens up an opportunity for Massachusetts to address the middle-skill shortage. There are many different pathways to middle-skill jobs and the table below provides a brief summary of opportunities for workforce deployment training programs for Massachusetts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time to Complete</th>
<th>Availability</th>
<th>Types of Jobs</th>
<th>Where Jobs are Currently</th>
<th>Growth Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Short-term, less than a year, on-the-job training</td>
<td>Employers</td>
<td>Food preparation and service workers</td>
<td>Food Services &amp; Drinking Places (67%)</td>
<td>12.90%</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Food &amp; Beverage Stores (9%)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Nursing &amp; Residential Care Facilities (5%)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Elementary &amp; Secondary Schools (5%)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Professional &amp; Business Services (3%)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Accommodation (2%)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Short-term, less than a year, on-the-job training</td>
<td>Employers</td>
<td>Hotel desk clerks</td>
<td>Leisure &amp; Hospitality (97%)</td>
<td>13.80%</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Food Service &amp; Drinking Places (85%)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Accommodation (5%)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Employment Services (2%)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Nursing &amp; Residential Care Facilities (2%)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Short-term, less than a year, on-the-job training</td>
<td>Employers</td>
<td>Waiters and waitresses</td>
<td>Food Manufacturing (35%)</td>
<td>7.30%</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Food &amp; Beverage Stores (28%)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Accommodation &amp; Food Services (25%)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Self-Employed (4%)</td>
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<td>2 years or specialized training</td>
<td>Community college</td>
<td>Bakers and pastry chefs</td>
<td>Food Services &amp; Drinking Places (40%)</td>
<td>8.40%</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Nursing &amp; Residential Care Facilities (24%)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Elementary &amp; Secondary Schools (2%)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Amusement, Gambling, and Recreation Industries (2%)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Hospitals (2%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 years or specialized training</td>
<td>Community college</td>
<td>Chefs and cooks</td>
<td>Food Services &amp; Drinking Places (74%)</td>
<td>6.30%</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Nursing &amp; Residential Care Facilities (5%)</td>
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<td>Accommodation (5%)</td>
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<td>Elementary &amp; Secondary Schools (3%)</td>
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<td>Amusement, Gambling, and Recreation Industries (2%)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hospitals (2%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree or higher</td>
<td>Universities with 4 year hospitality programs</td>
<td>Food service and lodging managers</td>
<td>Self-Employed (42%)</td>
<td>4.90%</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Food Services &amp; Drinking Places (40%)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Accommodation (7%)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Nursing &amp; Residential Care Facilities (3%)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Elementary &amp; Secondary Schools (2%)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Retail Trade (2%)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Addressing the need for middle-skill workers will require attention not only to educational opportunities for young people, but also for those already in the workforce. Close to two-thirds of the people who will be in Massachusetts’s workforce in the year 2020 were already working adults in 2005—long past the traditional high school-to-college pipeline. That is why talent management and workforce development have become and will continue to be some of the most important issues emphasized by human resources management. This provides southern New England with the opportunity to shape and develop human capital for a sustainable and growing economy.

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Boston Hospitality Review
School of Hospitality Administration
Boston University
928 Commonwealth Avenue
Boston, MA 02215
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Website

www.bu.edu/bhr
ISSN 2326-0351