

# Nurturing Leaders for a better future of Hospitality Industry

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**Abstract.** It is quite evident that hospitality industry is one of the fastest growing service intensive industry creating employment opportunities for millions. Being dynamic in nature and expanding horizon beyond the existing market, the industry is facing challenges in meeting the growing needs of the service sector along with the guests. To achieve the goal of customer satisfaction, the industry needs skilled labor with potential knowledge and skills to achieve excellence and trained minds to lead. It has been rightly quoted, 'Leaders are not born but made' and to carve leaders, it is the need of the hour to move from general management to transformational leadership which focuses on creativity, innovativeness and higher motivation for all, creating a conducive environment to learn and grow. Learning is an ongoing process and the process to transform should begin at an early stage of development and the same skill to be nurtured well, the very moment a student steps into the hospitality sector.

This paper thus focuses on the improvements needed in both the industry and the education system in India to inculcate the soft skills in the graduates to develop better leaders, the role of human resource management in training minds and different leadership patterns in the industry. The paper, at last, highlights the leadership challenges faced by hospitality industry, the understanding of which can help in achieving the goals and contribute to the profitability of an organization.

**Keywords:** Leaders, leadership, hospitality, human resource, curriculum, challenges

## 1 Introduction

Today, we are living in a world governed by the principles of competing. The race to win is getting harder and harder with hundreds of companies failing in achieving their goals and shutting down. The success of any company largely depends on the success of the leader. A leader is a person who has the ability to influence people around to work in a particular direction, motivates the followers and thus contributes to the goals of any organization. The questions that arise are: Do we need managers or leaders? What is the difference between them?

In simple words, any person who motivates, encourages, communicates with his/her colleagues is a leader whereas one who just delegates the work is a manager. Not all manager can be a leader, it solely depends on the behavioral aspect of a person A manager might be able to plan the work very efficiently but the people under him are not very confident so do you think he is a good leader? The answer would be a straight NO. The need of the hour is to develop leaders rather than managers who possess the skills to change the world and not just meet the company's goals and objectives.

Undoubtedly, Hospitality industry is one of the fastest growing competitive industries with ever growing needs of the customers, pushing the employees to do better each day. Right leadership is the key factor which is needed for maintaining high employee morale for generating better outputs and high productivity. The budding hoteliers need to be carved into leaders from the second introduced to the industry at the graduation level. This will not only determine their future in the industry but will also make them better human beings with great potential to succeed in dynamic environment.

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## 2 Major leadership skills

- **Technical Skills:** The ability to effectively and efficiently perform the duties with required knowledge and skills.
- **Human Skills:** An ability to motivate your colleagues, listen and respect others opinions and thus creating healthy work environment which decides the perception of the followers
- **Conceptual Skills:** Ability to understand your organization and accordingly develop and modify plans on the line of the missions and vision of the company .

## 3 Developing leadership skills

Hospitality industry is a skill-based industry demanding high passion to learn and work. Many institutes around the world and in India have hospitality courses designed to develop the skills to succeed in the hotels. The curriculum of most of these institutes focuses on the knowledge of four core departments and basics of ancillary areas related to the industry. Though there is a benefit of getting campus placements in top notch brands, the industry is facing the issue of high attrition rate which is increasing at approximately 10% each year. A recent research indicates that people don't leave their jobs, they leave their bosses. 50 % of 7000 employees left their jobs to 'get away from their managers'. A clear solution to the problem is to create better leaders resulting in a better work culture and thus retaining employees. The change should begin from the root level i.e. from the graduation level where educators can play a great role by not carving hoteliers but better employees who are fit for any job. The tenure of 3 years should focus largely on skill development supported by theoretical knowledge containing introduction to various administrative subjects like human resource management, sales and marketing etc. This will help in broadening the career opportunities even in MNCs after the completion of course. Introduction of Psychology – a study of human behavior in the curriculum will actually help students in having better understanding of human nature and thus learning how to deal with them. Sustainability or sustainable management should be incorporated in the curriculum as it has become the new standard in the industry. The curriculum should be updated to help students develop practical competencies about sustainability, as management is all about proper utilization of available resources.

With the unexpected turn of events after the COVID 19 situation, it has become more important to create awareness about crisis management at the graduation level. The educators need to add the new vocabulary and procedures which are now mandatory for hospitality industry like 'sanitization', 'food safety' etc. by discussing the new practices adopted in the industry. The development of such curriculum will contribute towards building a sense of responsibility in the students and will prepare them to produce results in any such crisis situations.

Various activities and trainings should be organized to develop sensitivity towards others which is the key quality of any leader. Industrial training and vocational trainings can be added with fixed credit score for the students to complete. Students should be given sensitivity training ( type of training given in corporate world ) where they are made to share their views ,knowledge , their life stories , appreciate others thus helping them to develop respect for other individuals through group interactions and realizing their own goals .

The success of any education system largely depends on the students and the teachers. It is very important to realize the potential of the students as well the knowledge and skills of the teachers and accordingly plan the curriculum. For example: A private college might have subjects like Business communication but if the students don't know basic English, the subject will be for mere cramming having no practical relevance. The application of digital sources can help impart knowledge in the best possible way and incorporating classroom activities like Group discussions, Role plays, case studies etc. can really make the learning process interesting.

The curriculum planned should balance the practical and theoretical knowledge even focusing on educator's development with research segments for students. The schedule should be revised with the growing needs of the students as well as industry.

#### 4 Leadership styles in work environment

A leader is the one who has the perfect blend of human, technical and conceptual skills which cannot be developed in a day. It is the experience and understanding that helps in developing leadership qualities. It has been proven that - ‘The candidates with more hunger to achieve, perform better than those possessing skills in the area.’ which indicates the importance of behavioral traits over knowledge. Most companies, now days prefer candidates possessing high EQ i.e. Emotional intelligence over candidates having better knowledge and skills, giving birth to Psychometric tests and situation handling as a major rounds in interviews. The concept focuses largely on understanding yourself, managing yourself, social awareness and social skills and the absence of any of these factors may result in failure to lead. The employees need to self-introspect themselves and accordingly decide the area of interest. SWOT analysis (Strength – Weakness – Opportunity – Threats) and Myers Briggs Personality test can help in discovering what part of the skill is lacking to be at a managerial position.

Understanding the organization involves deep analysis of the vision, mission, goals and objectives accordingly designing the leadership patterns. There can be two types of leadership patterns in an organization:

1. **Directive / Authoritative:** A traditional method includes the involvement of just the top management and downward communication which restricts the participation of the members and being less flexible, leads to high turnover.
2. **Participative:** A modern approach involves equal participation of the management and the employees involving shared ideas, delegation of duties, vertical and downward communication in the hierarchy. This method is much more creative and helps in developing knowledge and skills. This is very similar to transformational leadership where the employees are responsible for the future as they are the major decision makers. Alexander the Great once quoted that, “I am not afraid of an army of lions led by a sheep; I am afraid of an army of sheep led by a lion.” which clearly highlights the concept of participative leadership in an organization.

The simplest way to develop leadership is to stay in the shadow of a good leader, observe and learn from each action. The approach of ‘the buddy system’ used by the Housekeeping department of the hotels where each new employee is paired with an experienced personnel so that they can work together and the new employee can observe and learn, is being adopted by few renowned hotel chains. The personality of the Buddy would have a huge impact on the fresher and this would determine the long term outputs.

In hotels, the major contributor in developing soft skills is the role of Human resource department. The department is responsible for planning and executing training and development for improving the level of employee outcomes. Various forms of training should be provided at different levels of the hierarchy depending on the weaknesses. Executive development program should also be added for the proper training of the managers. Various types of personality based trainings should also be provided like sensitivity training, transactional analysis, games and simulations etc. which focus on understanding the employees and their ego states (the mixture of characteristics possessed by adults, parent and child) and accordingly working on the skills, knowledge level and personality. Thus, Human resource management, if plans the training and development in a systematic way, can contribute to personality development of the employees.

Not only it is the role of the Human resource but the managers and department heads are equally responsible for creating a learning environment for all. A recent study states that ‘In the next 5 years, creativity will be the most important leadership quality. Greater agility and more experimentation will be needed to meet the demands of the changing environment.’ The idea behind the creative leadership is to allow all the employees to share ideas and execute the best which can uplift the service quality and provide an upper edge in the market.

One of the most important step can be division of duties and target setting. Performance appraisal should be done periodically and Multirater feedback (360° feedback) which involves measurement of

the person's leadership abilities on the basis of viewpoints of the subordinates, supervisors etc. can really motivate the employees to perform better. Well planned curriculum targeting on polishing of communication skills can add feathers to the crown. Informal and formal mentoring by the supervisors can help in enhancing the skills of the subordinates. Rotational work pattern which gives an insight into the working of other departments can really help in understanding the functioning of the entire organization. For example: The Front Office employees can be occasionally asked to work or observe the functioning of Food and Beverage Service department, Sales department etc. and vice versa. A new concept of group-based leadership requires the leaders and the potential leaders to work together and in different work environments. In hospitality industry, the managers can be provided outside experiences by conducting exchange program within the same chain of hotels which will allow them to develop executive skills, get high – value constructive feedbacks, tackle different types of challenges and in breaking the functional silos.

## 5 Leadership challenges faced by the industry

A global consultancy company after conducting a survey, concluded that only 13 % of the employees around the world are engaged in work i.e. about one – eighth of the workers are psychologically committed to their jobs and thus have higher productivity levels. The main reason for the job dissatisfaction is poor management resulting in toxic work environment. The hospitality industry is no exception.

In any organization, the employee's perception of his/ her manager can largely affect their level of motivation, creativity, productivity and engagement, and thus the level of service. The efficiency of a manager is largely dependent of what the employees think of him. This evaluation can be a real eye – opener but there are hardly few hotel groups which have set a 360° evaluation system to control their quality of leaders.

Adding to this, the various issues faced in terms of leadership development in industry include:

- **Profit – oriented functioning:** The main aim of any business organization at the end of the day is to earn profit and maintain the workflow in the organization for which the main focus becomes the 'hard skills' or technical skills instead of considering the behavioural aspects of the people while recruiting them. This then at the management level results in issues of unfairness, lack of empathy, lack of integrity, or lack of transparency giving rise to toxic managers.
- **Inefficient selection process:** Mostly the selection process is based on a candidate's CV highlighting the achievements, education and work experience and not on the personality of the candidate.
- **Incorrect promotion decisions:** A person may be very knowledgeable holding experience of many years but might not be a good leader. Professional expertise doesn't guarantee leadership qualities. A candidate might be possessing great individual skills but leadership is all about teamwork and thus will fail in the same.
- **Wrong definition of leadership:** Employees try to walk on the footsteps of their leaders. The meaning of leadership should not involve the term 'fear'. A good manager should allow discussion and exchange of ideas. The fear will never allow a manager to get the best out of the people.
- **Challenge of promoting work – life balance:** The industry is operational round the clock with great work pressure on the employees especially during the peak seasons. This results in long hour shifts and in turn reduced potential. Being one of the major reasons for high turnover rate with nearly 6% of staff departing every single month, the Hospitality union in 2019 raised the issue with the idea of implementing 9 hours shift in hotels of Pune, Maharashtra. Once implemented, the flexible working conditions will not only create more job opportunities but also generate better outputs.

The turnover statistics reveal that 'Strong management transparency leads to 30% better retention rates.' Therefore, the aim should be to develop the employees individually at the same time work as an efficient team. Though it becomes bit difficult with the ever-changing needs of the customers and technological advancement but the only solution to the problem of high attrition rate is developing a team through mentoring, coaching, giving them equal opportunities in decision – making process etc.

## 6 Conclusion

It is not wrong to state that leadership should be combined with strong management for better results. With the development in technology and higher guest expectations, the industry needs transformational and innovative leadership where new ideas are discussed and implemented. The skills need to be developed by giving a kick start with practical knowledge and industrial exposure with focus on all kinds of soft skills so that the graduates can not only be successful in a particular industry but can do well in life. The students should be made aware about the different options open to them after the completion of the course such as in banks, corporate world, government jobs etc. and not just restrict them to hotels, airlines and cruise liners. According to a research, 85 % of the job today's students will be doing in 2030 haven't been invented yet. The aim is thus to carve employees for these future jobs for the bright future of the industry.

## 7 Methodology

The research paper is descriptive with data derived from primary sources by observation in institution and various secondary sources. A detailed study from various journals, textbooks, reports and e-books has allowed the successful compilation and completion of the same.

## 8 Recommendation

The researcher has focused on developing leaders for growth of hospitality industry. The further research can be done leadership in various other industries and sectors and output from different leadership patterns. The broader version may include methods of developing such skills at different levels of a hierarchy.

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