Hotel Workers Adapt to a Changing Industry

Description

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As the Omicron variant of COVID-19 instigates a new wave of pandemic travel restrictions and global lockdowns, hospitality workers, including hotel workers, continue to suffer. The continuous rapid change of policies, rules, and information which require immediate response is leaving hotel workers overwhelmed and lagging behind workers from other industries who are finding ways to recover from the ongoing pandemic. More so, as misinformation continues to be disseminated across the various platforms, hotel workers need guidance on the trusted sources to employ. This then raises multiple questions such as: What information sources are available to hotel workers to provide up-to-date and reliable information about their changing industry? How can hospitality programs share information about industry changes with their alumni? How are these programs utilizing pandemic data to adjust the hospitality curricula?

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Hotel workers cannot catch a break

Just when travel was starting to ignite again and furloughed hotel workers were invited back to work, the Omicron variant presents a problem for an industry that is watching the door of economic recovery close again. Worse still, workers do not know where to look for information that could save them both personally and professionally.

After 2.4 million jobs were added in 2021, the Hospitality industry is still down 1.3 million jobs from pre-pandemic levels according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Hotel recruiting demand continues to
fluctuate as new pandemic challenges arise. Travel restrictions locally and overseas produce increased challenges for hotels, e.g., a new wave of shutdowns causes cancellations and refund requests. With decreasing hotel occupancy and stay-at-home orders in place, jobs in the hotels continue to be in danger. The talent pool of the hotel industry approaches two years of pandemic uncertainty in 2022. As the emergence of new variants and closure of hotels loom, perhaps it’s time for hotel workers to consider transferring their skills to other fields. However, these workers need provision of information to help them understand the changes in demand, decimated talent pool, and how they can transfer their skills to new industries.

In addition, universities specializing in hospitality education may be forced to adjust quickly as the recruiting demands of hotel properties have and continue to change. As the pandemic introduces lower demand for staff and increased upkeep for unused spaces, the industry must consider that the job expectations for high-occupancy hotel properties may require drastic changes to job expectations for low-occupancy properties. Therefore, skilled workers may be better trained as generalists performing a variety of duties, rather than specialists focusing on one area of the business.

Hotels lose their talent pool

In a pandemic-facing hospitality industry, two factors put hotels at risk of losing workers. First, the hotel industry lacks the convenience of typical Monday through Friday daytime work schedules. Hotel traffic piques on weekends and evenings, causing the schedule of hotel staff to work atypical hours. Irregular work hours paired with the risk of COVID-19 exposure dispel the appeal of a formerly sought-after career in hospitality. While other companies transition to work-from-home schedules, hotel work expectations are people- and facility-centered, demanding an in-person presence for all staff.

The second factor that places hotels at risk of losing workers is the time it has taken for the industry to recover. The necessity of hotels to furlough workers early in the pandemic allowed time for hotel staff to consider other industries and employment. While furloughed workers face many struggles in their time away from work, one benefit is the time allotted to them to consider opportunities in other industries.

Where do I work with my hospitality skill set?

As hotel workers consider employment opportunities outside hospitality, the first question to consider is:
What industry do hotel workers’ skill sets best transfer to? Hotel workers are customer-service oriented, like retail workers, making Retail an employment opportunity. Unlike hotel employment, Retail provides remote work opportunities due to the increased demand for online shopping. While Retail is down 176,000 jobs compared to pre-pandemic numbers according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Hospitality industry, in general, was down close to ten times more jobs than Retail at the end of 2021.

The Hospitality industry is a service-oriented industry and thus its workers have tons of transferrable skills such as customer service, leadership, financial and budgeting, crisis management, problem solving, communication among others. While Retail is an attractive employment option, several other industries recruit for competencies like communication, problem solving, and teamwork—all competencies common to experienced hotel workers. Both Financial Services as well as Transportation and Warehousing offer more job opportunities today than were available pre-pandemic.

The rise of some industries in 2022, speedy return of others, and still declining return of Hospitality leads the need for hotel workers to consider opportunities in other industries. Thus, this leads to two questions. 1) Where are hotel workers getting their information about employment opportunities? 2) What is the best resource for information sharing and retrieval? The information-seeking behaviors of hotel workers will help to determine not only their sources but also use of information as they find new employment opportunities outside the hotel industry. Hotel workers can benefit from resources providing them information on what jobs are available that are applicable to their skill set, what jobs offer flexible or remote work, and what industries are recovering best in 2022.

Solutions to provide access to information desperately needed by hotel workers

- Universities should connect with and provide their alumni with information on employment opportunities (outside of Hospitality).
- Rapidly recovering industries like Construction, Transportation & Warehousing, and Business & Financial Services should find methods to provide recruitment information directly to former hotel workers. To recruit effectively, industries should consider how and where hotel workers obtain information from so they can reach them.
- Hotels should provide online support for furloughed workers including training workers to seek applicable employment opportunities. Information sharing within the hospitality industry can serve as a tool to build loyalty with hotel workers, ensuring they return when the industry returns to pre-pandemic.