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The Four 'Ps' of Hospitality Recruiting

John D. Murtha

The hospitality industry relies upon a supply of college graduates for entry-level management positions. Graduates can immediately contribute valuable services to employers and their initial jobs are a start toward future roles as general managers, corporate executives, consultants, and owners.

The Four P's

When recruiting the most capable young women and men from university programs, there is a consensus among hospitality professionals about the qualities that make candidates stand out, get hired, and achieve success in our industry. These attributes fall into four categories, which can be termed the Four 'Ps' of hospitality recruiting.

Preparation

Candidates should arrive having already done substantial research about the companies holding the interviews, and be prepared to ask questions that reveal such research was undertaken. For example, if a company has a management training program, then this fact should have been discovered by the candidate and questions probing the nature of the training should be posed to the interviewer.

The candidate's resume must be absolutely perfect with regard to spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Formats can vary according to personal taste, provided they have an overall traditional look. It is strongly recommended that resumes be limited to one page for seniors and recent graduates.

Presentation

Candidates must present themselves as professionals from the start, demonstrating traits that the interviewer believes are innate and not adopted merely for the interview. This means dressing the part and exhibiting a high degree of poise and maturity. A confident (but not cocky) demeanor and genuine smile are essential for success in the lodging industry and should be displayed by any college senior.

During interviews, candidates should appear comfortable with the process, be able to converse easily, and maintain a respectful demeanor. For example, addressing the interviewer by his or her first name is unacceptable, unless permission has been granted to do so.

Purpose

It is critical that candidates have some idea about what they want to accomplish in their careers and that they express this in specific terms during interviews. Being vague about professional goals can be a deal-breaker.

Although having a hospitality degree is essential for entry-level management positions, and while graduates from such programs are generally well prepared for entering the business world, their schooling does not replace on-the-job experience. Great candidates also have realistic expectations for the early years of their career. They understand that it will take time to develop the skills needed to succeed, that they must accumulate a reasonable breadth of experience, and that they will be expected to 'pay their dues.' This often means long hours, lower salaries, and a willingness to relocate for career-enhancing positions until they have proven their capabilities.

A recent article in *Hotels* magazine by Nathan Greenhalgh pointed to this issue. He observed that "hotel school graduates sometimes have inflated expectations about their career paths," but that "new curricula from hotel schools include more business-focused courses, as well as more experience in the field." Chris Mumford of HVS Executive Search was quoted as saying there is "still this complaint among hotel companies that these hotel schools are responsible for giving an inflated set of expectations."

Passion

While a high grade point average is great, prac-

tical experience and demonstrated ambition are better indicators of how serious a candidate is about making a career in the hospitality industry. There must be evidence that the candidate is committed to hospitality.

Interviewers look for job experience that is relevant, reveals a solid work ethic, and demonstrates progression through a variety of jobs during their college years. Experience in supervisory roles, or leadership positions in industry-related extracurricular activities or clubs, is especially valuable.

Personality Attributes

In addition to traditional interviews, some recruiters use personality tests or leadership style assessment tools to identify traits believed to make someone an 'ideal manager' for the hospitality industry. These include the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and the Predictive Index. Critics of these tools argue that they are not infallible, so the results are often used to inform rather than determine decisions.

Most recruiters would like candidates to exhibit the following range of attributes that various testing tools can help to reveal:

- Open-minded and flexible, having the ability to understand a range of perspectives and opinions;
- Eager with a sense of urgency, having the ability to get things done quickly and correctly;
- Comfort with policies and procedures that are dictated by others;
- A team orientation, with a willingness to commit to the objectives of a group;
- Ambition, with the urge to advance and be seen as a leader;
- Self-motivation, with an outlook that is undaunted in the face of challenges;
- A personable and happy manner, which increases the likelihood they will be liked by others.

Best Practices

Marta McManus, Director of Career Services in the School of Hospitality Administration at Boston University, recently commented on these issues. She observed: "We view career services as a linkage between students and industry professionals. To create this linkage, we start from the career basics

of resumes and cover letters. Then we prepare students on what to expect in an interview and provide them with a mock interview. Through this process, we also offer workshops on proper dress and professional protocol when working with business leaders.”

Natalie McGinniss, the employment manager at the Omni Parker House Hotel in Boston confirms that this comprehensive approach makes a difference. She remarked: “One thing I noticed when interviewing BU students is that they were all professional and well prepared for the interview. This

made it more difficult, in a good way, to determine the top choices. So, we had to look more closely at their purpose and passion for the industry.”

Conclusion

The ‘Four Ps’ are a useful way for hospitality professionals to assess the qualities of prospective entry-level managers. Candidates should be aware that these categories are being considered and plan accordingly. ■



John D. Murtha, CHA, is a 37-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