

# today's hotelier

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The Official Publication of AAHOA

THE  
• WORKFORCE MANAGEMENT •  
ISSUE



Where  
the voice of  
the member

*prevails*

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The Best Western®  
Hotels & Resorts  
Board of Directors

RESCUING  
DIFFICULT  
EMPLOYEES  
AND TURNING  
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AAHOA'S  
2022  
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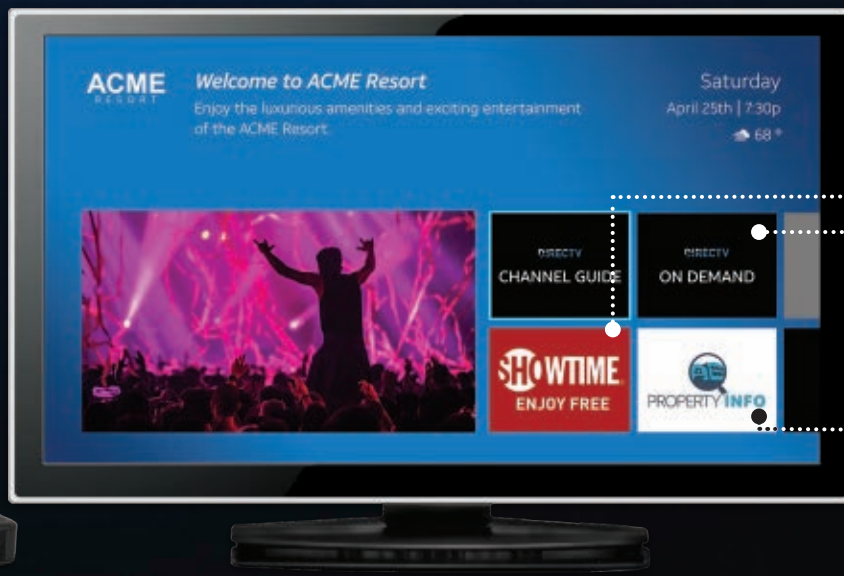
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# 5 Things to Know About AAHOA This Month

## HAPPY NEW YEAR FROM AAHOA!

Hospitality continued its recovery in 2022, with travel and tourism picking up to pre-pandemic levels and hotel owners investing in the guest experience to increase loyalty and revenue. Though there is still much work to be done, join us in welcoming 2023 with hope and optimism. AAHOA wishes you and your loved ones a happy and prosperous 2023!



## JOIN THE FIGHT AGAINST HUMAN TRAFFICKING THIS MONTH.

January is Human Trafficking Awareness Month, and you can help prevent this horrible crime from taking place on your hotel properties when you complete the Businesses Ending Slavery and Trafficking (BEST) Inhospitable to Human Trafficking Training Sponsored by AAHOA. The training takes **30 minutes to complete**, and it's **FREE** for you and your hotel staff. Get trained today to save lives and protect your business.



[AAHOA.com/HTAT](http://AAHOA.com/HTAT)

## TODAY'S HOTELIER WINS THREE PLATINUM MARCOM AWARDS.

We are over-the-moon excited to announce that



*Today's Hotelier* was recognized with three platinum awards. Two of the awards recognized the overall magazine quality and design of the July 2022 issue. The third award recognized our three-part feature on the labor shortage in the January 2022 issue. The MarCom Awards honor excellence in marketing and communication while recognizing the creativity, hard work, and generosity of industry professionals. THANK YOU to all our contributors and advertisers who helped us earn this recognition.

creativity, hard work, and generosity of industry professionals. THANK YOU to all our contributors and advertisers who helped us earn this recognition.

## REGISTRATION FOR AAHOACON23 IS NOW OPEN.

The 2023 AAHOA Convention & Trade Show is set for April 11-14 in Los Angeles, CA, and registration is now open. This annual event brings together industry professionals from across the U.S., deal-making on the trade show floor, networking opportunities, and incredible general sessions led by expert thought leaders. Register today for the largest gathering of hotel owners! [AAHOACON.com](http://AAHOACON.com)



## DO YOU WANT TO SERVE ON THE AAHOA BOARD OF DIRECTORS?

If you're a motivated member eager to help drive the strategic direction of a national association dedicated to advancing and protecting the interests of hotel owners, then consider serving on AAHOA's 2023-2024 Board of Directors. For updates on open Board positions and deadlines, please visit: [AAHOA.com/Candidates](http://AAHOA.com/Candidates). ■





**NISHANT (NEAL) PATEL,  
CHO, CHIA**  
AAHOA CHAIRMAN (2022-2023)

“

We must be strategic and think ahead because old practices will no longer work. The old way of thinking no longer helps our bottom line.”

## Embracing change

**A**T THE HEIGHT OF THE PANDEMIC, COMPANIES AROUND THE WORLD SCRAMBLED and spent thousands of dollars getting the equipment needed so their employees could work remotely.

If they couldn't come to work, work would come to them.

But, for the hospitality industry, for the most part, that just was not possible. How do you run a hotel without people being physically present? Hotels had to shut their doors, and the industry lost billions of dollars in revenue as travel and tourism screeched to a halt.

Sure, many companies weathered the downturn well enough and, for some, productivity levels actually increased. But, the hotel industry, and all other industries requiring workers to be in a brick-and-mortar building, had to close, take out loans, or figure out another way to stay afloat in a sea of uncertainty.

Years later, we're still scratching our heads trying to figure out a way to make this possible, as remote work has become a very desirable job benefit.

The labor shortage still hasn't improved, and hotel owners have been put in a position to think outside the box. With so many other industries offering benefits, like working from home, the hospitality industry must figure out a way to entice workers in a different capacity.

While hotels have certainly evolved in countless aspects of the business, this industry is about being hospitable. How can we continue to be hospitable when we take out human contact?

Technology.

We've implemented kiosks, as check-in services are often provided by someone hundreds of miles away who can respond to guests at all hours.

There's some testing being done around robots, so, perhaps one day in the future, we'll have robots making your bed, cleaning your bathroom, and emptying your garbage.

Technology is also allowing employees to get paid quicker and more often, and cashless tipping via smartphone is becoming the way of the future.

While these changes won't be the final solutions to our problems, they certainly can help. If we can figure out a way to minimize the labor shortage, offer employees what they want, provide a better work-life balance, and demonstrate a clear career path for those we employ, we can become the competitive industry that other industries will want to learn from.

The world changed due to the global pandemic, and things will never be the same again. We must be strategic and think ahead because old practices will no longer work. The old way of thinking no longer helps our bottom line.

Workforce management is a whole new ballgame, are you ready to step up to the plate? ■



LAURA LEE BLAKE, ESQ.  
PRESIDENT & CEO

## Together, everyone achieves more

“  
Whether you want to be a leader who inspires your team each morning or entices your employees with incentives and clear paths to a rewarding career, the key is building relationships and being that driving force to make employees want to continue giving 110% to everything they do.”

**WAS ON A FLIGHT RECENTLY, AND THE WOMAN SITTING NEXT TO ME DISCUSSED AT** length how she uses motivational sayings to really inspire and improve her day.

Over the years, she had gathered a series of favorite ones and would meditate on them every day as she prepared to do her work.

I love starting new traditions. So, with that mindset, I started the same practice with Team AAHOA, allowing them to embrace and meditate on different perspectives, and use them to inspire their days and work. Pouring into your people is the best way to ensure they're inspired to do their best work daily.

While all managers and industry leaders have different approaches to how they motivate their employees, we have all had to adapt and rethink strategies when it comes to the workforce thanks to the pandemic.

Things have changed, and the world has seen a new way of life. It is no secret workers want higher wages, flexible work environments, and work-life balance. It is a pivotal time in the work world.

I have had several conversations with hotel owners about the hospitality industry and the labor shortage. I often wonder how they have shifted their approaches when it comes to today's workforce management.

Here at AAHOA, we are working across multiple fronts to ensure talented people have the access and qualifications to integrate smoothly into the hospitality workforce. We have worked alongside members of Congress and federal agencies to highlight the H-2B and H-2C visa programs, leading to increases in visa caps. And partnering with our state and local partners, we have promoted workforce training and development programs to ensure any member of our communities has the opportunity to earn a living wage.

How do they keep their employees motivated? How do they compete with other industries with incentives that working in a hotel simply cannot offer?

While there is no right answer, this conversation is happening at every industry conference, and hospitality industry leaders are constantly working to adjust their strategies that attract and retain good employees.

Hospitality is people-oriented, creative, and always thinking of new ways to make all experiences better for the customer. I would like to think that this industry will lead the way, and many other industries will follow suit once we come up with the answer.

It is a wonderful field to grow and develop into leadership and management positions, and is a career where the opportunities are endless – personally and professionally. It is rewarding and, at the end of the day, I believe people are looking for fulfillment in their work that enriches their own life, but also the life of those they interact with.

So, whether you want to be a leader who inspires your team each morning or entices your employees with incentives and clear paths to a rewarding career, the key is building relationships and being that driving force to make employees want to continue giving 110% to everything they do.

It starts at the top, and we will only continue to adapt to the times if we pay attention to what works. ■

# The parallels between AAHOA and Best Western® Hotels & Resorts

by BEST WESTERN® HOTELS & RESORTS BOARD OF DIRECTORS

## IT'S THE VOICE OF OUR MEMBERS

who drive our organization forward. This sentiment rings true for two industry-leading organizations: AAHOA and Best Western Hotels & Resorts. Both organizations have placed members at the heart of all that they do. After all, it's members who, at the very core, lead both companies.

As a Board, we often reflect on how the structure of our organization has been the key element behind our more than 75 years of success. It's because we are a membership organization that cares about each of its members that we have grown into a global powerhouse, with more than 4,500 hotels in more than 100 countries around the world. Also critical to our success is that we are united in our mission – *to deliver trusted guest experiences, drive hotel success, and foster a caring, inclusive culture that respects our environment*. And, we have a shared vision for our organization – *to inspire travel through unique experiences*. Ensuring the voice of our members remains at the forefront of every decision we make is fundamental to the success of both our mission and vision.

## TEAMWORK

Best Western has been fortunate to have long-standing partnerships with organizations such as AAHOA. Our partnership is built on mutual respect, shared values, and a common purpose. As a founding member of AAHOA, we share AAHOA's values of self-improvement, bettering our communities, and empowering hoteliers to follow their dreams. The strength of our partnership has never been more evident than it was during the global pandemic. As an industry, we experienced remarkable challenges. However, we stood shoulder to shoulder with our members and our partners at AAHOA, and our mutual resolve to persevere and emerge stronger than ever before never wavered.

From the pandemic's beginning, both of our organizations were focused on helping our members survive. At Best Western, we provided timely and insightful communication, and practical guidance. Fortunately, we were able to give \$80M in financial relief to our members through the end of 2022. Similar to Best Western, during this incredibly challenging time, the leadership team at AAHOA was steadfast in its commitment to advocate for its members and our industry. AAHOA made numerous calls to government officials and hotel brands throughout the industry to recognize the hardships faced by their members and do whatever they could to help their businesses survive.

Where  
the voice  
of the member

prevails

**WHAT'S NEXT?**

As we look to the future, both AAHOA and Best Western are fiercely determined to drive meaningful results to our members, grow our memberships, and help our hoteliers operate with increased efficiency. At Best Western, a few of our top priorities include strengthening our global presence, exceeding guest expectations,

driving superior revenue and hotel profitability, embracing a global environmental strategy, and – importantly – growing and enhancing our Best Western Rewards and WorldHotels Rewards loyalty programs. We also look forward to continuing to work closely with AAHOA to support their advocacy efforts and to ensure the interests of our members are well represented.

The need for our organizations to remain unified toward our shared goals has never been more critical. While our industry has experienced a strong resurgence, we remain cautiously optimistic for what lies ahead. At Best Western, our ADR and RevPAR continue to trend upward – very positive signs for our hoteliers. But challenges continue in our industry, from supply and labor challenges to broader political and economic issues. If the past two and half years have taught us anything, it's that the hospitality industry is incredibly resilient, but it's critical that we tackle these challenges in a unified voice.

Best Western's partnership with AAHOA is deeply ingrained in who we are as a hotel family. We're proud to engage in constructive dialogue with our AAHOA partners, our members, and other industry leaders as we create a brighter future for our industry. We look forward to seeing all that our two organizations accomplish together in the years ahead. ■



The strength of our partnership has never been more evident than it was during the global pandemic. As an industry, we experienced remarkable challenges. However, we stood shoulder to shoulder with our members and our partners at AAHOA, and our mutual resolve to persevere and emerge stronger than ever before never wavered.”



The Best Western Hotels & Resorts extended corporate team joins the Board of Directors, including (L-R on the front row) President & Chief Executive Officer Larry Cuculich, Director Santosh Khanjee, Secretary-Treasurer Steve Wahrlich, Vice-Chairman Phil Payne, Chairman Danny Lafayette, Director Mike Merchant, Director Raj (Rajesh) Patel, and Director Viral (Victor) Patel.

How to rescue difficult employees  
and turn them into star players

# Workforce EMERGENCY



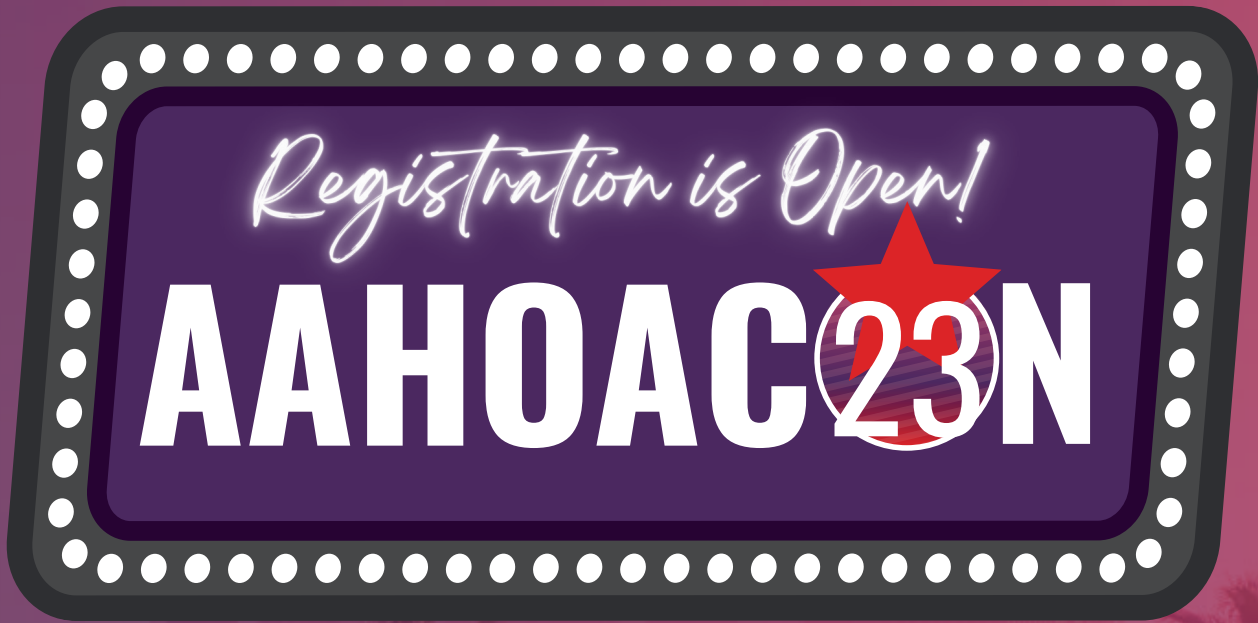
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# EMERGENCY

by TOM GRESHAM

**T**HE LABOR MARKET CRUNCH THAT HAS left hospitality businesses scrambling for workers has made retaining team members more important than ever. That emphasis on retention even extends to workers who might be classified as difficult because of behavior that creates challenges in the workplace. In today's climate, operators may be less inclined to dismiss those workers in favor of trying to address their problems and help improve their behavior and performance.

"The hospitality industry always used to have an extensive pipeline of talent waiting in the wings if an employee didn't work out, and now that pipeline is not there in the same way," said Sarah Diehl, founder and principal, Empowered Hospitality. "Managers, owners, and leaders in hospitality are much more willing to retain current employees, especially people they've put a lot of time and effort into onboarding and training, rather than eliminating someone without putting in that effort first because they know that role will not be easy to fill."

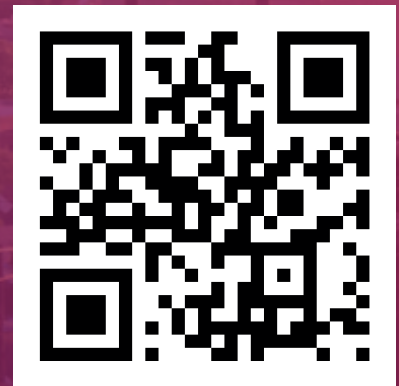


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Difficult workers in the hotel industry not only can prove unproductive, but they can create a difficult environment for other team members and negatively impact the customer experience. However, difficult workers often are not without potential, and leadership and coaching can help seemingly lost employees not only turn around their efforts in the short term but take crucial steps toward becoming standout members of the team.

It starts with engagement from leadership.

### IDENTIFY THE PROBLEM

With difficult employees, Marie McIntyre, author of “Secrets to Winning at Office Politics,” says the road to redemption starts with understanding the problem.

“If you can get some idea of the cause, then you can get some idea of the solution,” McIntyre said.

Diehl agreed.

“You really have to know where the difficulty is stemming from to understand how to address it,” Diehl said. “And that starts with sitting down with the employee, explaining to them the behavior that’s problematic, so they clearly understand what you’re observing from your perspective, and then asking them what they feel might be causing this so they can commit to eliminating the behavior.”

Maxine Attong, a leadership specialist, coach, and author, said that a leader must be honest when considering if their view of a team member as difficult is biased, such as because the team member is outside the leader’s affinity group

““

Difficult workers in the hotel industry not only can prove unproductive, but they can create a difficult environment for other team members and negatively impact the customer experience.”

## Managing difficult employees and **DISRUPTIVE** behaviors

According to the Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM), there are numerous reasons why an employer would want to proactively manage challenging employees instead of simply hoping the problem resolves itself. Chief among them, and highly applicable to the hospitality industry, is the notion that happy employees are more productive than their disgruntled counterparts, and they can elicit higher levels of customer satisfaction from guests as a result.

Based on research published by SHRM, there are four key forms of disruptive behaviors most commonly exhibited in the workplace. These need to be addressed as quickly as possible, before the negative attitudes of unhappy employees wind up affecting the rest of the team and tanking morale.

### 1 GOSSIPING

Though sometimes perceived as a harmless way to pass the time, gossiping is a vicious behavior where an individual repeatedly reveals sensitive, personal information about others, regardless of whether the statements are true.

### 2 GENERAL INCIVILITY/INSOLENCE

This behavior pattern typically is displayed through rude or disrespectful language, but it can manifest itself physically, as well, which can include violent actions such as slamming doors or throwing things.

### 3 BULLYING

Though this behavior can fall within the incivility category, it’s typically less overt. Bullying can commonly be subtle, including social isolation, manipulation, and the use of condescending or contemptuous language. This behavior can be more challenging to spot as it often happens out of the sight of others, thus making it one of the most difficult behaviors to eliminate.

### 4 INSUBORDINATION

This behavior typically manifests itself in an employee’s flat-out refusal to follow an employer’s lawful and reasonable instructions. Employees exhibiting this behavior are often attempting to subvert a manager’s authority or feel as if a particular job or task is beneath them.



or the leader has allowed past issues the employee had to affect the present.

“It is quite easy to label a team member as difficult or challenging, and it’s less easy for the team member to rid him or herself of this label,” Attong said. “The leader needs to reflect on the question, ‘What makes the team member difficult to me?’ The answer will bring clarity on the reasons for the label and the solution becomes clearer.”

In that vein, McIntyre said, managers should consider if they’re managing in a supportive and helpful way.

“Are you doing anything that might be creating some of these issues?” McIntyre asked. “Especially if it’s more than one person having these problems, you really need to take a look at yourself.”

### **AVOIDING ‘PSYCHIC’ MANAGEMENT**

Too often, McIntyre said, managers fail to speak to difficult employees about their behavior, resorting instead to what she calls “psychic management.”

“As a manager, you see an employee problem that is troublesome to you, and you think about it and you keep thinking about it, but you don’t ever talk to the person about it,” McIntyre said. So, in those cases, the employee often doesn’t even know their behavior is considered a problem.

“Situations like this need courage,” Attong said. “The leader must have the courage to call the team member out, to name the behavior, and to apply the relevant organizational policies and procedures to limit the behavior when necessary.”

McIntyre said she sees two major reasons that managers frequently are reluctant to have critical conversations with difficult employees – they want to avoid an uncomfortable discussion and they lack the training and skills to hold that conversation.

“Nobody’s really born knowing how to be a good performance manager or a good coach,” McIntyre said. “There are some skills and strategies that are helpful in having those conversations, and I think once people learn the skills and have a roadmap



Nobody’s really born knowing how to be a good performance manager or a good coach. There are some skills and strategies that are helpful in having those conversations, and I think once people learn the skills and have a roadmap for the conversation, it can be much more comfortable.”

for the conversation, it can be much more comfortable.”

Diehl said she has experienced this challenge firsthand.

“Having previously been a manager in hospitality, I know that sometimes it’s easy to feel unsupported or to go into conversations with difficult employees not having a script, not really being prepared, not having someone necessarily who can help you through those conversations,” she said. “I would encourage managers and leaders to seek out a mentor or a coach or an HR resource, or someone who can help you learn how to have these conversations, because when you aren’t comfortable having these conversations directly, these issues do tend to fester and become more and more serious.”

Diehl added that leaders should aim to snuff out problematic behavior early by setting clear expectations, reinforcing them, and holding team members accountable. Addressing issues when they’re small helps prevent them from turning into major problems. However, it can be difficult for an organization, especially in the fast-paced world of hospitality, to develop a pattern of coaching in the moment and addressing little issues as they arise.

“It’s really important to create a culture within your team or within your company where regular coaching and counseling on small problems is just part of your day-to-day style,” Diehl said.

### **SOLUTIONS-BASED CONVERSATIONS**

McIntyre said speaking with difficult employees about their issues shouldn’t be a confrontation.

“It’s a helpful business conversation between two adults about a business issue and focused on how to solve a business problem,” McIntyre said.

McIntyre said managers cannot simply have a “one-and-done” conversation but will need to manage a series of conversations to ensure progress. Based on those conversations, leaders can tailor solutions to an employee’s individual circumstances, Diehl said, such as by providing developmental opportunities, linking with a coach or mentor, or resetting expectations about their behavior or efforts.

Unfortunately, some employees won’t respond to coaching and crucial conversations, no matter how well it may be handled, but others will embrace the opportunity and show a determination to grow and improve. Helping an employee look at the big picture of their career and how their behavior is impacting it can have a profound influence on them. In some cases, Diehl said, an unproductive employee might be bored or unchallenged in their work, so mapping out their career path or giving them new challenges could be a helpful way to get them on track.

“It can be very helpful to understand what’s important to them at work and with their career and help them see how what they’re doing is going to get in the way of that,” McIntyre said. “Sometimes people just don’t think about the bigger picture.”

In the end, Diehl said, engaging with an employee about their challenges can build a stronger relationship with them.

“Showing them empathy in that conversation and a genuine desire to help them improve can create loyalty in a way that very few other things can,” Diehl said. “It’s very powerful.” ■



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magazine won **THREE 2022 PLATINUM MarCom Awards** for overall publication excellence, design, and feature writing. The MarCom Awards honor excellence in marketing and communication while recognizing the creativity, hard work, and generosity of industry professionals.



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# Hit the JACKPOT

Score big by finding, training, and retaining the best employees

by ZOHREEN ISMAIL

**A**S NUMEROUS REPORTS HAVE SHOWN – and many hoteliers can attest from personal experience – the hospitality industry is facing built-up demand from people across the world who have been unable to travel due to self-imposed quarantine, government restrictions, event cancellations, and overall health safety, all tied to the pandemic. To accommodate this influx of travelers, hotel owners and operators are scrambling to fill vacant positions at their properties all in the name of providing excellent customer experiences for their guests.

Accordingly, hoteliers are working hard to find, train, and retain the very best staff members possible, but given persistent shortages in the American workforce – which is affecting hotels and restaurants disproportionately – it's hard enough keeping staffing levels adequate, much less finding the very best people to fill the vacant positions.

This issue of Today's Hotelier is dedicated to workforce issues, and in this article, we explore three key components necessary to build a strong team – hiring, training, firing – and examine strategies and techniques needed throughout the process to find, and keep, the best team possible.



# Key #1 Hiring

**M**any hotel owners don't have a human resources department to assist with the hiring process. Often, owners and managers are the ones emailing and interviewing candidates, and organizing all the new-hire paperwork.

Hiring starts with advertising the position and finding quality candidates. According to a 2022 HubSpot study, 80% of all job searches are conducted online and roughly 85% of all jobs filled are accomplished via networking. So, what are some green flags of the hiring process that owners and operators can use as a guide?

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According to a 2022 HubSpot study, 80% of all job searches are conducted online and roughly 85% of all jobs filled are accomplished via networking.”

## Red flags during the hiring process

- Lack of passion for the role/industry
- Ambiguous responses to basic questions
- Poor communication skills
- Unwilling to share availability

### **MULTIPLIER: LEVERAGE YOUR NETWORK**

Networking is a huge part of the job hunt and hospitality professionals can do this by promoting current job openings on their LinkedIn, Facebook, or other social media accounts. An estimated 48% of Gen Z and Millennials with work experience have applied to job opportunities they found on social media.

### **MULTIPLIER: BOOST YOUR RESPONSE TIME**

The hospitality industry can be fast-paced, especially during peak travel seasons. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, there were nearly two million job openings in the hospitality industry in 2021. To remain competitive, response times for quality candidates need to be quick.

### **MULTIPLIER: BE TRANSPARENT ABOUT RESPONSIBILITIES AND PAY**

Some hotel owners may think it's hard enough getting good candidates in the door, so why scare them off with a pre-screen call? This pre-screen phone call can end up saving you and the candidate a lot of time if the role isn't a good fit for the candidate. It also reduces turnover caused by someone accepting a role while not fully understanding the expectations.

In the pre-screen call, it's important to be transparent about exactly what the responsibilities of the role are, along with the pay/salary. Studies show that Gen Z and Millennials support pay transparency, and when an employer is upfront and honest these applicants are more likely to respect the employer.

# Key #2 Training

**L**et's say you found the perfect candidate and are ready to bring them on board. How can you ensure this new employee not only stays for the long term but becomes an advocate for your business while providing excellent customer service to guests?

A huge part of employee retention is the onboarding and training process. A passionate, motivated candidate will be open to learning new things, but it's your job to ensure the candidate has the right tools and resources that set them up for success.

## **MULTIPLIER: THE BUDDY SYSTEM**

When you've hired a new candidate, it's helpful to pair them with a high-performing employee they can refer to as a mentor and resource. New candidates often feel timid asking their boss simple questions. But, by pairing newer hires with a more-tenured employee, those new team members will be more encouraged to ask questions and pick up best practices.

## **MULTIPLIER: SELF-PACED TRAINING**

It's important to realize that everyone learns at a different pace and in a different way. Be sure to offer your new candidate enough time to continue learning about their responsibilities. A good analogy for this is like peeling an onion. When you throw all the responsibilities at a new candidate, they may find it difficult to digest. However, they're more likely to retain the information and make fewer mistakes if you peel the layers and teach them the responsibilities in a sequential, cohesive manner.

## **MULTIPLIER: INSPIRING CREATIVITY**

When you hire a new candidate, you're in a unique position to learn about your business and processes from a new perspective. Allowing new hires to feel ownership over their role and that they have a voice that's being heard will improve your operational processes. These situations often can lead to creative problem solving in a way you hadn't considered before.

### Red flags during the onboarding process

- New candidate is not asking questions
- Unmotivated to learn
- Dismissive to customers/guests and/or fellow team members
- Shows up late multiple times for training

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A passionate, motivated candidate will be open to learning new things, but it's your job to ensure the candidate has the right tools and resources that set them up for success.”





## Key #3 Firing

In recent months, we've seen well-known brands lay off thousands of employees through text messages. Being a business owner has a lot of benefits, but there certainly are some not-so-fun aspects of the job – including firing an employee. Human resource professionals get specifically trained on how to fire someone with dignity and managers/owners can apply those best practices to their own businesses.

### **MULTIPLIER: DON'T BURN BRIDGES**

Whether your employee has been with you for a day or a year, it's important to give your employees the same level of customer service you provide your guests. Have an open conversation with the employee and being understanding that the hospitality industry relies heavily on word-of-mouth. One upset employee can make it difficult for you to hire new employees.

### **MULTIPLIER: BE CONCISE**

State the reason for the firing so your employee isn't left feeling confused and betrayed. Whether

it's due to budget cuts or a behavioral issue, being clear and concise with a concrete reason for the firing is an effective way to approach a tough situation.

### **MULTIPLIER: ENSURE YOUR ACTIONS ARE LEGAL**

Some hotel owners sign contracts with their employees, so you'll want to double check that you aren't violating any of these types of agreements. You'll also want to ask yourself if the reason for the firing is legal and valid. Consulting a lawyer may be helpful if you aren't clear on the reasoning or the reasoning can fall under the laws of discrimination.

### Red flags during the firing process

- Not having a concrete reason for firing
- Handling a firing via text, phone call, or other impersonal method
- Keeping an underperforming worker to avoid an uncomfortable confrontation
- Failing to examine a firing's legality beforehand

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Human resource professionals get specifically trained on how to fire someone with dignity and managers/owners can apply those best practices to their own businesses.”

# What went wrong?

“

If those team members are unhappy and/or underperforming, you will lose business, and you will lose other employees as the well is poisoned.”

**N**ow that we've covered some best practices and red flags of the hiring, training, and firing process, let's look at a sample scenario to see if we can spot the avoidable mistakes. You've already checked out the rest of this article, right? No skipping ahead!

OK, grab your partner and/or manager and discuss what could have been done differently in this case study.

**Case Study:** An experienced motel owner was in need of qualified individuals as part of his or her housekeeping staff. The owner had two locations and needed someone who could switch shifts between both locations. The owner decided to interview candidates and made a list of questions to ask.

- **Question 1:** What is your pay/salary expectation?
- **Question 2:** Do you have any hospitality work experience?
- **Question 3:** What's your favorite part of your day?

After the interview process, the owner decided this was the right candidate. Although the candidate didn't have hospitality experience,

the candidate had experience cleaning houses for more than two years. The owner and candidate agreed on a start date and decided no training was required since the candidate was accustomed to cleaning homes.

After one week on the job, the candidate decided to quit. The owner was puzzled by this because the candidate seemed enthusiastic during the interview. Later, the owner learned that the candidate didn't have a reliable car, which made it difficult to travel between the two motel locations. He also learned that although the candidate was experienced in house cleaning, the candidate would often forget to refill/replace the toiletries.

What could this owner have done differently?

## CUSTOMER SERVICE = EMPLOYEE SERVICE

Hoteliers share many differences, but one commonality across the industry is the recognition of the need for excellent customer service. Until something drastic changes the dynamic, your team members are the ones directly responsible for creating a great experience for your guests. If those team members are unhappy and/or underperforming, you will lose business, and you will lose other employees as the well is poisoned. Fortunately, treating employees with dignity and respect, and giving them the tools they need to succeed, will set them, you, and your business up for growth and ensure you are retaining quality staff members for years to come. ■

# Ring in 2023

**L**AST YEAR WAS A SIGNIFICANT ONE for AAHOA and the industry. In 2022, AAHOA leaders led fair franchising efforts, welcomed more than 4,000 hoteliers to the 2022 Regional Conferences & Trade Shows, hosted a successful Fall National Advocacy Conference, launched the HerOwnership initiative, raised \$333,529 for 18 charities across the U.S. and so much more. While the industry grappled with major issues, such as labor shortages, hoteliers remained resilient amid the post-pandemic challenges. These accomplishments are possible thanks to the dedication and commitment of AAHOA's Board Members. As we look forward to 2023, AAHOA's Board Members are more ready than ever to use the power and strength of this great association to support America's hotel owners. Some of these AAHOA leaders welcomed the new year by reflecting on 2022 and the difference they plan to make in the new year.



**Sanjay M. Patel**  
Alabama Regional  
Director

**WHAT'S THE SINGLE BIGGEST CHALLENGE YOU FACE IN YOUR BUSINESS TODAY?**

“LABOR, LABOR, LABOR! People will eventually get back to work, but I believe we have lost a good portion of the workforce to industrial spaces like Amazon and other distribution hubs.”

**WHAT ADVOCACY TOPIC OR ISSUE IS MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU AND WHY?**

“Occupancy tax. It seems every municipality turns to occupancy taxes when they are in need of money, and the hotels do not get any benefits from these raises, like advertising, events, etc.”

**WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE THE NEXT GENERATION ABOUT GETTING INVOLVED IN HOSPITALITY AND AAHOA?**

“GET INVOLVED! These times are different from how the first- and second-generation hoteliers started. What goes on at the local, state, and federal level directly affects hotel businesses and their bottom line. Also, get involved with your franchise because what franchises do affects us and our bottom line as well.”



**Vik Zaver**  
Georgia Regional  
Director

**WHAT DO YOU THINK IS THE BEST WAY TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF YOUR AAHOA MEMBERSHIP, WHETHER YOU'RE BRAND NEW TO AAHOA OR AN INDUSTRY VETERAN?**

“The best way to take advantage of your AAHOA Membership is by simply being involved. When AAHOA sends out a survey, or there is a Town Hall in your area, or you join us at the nation's Capital, these are all the ways a member can take full advantage and, ultimately, serve your interests and goals.”

**WHAT CHANGES DO YOU FORESEE IN OUR INDUSTRY IN 2023?**

“The hotel industry is always evolving, and 2023 will bring some new challenges that most of us may not be prepared for yet. Rising interest rates, a decrease in demand, and an increase in supply will harm the industry. AAHOA Members have always been resilient and will continue to be innovative to overcome these obstacles, whether it is to implement new technology to assist with the labor shortages, work with your vendor partners to maximize their full potential, or to not overleverage.”

**WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE THE NEXT GENERATION ABOUT GETTING INVOLVED IN HOSPITALITY AND AAHOA?**

“My advice to the next generation is to reach out to your local Regional Director and ask if they need help. More often than not, we are always looking for more help from our local members.”



**Miraj S. Patel**  
Treasurer

**YOUR VOLUNTEER LEADERSHIP ROLE WITH AAHOA DEMANDS A LOT OF TIME, TALENT, AND RESOURCES. WHY DO YOU INVEST SO MUCH IN AAHOA AND SERVING OUR 20,000+ MEMBERS?**

“Growing up, I was rooted in the importance of serving my community. Thanks to my father being an active AAHOA Member, I always attended any AAHOA event I could as a kid. I even read and collected all the AAHOA magazines to understand where our association and industry are going. As I grew older, the past AAHOA leaders inspired me to get involved. It amazed me how much time and effort the leaders were putting into the association to ensure every hotelier's voice was heard. I saw the value of AAHOA because I grew up admiring the leadership, learning the issues, and hearing the concerns. I knew since a young age that one day, I wanted to serve AAHOA and the membership – and today, that membership has grown to 20,000+ members.”

**WHAT ADVOCACY TOPIC OR ISSUE IS MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU AND WHY?**

“Many advocacy topics and issues are important to me, such as arbitrary taxation and harmful, short-sighted policies. As an association, our objective is to be more aggressive than ever in the coming years in advocating for hotel owners at the local, state, and federal levels to protect our investments.”



## Lina Patel

Female  
Director  
Eastern  
Division

### WHAT DO YOU THINK IS THE BEST WAY TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF YOUR AAHOA MEMBERSHIP, WHETHER YOU'RE BRAND NEW TO AAHOA OR AN INDUSTRY VETERAN?

"AAHOA provides an opportunity to network and learn from one another, inspire one another, and set ourselves up for years of progress and success in our businesses. It's a place to meet experts and practitioners who find ways to attract new businesses in a changing landscape. We learn the importance of building relationships with elected officials and decision-makers in our local governments to ensure they understand our businesses and industry."



## Arti Patel

Central  
Midwest  
Regional  
Director

### WHAT'S THE SINGLE BIGGEST CHALLENGE YOU FACE IN YOUR BUSINESS TODAY?

"Seeking quality employees that actually give the job a chance."

### WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE THE NEXT GENERATION ABOUT GETTING INVOLVED IN HOSPITALITY AND AAHOA?

"I encourage the next generation to stay involved in your local communities. If you see an issue with a hospitality organization, don't run from it; instead, get involved and help."

## Deepak Patel

Washington DC  
Area Regional  
Director

### YOUR VOLUNTEER LEADERSHIP ROLE WITH AAHOA DEMANDS A LOT OF TIME, TALENT, AND RESOURCES. WHY DO YOU INVEST SO MUCH IN AAHOA AND SERVING OUR 20,000+ MEMBERS?

"Every time I see our past and current AAHOA leaders, every time I attend a board meeting or any advocacy event, it excites me to do something for membership and my region. It is an honor to give back to the industry, which has given me a lot."

### WHAT ADVOCACY TOPIC OR ISSUE IS MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU AND WHY?

"Fair Franchising. AAHOA Members are tired of unfair practices."



Every time I see our past and current AAHOA leaders, every time I attend a board meeting or any advocacy event, it excites me to do something for membership and my region."

## Taran Patel

Northwest Regional  
Director

### YOUR VOLUNTEER LEADERSHIP ROLE WITH AAHOA DEMANDS A LOT OF TIME, TALENT, AND RESOURCES. WHY DO YOU INVEST SO MUCH IN AAHOA AND SERVING OUR 20,000+ MEMBERS?

"I have the desire to help others succeed. The hospitality industry has given me so much, and to be in a position where I can give back and make an impact is rewarding."

### WHAT CHANGES DO YOU FORESEE IN OUR INDUSTRY IN 2023?

"Our industry is quite resilient, and while labor has been one of the greatest challenges in 2022, I don't anticipate that changing. Our industry will look to evolve in a creative way, allowing our hotels to operate successfully with a leaner staffing model. Whether it be via technology, enhanced training, or greater brand support, our industry will navigate through labor shortages."





**Harikrishna  
(HK) Patel**  
Mid South  
Regional Director

**WHAT DO YOU THINK AAHOA COULD BE DOING MORE OF?**

“AAHOA could work more strategically to put this great association in front of more legislators. As I travel across the U.S., I’ve realized that outside of our industry, not many people know the power that we, as an association, hold.”

**CAN YOU SHARE A TIME YOU OFFERED HOTEL ROOMS TO A PERSON IN NEED IN YOUR COMMUNITY?**

“There was a family who had a fire in their house, and this happened in the middle of winter on a snowy night. The police department brought the family to my hotel and asked to accommodate them in a room so they could have a place to stay. After we learned their house was on fire, we did not charge the family for their entire stay. The family stayed at our hotel for two weeks until they found a place to stay.”



As I travel across the U.S., I’ve realized that outside of our industry, not many people know the power that we, as an association, hold.”



**Bhavik Patel**  
Young  
Professional Director  
Eastern Division

**YOUR VOLUNTEER LEADERSHIP ROLE WITH AAHOA DEMANDS A LOT OF TIME, TALENT, AND RESOURCES. WHY DO YOU INVEST SO MUCH IN AAHOA AND SERVING OUR 20,000+ MEMBERS?**

“I strongly believe that hotel owners need a voice in the industry and that without representation, we will be left behind. Profit margins for owners continue to decline, and large companies continue to cannibalize in every opportunity they receive.”

**WHERE WERE YOU BORN; WHERE DID YOU GROW UP?**

“I was born and raised in Florida. I grew up in a little town called Wauchula, and then my family moved to Punta Gorda when I was eight or so. I spent the rest of my childhood in Southwest Florida until I went to college in Gainesville. At a young age, I learned the day-to-day hotel operations with my family. I started folding towels at the age of five, serviced rooms at eight, worked the front desk by 14, and helped manage properties at 16 years old.”

**WHAT IS YOUR MOST SUCCESSFUL PROPERTY, AND WHY?**

“Our most successful property is our independent hotel. It is the easiest to operate and has by far the highest NOI margin. We will always hold onto this hotel, and it is the hotel that I grew up in.”



**Rahul Patel**  
Florida Regional  
Director

**YOUR VOLUNTEER LEADERSHIP ROLE WITH AAHOA DEMANDS A LOT OF TIME, TALENT, AND RESOURCES. WHY DO YOU INVEST SO MUCH IN AAHOA AND SERVING OUR 20,000+ MEMBERS?**

“I am what I am today because of the State of the Industry when I immigrated to the U.S. I want to protect the free enterprise system, which makes the American Dream possible, so I invest my time in AAHOA to protect the hotel business environment.”

**WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST EVENT WITH AAHOA?**

“My first AAHOA event was an AAHOA Regional in Tampa, FL. I remember attending that Regional event with all my local friends from the Sarasota area, including our current Vice Chairman Bharat Patel.”

**CAN YOU SHARE ANY ACTS OF COMMUNITY SERVICE HERE IN THE U.S. OR ABROAD?**

“Time and again, as needs arise, we volunteer and raise money for the needy and distribute funds as it may best suit the situation. During COVID, we raised about \$20,000 and distributed half of the money to food banks in Manatee County and Sarasota County, and the rest of the money was sent to India to feed needy people. In the aftermath of Hurricane Ian, we were able to collectively fundraise more than \$100,000 and distributed it to local charities.”



**Vimal Patel**  
Gulf Regional Director

**MANY THINGS CHANGED IN THE WORLD DURING THE PANDEMIC. WHAT DO YOU THINK WILL NEVER GO BACK TO THE WAY IT WAS BEFORE?**

“Our clientele has shifted how they spend their money on travel. Many see how much they can save with a Zoom meeting, but the same money spent before may go toward face-to-face conferences and conventions.”

**WHAT ADVOCACY TOPIC OR ISSUE IS MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU AND WHY?**

“Fair franchise agreement. For example, there used to be a phenomenal brand. Post acquisition with a larger brand, we saw an immediate decrease in revenue and corporate culture. The option to leave the brand was not there. Otherwise, I would have. Franchisors seem to care most about their stock value as the numbers are more in favor that way.”



**Fenil Desai**  
South Carolina  
Regional Director

**WHAT CHANGES DO YOU FORESEE IN OUR INDUSTRY IN 2023?**

“In 2023, I see corporate travel coming back. To prepare for this, hotels will have to continue improving their operations to welcome guests, while knowing that there is a shortage of staff. Hotels will have to find unique ways to address the problem by becoming more autonomous.”

**WHAT DO YOU THINK IS THE BEST WAY TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF YOUR AAHOA MEMBERSHIP, WHETHER YOU’RE BRAND NEW TO AAHOA OR AN INDUSTRY VETERAN?**

“AAHOA provides 100+ webinars on how to improve your operations. I take advantage of these webinars as they educate me on how I am able to make the most out of my portfolio.”



**Naresh (ND) Bhakta**  
Greater Los Angeles  
Area Regional Director

**WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE THE NEXT GENERATION ABOUT GETTING INVOLVED IN HOSPITALITY AND AAHOA?**

“Study anything you sign. Read properly. Consult other people. Communicate with the AAHOA office for the guidance, especially on the 12 Points of Fair Franchising. It’s about knowing before investing.”

**YOUR VOLUNTEER LEADERSHIP ROLE WITH AAHOA DEMANDS A LOT OF TIME, TALENT, AND RESOURCES. WHY DO YOU INVEST SO MUCH IN AAHOA AND SERVING OUR 20,000+ MEMBERS?**

“I love to serve our fellow hoteliers. I want to protect them from false claims and wrongful investments, and guide them wherever they can be successful. Seeing them succeed gives me joy. I like to share my experience and knowledge for the betterment of others. I am blessed with support from my family.”



**Pinal Patel**  
Director At Large  
Eastern Division

**WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE THE NEXT GENERATION ABOUT GETTING INVOLVED IN HOSPITALITY AND AAHOA?**

“I can truly say that AAHOA’s tools and resources were part of what helped me become a multi-branded hotel operator today.”

**WHAT’S THE SINGLE BIGGEST CHALLENGE YOU FACE IN YOUR BUSINESS TODAY? DO YOU SEE THIS AS A SHORT-TERM CHALLENGE OR LONG-TERM, AND WHY?**

“The pandemic has taught many people that the job does not have to be the way it was.”

**WHAT IS YOUR MOST SUCCESSFUL PROPERTY AND WHY?**

“Red Roof Inn. The brand cared for my success. Location and growth in the area exploded.” ■

# Don't Miss a Single Offer from AAHOA's Top Industry Partners!

## Have you opted in?

If not, you're missing out on tremendous savings!

The Bulletin, Vendor Digest, and The Allied Alley contain offers, deals, and discounts exclusively for AAHOA Members. Opting in is easy and takes only a few seconds in MyAAHOA, or contact info@aahoa.com and the AAHOA Team can add you to the list.



Here's how you can gain access to our Vendor Offers...

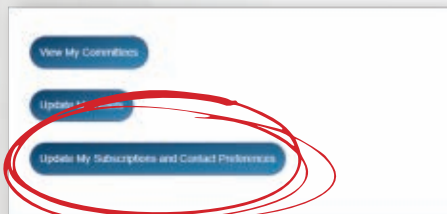
### STEP 1:

Click "My Profile."



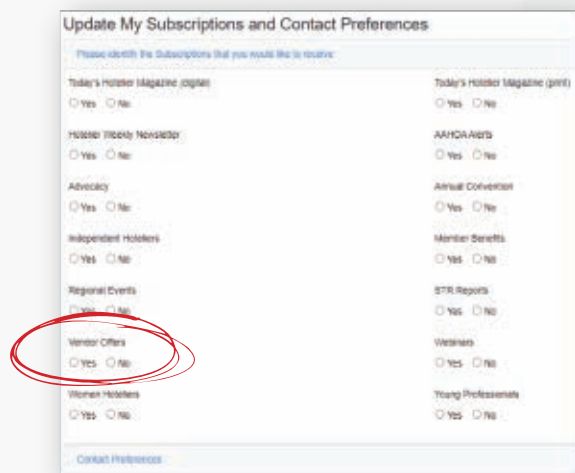
### STEP 2:

Click "Update My Subscription and Contact Preferences."



### STEP 3:

Under "Vendor Offers," click "Yes."



Get weekly savings delivered right to your inbox with just three clicks of a mouse.



# OPT IN TODAY!

# REVIEW

## Recapping AAHOA's 2022 advocacy efforts

by EVELYN HOOVER



### AAHOA's Fall National Advocacy Conference addresses legislation impacting the industry

AAHOA Members and leaders from all over the country flew into Washington D.C. last fall to shed light on the issues that matter most to America's hotel owners. Hoteliers met and built relationships with more than 100 offices and in-person meetings with more than 70 Members of Congress, including 8 U.S. Senators, to push industry-friendly policies forward.

Read more here:



# MINUTE



## AAHOA leadership advances fairness in franchise with Federal Trade Commission Commissioner Alvaro Bedoya

AAHOA leadership met with Federal Trade Commission (FTC) Commissioner Alvaro Bedoya in D.C. and discussed several key issues affecting the hospitality industry, including the unfair practices in franchising and the FTC's Franchise Rule. AAHOA thanks Commissioner Bedoya for taking a great interest in franchising and being a strong advocate for AAHOA Members and American consumers.

Read more here:



## AAHOA applauds the increased funding for the SBA's 504 loan program

In a major win for America's hoteliers, Congress boosted funding for a number of SBA loan programs, including the 504 loan program.

Read more here:





## Take a deeper dive into AAHOA's 12 Points

The 12 Points Webinar Series continues AAHOA's mission and commitment to educating members and franchisees on best-in-class, mutually beneficial franchise systems.

**Watch the 12 Points Webinar Series today:**

Read more here:



## AAHOA puts people first

Hurricane Ian made landfall in Florida on last September, as a Category 4 storm. For AAHOA Members with properties in the path of Hurricane Ian, the impact was devastating. AAHOA leaders held a call the Saturday before Hurricane Ian made landfall, and about 50 hoteliers attended, ensuring everybody was aware of the dangers of the storm and directing them to available resources. Shortly after the Hurricane, AAHOA President & CEO Laura Lee Blake traveled to Florida to encourage and meet with local members. During the visit, AAHOA Vice Chairman Bharat Patel scheduled a Town Hall with U.S. Congressman Byron Donalds (FL-R-19) and numerous local AAHOA Members to discuss the ongoing recovery from Hurricane Ian's ruinous effects on their communities.

Read more here:



## Lodging per diem increases

Excellent news! The General Services Administration increased the lodging per diem rates for traveling federal employees from \$155 to \$157 for FY 2023. This win is a testament to the incredible work of the AAHOA team. Last summer, AAHOA Chairman Neal Patel penned a letter to U.S. General Services Administration Administrator Robin Carnahan, calling on the agency to raise the per diem rate. AAHOA thanks the GSA for its continued support of the lodging industry, ensuring federal officials are well-equipped to travel in service of the federal government.

**Read AAHOA's per diem letter to GSA:**



## Congresswoman Beth Van Duyne Joins Texas AAHOA Members for a back-of-house tour

Last fall, AAHOA Members hosted Congresswoman Beth Van Duyne (R-TX-24) for a back-of-house tour at the Wyndham DFW / North Irving hotel to get a unique, hands-on tour of the daily life of a hotel operator. "Having Congresswoman Beth Van Duyne participate in the back-of-house tour was an amazing experience. Interacting with the staff and guests, participating in daily staff duties, and understanding the hospitality business demonstrates her commitment not only to AAHOA members, but also her constituents that reside in her district," said Dhiren Masters, North Texas Regional Director.

**Read more here:**



## AAHOA Members stand up to Los Angeles City Council's controversial land use ordinance

AAHOA Members stood up and used their voices during the Los Angeles City Council Hearing to make it known that the controversial land use ordinance creates a serious safety concern for guests, housekeepers, and all hotel staff.



**Read more here:**



# Back to



## Understanding the key components of bank financing for hotels

by ANNA SWARTZ-LOPEZ

This article is part of an ongoing series designed to walk those newer to the industry through ground-level finance basics.

**C**ONVENTIONAL BANK financing remains the most common source of funds for the majority of commercial real estate transactions in this country.

To improve one's chances of getting bank approval for a loan, the aspiring hotel investor should understand some basics of how banks operate.

When looking for a loan, the first impulse may be to approach a large bank. Those well-known institutions may be the first resource that comes to mind when the new investor thinks of securing financing. However, large financial institutions have, generally speaking, a very low risk tolerance. Those lenders often focus exclusively on making loans of the highest quality – i.e., those with the lowest possibility of default. A new investor with an unproven track record may have difficulty securing financing from such a source. For that matter, large

institutions often have policies of not issuing hospitality loans. And that's during the best of times. On the heels of a global pandemic, the risk factor is even higher.

### READ THE ROOM

While not impossible to secure funds from a large bank, there will be a higher chance of success in getting financing from a smaller, regional bank – like a community bank or credit union, for example. These types of institutions typically have both a higher risk tolerance and a focus on the community. Sometimes, they even have a community-driven purpose, which may make them more amenable to a hospitality loan if it can be shown that it aligns with the overall focus of the bank.

A community bank may be more eager to work with an investor who has strong local ties to the community, such as a good reputation and

involvement in community affairs. While community involvement won't make up for a bad business plan, it can positively affect the banking relationship. If an investor has strong local ties to a community and is able to bring significant deposits to a regional bank, that lender will likely do everything in its power to strengthen and maintain a good relationship with the borrower.

The best way to cultivate a relationship with a bank is to bring deposits. That's the number one most important thing every bank is looking for. More deposits mean a bank has a stronger balance sheet, meaning it can lend out more money. All banks are highly regulated by the government and have strict standards to which they must adhere to stay in business. Additional deposits always put a bank on a more secure standing. It also allows the bank to make more loans – and, after all, the bank is in the lending business.

**MONEY TALKS**

Now, a word about pricing. Some investors focus exclusively on the interest rate of a loan and, in so doing, don't consider other elements that may dramatically affect their business plan. Is the loan adjustable or fixed, and for how long? What happens to the loan after it closes? Will it be sold to another party, or will it remain on balance sheet with the original lender? What are the post-closing covenants? Who will be servicing the loan after closing? There are myriad ways a loan can be structured, and a better structure may be worth a slightly higher price.

It's also vital to understand that pricing is determined by multiple factors, including liquidity, net worth, and experience of the borrower. A banker will need to dig into the specifics of a particular loan request, before giving an actionable loan quote. Don't expect a hard, fast number in the first conversation with your banker.

There are still limits to what a bank can do, even for its best client. Over the last few years, the cost of capital has been extraordinarily low, and lenders have given out a significant amount



Large institutions often have policies of not issuing hospitality loans. And that's during the best of times. On the heels of a global pandemic, the risk factor is even higher.”

of debt under very unique conditions. With inflation running hot, the market increasingly volatile, and the Federal Reserve raising interest rates, some lenders are now looking at their book of business and realizing perhaps they overextended themselves. The internal focus for many lenders has shifted toward ensuring their loans meet internal stress testing, so they can satisfy federal regulators that their overall loan portfolio remains strong.

The implications of this shift in focus mean that sometimes a bank will deny a

loan request, based on internal factors for the bank and perhaps having nothing to do with the business plan of the borrower. This is the sort of thing that a quality mortgage broker can help navigate. A great deal of frustration can be generated when a borrower has a strong business plan but still gets their loan denied. Borrowers ought to understand that there may be factors at work other than the strength of their business plans. ■

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*Anna Swartz-Lopez is a commercial mortgage banker with Slatt Capital, providing customized debt solutions across the country. She's California native who spent years living outside the state, including in such diverse places as Incheon, South Korea, and Moriarty, New Mexico. She can be reached at [aswartz-lopez@slatt.com](mailto:aswartz-lopez@slatt.com) or (925) 478-2271.*



# Presto!

## Revealing the secrets to profitability in this new economy

by KEN PATEL

**U**NFORTUNATELY, as the hospitality industry attempts to recover from a tumultuous few years, there still are challenges ahead. Fortunately, summer 2022 brought a much-needed revitalization to all-things hospitality, but with the looming possibility of a global recession, it's unclear what the future holds. Even though a survey conducted by Destination Analysts shows that 74.8% of Americans would still prioritize travel spending in the midst of a recession, it's difficult to truly predict how travel will play out in reality since it's unclear just how bad things could get.

Despite these challenges, hospitality leaders must prioritize profits to weather the uncertainties ahead. Restaurants, hotels, tour companies, convention operators, and more could face economic hardships that are more intense than ever before. In the wake of these challenges, here are five ways leaders can overcome the emerging hurdles to deliver quality results to their investors.

### 1

#### PROACTIVE SALES EFFORTS

Unfortunately, when a recession appears, many managers instinctively look to cut the sales efforts as they think it's a lost cause. However, ensuring your team has the right sales training and understanding of market dynamics will go a long way in boosting profits. You need to have the right number of sellers in the right positions to keep up with the competition in your area, and also equip them with the skills to identify new, high-value customers while still prioritizing existing customers.

Your sales team is the first to provide service to customers, so it's critical they're highly skilled and committed to quality. Sales professionals also must stay closely connected with your operations team to ensure that the quality of services and promises made are kept throughout the duration of the visitor's experience.

### 2

#### SERVANT LEADERSHIP POLICIES

During the next few years, hospitality professionals will be in the trenches, and they need their leaders in the trenches as well. Work alongside your associates to showcase solidarity, keep a pulse on how they are doing and feeling, and provide assistance when needed. When it comes time to promote, reward the diligent workers that are already within your organization instead of pulling a new hire from outside whenever possible.

Pay your teams well and keep benefits competitive in your industry. Work with HR to provide clear and regular feedback to your associates, and use a number of mediums like meetings, newsletters, memos, chat boards, and leadership Q&As to keep everyone informed on what's happening in your organization at all levels.

### 3

#### STRONG CUSTOMER AND STAKEHOLDER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

Get feedback from your customers and take action on that feedback. Making customers feel seen, heard, and valued will go a long way in convincing them to come back or recommend your services to others. Go the extra mile to highlight the value of your customers by sending thank-you letters and keep them updated with newsletters or quarterly blogs. Returning customers are incredibly valuable, so don't make the mistake of focusing only on new customers. You can even host customer-appreciation events to offer a feeling of exclusivity and make them feel appreciated.

# 4

## CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT METHODOLOGIES

Once you have established your key metrics, it's imperative that you measure them and track any changes. Key performance indicators (KPIs) are a data-based way to know what is and isn't working. Use them to identify waste or redundancies that can be removed throughout your entire organization. When you get customer/associate feedback, act on it – the voice of the customer and the associate is a critical function of any business. Lastly, in everything your organization does, you should be finding the most efficient way to complete tasks and propel business.

# 5

## MANAGE SPENDING AND LABOR COSTS

The time of your team is one of the most valuable resources you have, so use it well. With a continuous improvement mindset, you can invest in tools and technologies to get the job done right. When you develop the most efficient ways to complete tasks, be sure to train your employees so there's a uniform approach to everything. This approach will streamline processes and cut labor costs by saving time.

Time and time again, hospitality proves its ability to weather the storm. Whether it's working through natural disasters, economic downturns, or a global pandemic, those in hospitality continue to come back with resilience. This time will be no different. ■



*Ken Patel is the owner and CEO of A&R Group. After immigrating to the U.S. in 1996, he began his career in the hospitality industry by managing a family-owned hotel. In the years since, Patel has accumulated a portfolio of globally recognized brands such as Hilton, Intercontinental Hotel Group, and Wyndham.*

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Time and time again, hospitality proves its ability to weather the storm. Whether it's working through natural disasters, economic downturns, or a global pandemic, those in hospitality continue to come back with resilience.”

# Creating a network of safety

AAHOA Members lead the fight against human trafficking

by EVELYN HOOVER

**J**ANUARY IS DESIGNATED National Human Trafficking Prevention Month by presidential proclamation, a time for individuals and businesses to raise awareness, educate, and prevent human trafficking. As an organization representing nearly 20,000 hotel owners who own 60% of the hotels in the U.S., AAHOA has long been at the forefront of the hospitality industry's battle against human trafficking.

## DATA BEHIND TRAFFICKING

According to the Polaris Project, a nonprofit organization combating and preventing human trafficking in the U.S., 10,583 situations of human trafficking were reported to the U.S. National Human Trafficking Hotline involving 16,658 individual victims in 2020. This statistic is staggering, and it shows that traffickers kept this horrible crime going amid the COVID-19 lockdowns. Recent research from the Polaris Project also indicates that the internet has become a top recruitment location for all forms of trafficking, with Facebook and Instagram being the most common sites for this crime to occur.

On top of online recruitment, traffickers continue to use hotels and motels to exploit their victims, taking advantage of accessibility, the ability to pay in cash, and remain anonymous. Data from the National Human Trafficking Hotline shows that at least 6.8% of human

trafficking cases reported in 2020 were based in hotels or motels. These statistics indicate that hoteliers are in a prime position to help fight against this horrendous crime. That's why AAHOA offers Businesses Ending Slavery and Trafficking (BEST) Inhospitable to Human Trafficking Training, Sponsored by AAHOA. It's completely free and available online 24/7/365 for all AAHOA Members and their employees. Thousands of hospitality employees have already completed this human trafficking awareness training.

## HOW AAHOA MEMBERS ARE RESPONDING

AAHOA Members are taking an active role in preventing the illegal exploitation of individuals on their hotel properties, including Vice Chairman Bharat Patel and Central Midwest Regional Director Arti Patel. For years, Bharat has used his human trafficking knowledge to spread awareness and work closely with law enforcement. In 2019, he helped law enforcement in the City of Sarasota with a reverse sting operation to catch a trafficker.

"They wanted me to give a couple of rooms so they could run a reverse sting operation," Bharat shared. "They didn't make the papers, and we did not promote it. But they got somebody off the street who was trafficking human beings."

"Many times, for law enforcement and business owners, our successes are more private. The failures might be public, but our successes tend to fly under the radar.

We should always look for ways to do a little to improve our community, and this is part of it.”

No matter how big or small, these efforts can save lives and protect your businesses. Over in the Central Midwest Region, Arti and her hotel staff have stepped in to help victims of human trafficking.

“We had an incident where a woman came into the hotel and was very frightened. She was running. Our employee gave her a room, and we called law enforcement,” Arti explained. “If it weren’t for the training and advocacy, it would’ve been tough to understand what was happening that night.”

These situations, and the millions happening worldwide and online, are some of the reasons AAHOA has worked diligently to help hotel staff look out for warning signs.

“I have done the training on more than one occasion, and I would encourage people to take it with their team members and fellow hotel owners and operators,” Bharat said. “Also, for new employees and new team members who start in your business, make sure they’re involved also.”

“We sometimes get blinded about what human trafficking is. We speak about fraudulent activities when it comes to bank cards. We speak about drugs, and we even speak about domestic violence,” Arti explained. “But human trafficking is very, very widespread. Hoteliers must know the importance of what we’re trying to fight.”



These situations, and the millions happening worldwide and online, are some of the reasons AAHOA has worked diligently to help hotel staff look out for warning signs.”

## The breakdown

AAHOA’s 2022 Human Trafficking Awareness Training Efforts

**1,000+**

people completed online training in 21 states.

**200+**

people attended training sessions at 8 AAHOA Regional Conferences & Trade Shows.

### KNOW THE LAWS IN YOUR STATE OR AREA

Several states have required and encouraged human trafficking training or the posting of the National Human Trafficking Hotline information in hotels. Below are the 10 states that currently require human trafficking awareness training:

- California, Connecticut, Minnesota, New Jersey, Florida, Iowa, North Dakota, Texas, Illinois, and Maryland.

This training helps hotel staff spot the signs and make a difference in the community. ■

## Take the Training Today

During National Human Trafficking Prevention Month, take the BEST Inhospitable to Human Trafficking Training, Sponsored by AAHOA. Empower yourself and your staff with the tools to fight human trafficking.

**For more information, visit [AAHOA.com/HTAT](https://AAHOA.com/HTAT)**

# Obstacles ahead

## Are we facing a new reality in commercial real estate financing?

by RUSHI SHAH

**INTEREST RATES AREN'T IMPORTANT** until they are. History has taught us that nothing remains low or high forever, including interest rates, but studying historic interest-rate cycles can allow us to better appreciate and understand trends and timing. Looking back at the last half-century, the '80s were a hyper inflationary and high interest rate era. We spent the '90s recovering from those conditions. The first two decades of the 2000s were defined by moderate-to-low interest rates. Today, we're in the last leg of a 50-year cycle with interest rates climbing.

### INTEREST-RATE FORECAST

When it comes to inflation, the economy is like a freight train. It takes a long time to get it going and it takes a long time to bring it to a halt. This is directly correlated to how interest rates behave and how the Federal Reserve regulates its federal funds rates. Many people naively believe that rates will soon come back down. For a decrease to occur, however, there would have to be a major correction in the overall economic activity. Even if rates fall, they won't reach

zero without an economic Armageddon. For the foreseeable future, this new paradigm of interest rate environment is likely here to stay. Without a recession or an abrupt change in economic cycles, it's fair to say that both short- and long-term interest rates will be higher in the next 10 years than they were during the past 10 years. This is the new reality.

### EFFECTS ON PRICES & CAPITAL MARKETS

It's important to understand what happens to asset prices and how capital markets react to these new challenges. When short-term interest rates go up, indices such as the one-month SOFR, prime rate, LIBOR, and the Fed funds rate also go up. Lenders funding their own balance sheets using short-term money have to charge an

interest rate that is pegged to a short-term index, which follows the Fed's movements. Therefore, when short-term interest rates rise, lenders have to increase their all-in lending rates along with the increase in the spread.

For example, if a debt fund is making bridge loans at the secured overnight financing rate (SOFR) + 500 basis points (at the time of writing SOFR is close to 4%) and historically SOFR was at 1%, the

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Hospitality may be especially vulnerable, as unemployment will curb demand for leisure and business travel.”

all-in rate would have been 6%. Now, just because the SOFR is at 4%, the spread can't go down from 500 basis points to 200 points, because the actual perception of credit risk hasn't lessened. Rather, the perceived credit risk has actually gone up because of the recessionary pressures.

In other words, there's a double whammy in the market where economic slowdown puts upward pressure on the spread. In this example, the spread would be more than 500 basis points because of the perceived higher risk of default for the same deal to be closed this year vs. last year. This subsequently puts pressure on debt service coverage ratios – which, by definition, would mean

lower loan amounts that then translate into lower loan-to-values and the need for additional equity to get deals done. Unfortunately, there's a drag on equity returns. If the equity isn't willing to settle on lower returns, the only other thing that can move is asset value. Asset value would be lower because of the willingness of the equity holders to pay a lower price for the returns to work. As a result, we'll see lower-leverage transactions.

#### MARKET DYNAMICS IN 2023

The biggest X-factor in the economic landscape will be jobs. If the current unemployment rate is sustainable, the pain endured will be bearable. Increased job loss, however, will have a negative spiraling effect, adding to the headwinds we already face in the higher interest rate environment. Hospitality may be especially vulnerable, as unemployment will curb demand for leisure and business travel.

In 2023, getting to the closing table will require strong relationships with capital providers on both the debt and equity side. Market knowledge and the ability to creatively structure around pain points will be pivotal for owners, developers, and general partners seeking financing, and act as the differentiating factor between winning and losing in the market. More than ever, the right investment banker or financing intermediary will prove to be the most valuable resource in the commercial real estate value chain. ■



*Rushi Shah is Principal and CEO of the commercial mortgage and real estate investment banking firm and AAHOA Allied Member Mag Mile Capital. As a leader in hospitality financing, Shah specializes in structuring and placing high leverage, nonrecourse bridge and permanent debt with cash out for full- and limited-service hotels nationwide. Since joining the firm's predecessor, Aries Capital, in 2015, Shah has structured and closed hundreds of millions in financing for all property types. Shah has held previous positions at Northern Trust and has an MBA from the University of Chicago's Booth School of Business.*

# Aim for the

# STAR

When managing your workforce,  
the sky is the limit

by TIMESH PATEL

**L**EADERSHIP SKILLS ARE crucial when it comes to workforce management, and this is especially true for independent hotel chains. For example, when the staff is smaller, it's imperative that transparency and communication are streamlined so everyone is on the same page. It can be tough to maintain high morale and retention among employees, but doing so will lead to a healthier working environment, which results in a stronger business overall.

Independent properties account for 40-50% of the world's total hotels, and these properties must sell their rooms and maintain excellent customer reviews to continue bringing in revenue and maximizing their earnings. For independent hotels, this often means having employees wear

multiple hats rather than implementing dedicated teams for each department. Management would best be able to handle staff in these circumstances with proper software and tools. Here are four ways independent properties can better manage their teams.

## DELEGATE THE DETAILS

When it comes to minimizing expenses and capitalizing on ROI, it's vital that employees are empowered to affect change. This can come from delegating tasks while allowing them more autonomy to operate and overlap duties as needed to get everything done. Learning how to delegate is a vital skill when it comes to leading your workforce. When you have a smaller team, it helps to know what tasks at which each employee excels. From here, leadership can better divide who works on what and when.

## COMMUNICATION IS KEY

Strong leadership skills also include knowing how to communicate. Don't wait for your employees to know what needs to be done and when. Set specific times for check-ins and checkouts and know who will be manning the front desk to handle administrative work and who will be cleaning the rooms. There needs to be enough staff for seamless checking in and out of guests. When leadership focuses on task management, they can more accurately forecast budgets and schedules.

## CLARITY AND CONCISION

Communication and transparency will make or break your team, and this is especially true for independent hotels. Transparency allows all team members to feel included and on the same page, rather than risking someone being left in the dark and unsure of their duties or others. A great way to ensure that your staff are on the same page is to hold a daily or weekly meeting. If staff are not all there on the same day, consider having a general area for workplace announcements, reminders, and more – including a whiteboard or calendar that can be either digital or physical in nature to which everyone can have access.

# RIS

## COMPETITION IS KING

One final tip for keeping your staff morale and teamwork high is to incentivize. This can be accomplished by holding monthly contests for the best positive ratings from guests, ensuring everyone is on time for their shifts for the whole month, etc., to win a singular or team-based prize. This prize could be anything from recognition – such as employee of the month – to something bigger, like a party for the whole team. Small bits of encouragement go a long way when it comes to boosting and maintaining staff happiness and bonds.

With great leadership comes great team and individual performances. From this, a strong world of positive reviews will be built and your independent hotel will stay on the map and bring in new and returning guests alike. ■



*Timesh Patel is an AAHOA Independent Hoteliers Committee (2022-23) member, the Hospitality Director for Paloma Realty Partners, and he specializes in management consulting and brokerage services. He can be reached at [timesh@palomarealtypartners.com](mailto:timesh@palomarealtypartners.com) or (323) 717-9698.*

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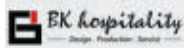
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# 2022 RECAP

## A Year in Photos



The Mid Atlantic Regional Conference & Trade Show brought together hoteliers from a wide range of backgrounds to learn, network, and collaborate.



Hoteliers heard important industry updates and voiced any concerns at AAHOA's Town Hall meeting in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.



AAHOA Chairman Neal Patel (second from left) and Northeast Ambassadors welcomed local hotel owners and industry partners at the Northeast Regional Conference & Trade Show.



Hoteliers showed up for AAHOA's Town Hall meeting in Greensboro, NC.



[L-R]: AAHOA Treasurer Miraj Patel, Chairman Neal Patel, Vice Chairman Bharat Patel, Louisiana Attorney General Jeff Landry, and Gulf Regional Director Vimal Patel at the Gulf Regional Conference and Trade Show this past November.



AAHOA Team Members served dinner to families at Atlanta Ronald McDonald House Charities.



AAHOA partnered with the California Hotel & Lodging Association to offer the South Pacific Regional Conference & Trade Show, giving attendees the chance to connect with dozens of exhibitors in San Diego, CA.



Women hoteliers were among the 150 attendees at the South Pacific Town Hall meeting at the BAPS Temple in Chino Hills, CA.



Indian Superstar Singer/Actor Shaan delivered a stunning performance at the AAHOACON22 Gala.



AAHOA Members connected and learned from each other at the Arkansas Regional Conference & Trade Show last summer.



Garba night was a celebration of Indian culture and traditional dance at AAHOACON22.



AAHOACON22 attendees had the opportunity to meet more than 500 exhibiting companies on the trade show floor.



Washington DC Area Regional Director Deepak Patel and Female Director Eastern Division Lina Patel empowered women hoteliers to grow in the industry during the Washington DC Area Regional Conference & Trade Show.



AAHOA Members gathered in Cincinnati, OH, for AAHOA's inaugural HerOwnership Conference & Retreat.



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