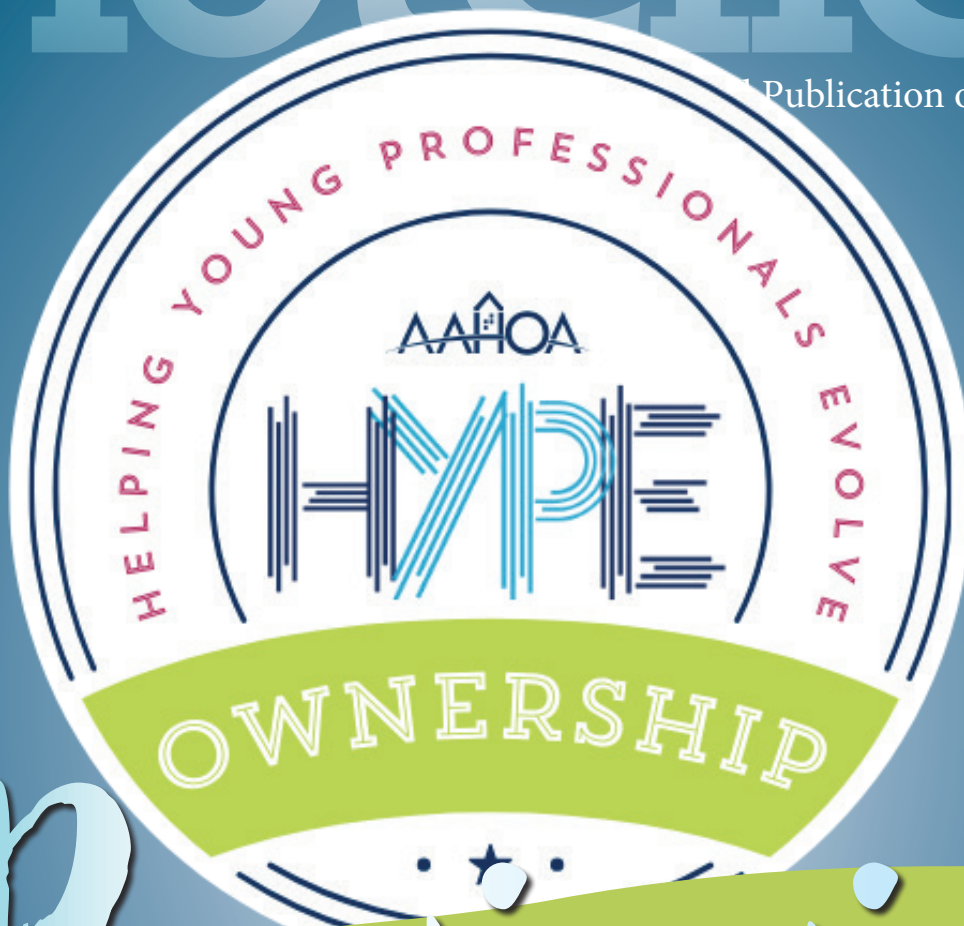


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Publication of  AAHOA
ASIAN AMERICAN HOTEL OWNERS ASSOCIATION



Previewing

AAHOA's 2025 HYPE Conference

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**Firsthand perspectives from
young professionals pursuing
a future in hospitality**

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5 Things to Know About AAHOA This Month

LOOKING AHEAD: HAPPY NEW YEAR FROM AAHOA

As we welcome 2025, we celebrate another year of progress and resilience within the hospitality industry. AAHOA remains committed to driving innovation and fostering unity among our members and partners. Together, let's embrace the opportunities and challenges of the new year with optimism and determination. From the AAHOA family to yours, we wish you a Happy New Year filled with growth, success, and new horizons.

20
25

LET THE GOOD TIMES ROLL AT AAHOACON25

In just three months, the hospitality industry's biggest event for hotel owners is coming your way! Get ready for AAHOACON25, where you will find new ideas and new opportunities in New Orleans! Join us April 15-17 at the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center for a convention and trade show like no other. Whether you're reconnecting with familiar faces or expanding your network, this event promises to be

bigger, bolder, and brighter than ever. Register today at AAHOACON.com.



STAND WITH AAHOA IN THE FIGHT AGAINST HUMAN TRAFFICKING

January is National Human Trafficking Prevention Month, a time to come together to raise awareness and take action. AAHOA is deeply committed to leading the hospitality industry's efforts to combat human trafficking. You can make a difference by completing the Businesses Ending Slavery and Trafficking (BEST) Inhospitable to Human Trafficking Training, Sponsored by AAHOA. This 30-minute, FREE training is available to all AAHOA Members and their staff. Protect your properties and be part of the solution. Visit AAHOA.com/HTAT to get started.



WANT TO SHAPE THE FUTURE OF HOTEL OWNERSHIP?

AAHOA Members, this is your chance to make a lasting impact! By joining AAHOA's 2025-26 Board of Directors, you can play a key role in guiding the strategic vision of an organization that champions the interests of hotel owners nationwide. Your leadership can drive positive change in our industry. Take advantage of the opportunity – nominations for the 2025-26 Board of Directors close on February 15, 2025. Submit your nomination today: bit.ly/3VhVsre



DISCOVER SAVINGS ON NATIONAL CUT YOUR ENERGY COSTS DAY

Mark your calendar for January 10, National Cut Your Energy Costs Day – a time to focus on reducing energy expenses and boosting efficiency in homes and businesses. Energy can be a significant expense for hotels, averaging \$2,196 per room annually – around 6% of operating costs. That's the same energy usage as more than five million homes! Take action to improve your property's energy efficiency and see the impact on your bottom line. Find energy-saving strategies here: bit.ly/3Ymu39r.





MIRAJ S. PATEL,
MBA, CHIA

AAHOA CHAIRMAN (2024-2025)

Empowering young professionals

“It’s not about how many years of experience you have. It’s about the quality of your years of experience.”

– *Jacob Cass, Australian entrepreneur*

“

I’ve seen firsthand how adaptable, innovative, and driven young professionals are in our industry, and their contributions are essential to its continued success.”

F YOU’VE ATTENDED ANY AAHOA OR INDUSTRY EVENT RECENTLY, YOU LIKELY HAVE

noticed the rising engagement of young professionals. Whether through educational sessions tailored to their needs or networking opportunities, it’s clear AAHOA’s efforts to foster the next generation of leaders are resonating. The growing number of young attendees at our events speaks volumes about our ability to connect with and inspire this crucial demographic.

As the youngest chair in AAHOA’s history and as someone who got involved at age 17, I find this topic incredibly close to my heart. I’ve seen firsthand how adaptable, innovative, and driven young professionals are in our industry, and their contributions are essential to its continued success. Our industry thrives on fresh ideas; the next generation is ready to lead the way.

This engagement can be attributed in part to AAHOA’s Helping Young Professionals Evolve (HYPE) initiative, launched in 2023, to foster the growth and success of emerging hoteliers within AAHOA and across the broader industry.

Next month, we’re excited to build on our efforts by hosting our second HYPE Conference on February 6-7 in Mexico City, Mexico. This event would not be possible without the leadership and dedication of our Young Hoteliers Committee, along with Young Professional Directors Dylan Patel (Eastern Division) and Tanmay Patel (Western Division), who have worked tirelessly to make this conference successful. Our inaugural HYPE Conference, held in New Orleans last year, welcomed more than 200 attendees – a testament to the hunger for growth and connection among our young members.

At AAHOA, young professionals are eager to expand their knowledge and elevate their careers. We’re committed to providing them with mentorship, development opportunities, and a platform to make their mark in the industry. Through these efforts, we’re shaping their future and encouraging them to stay engaged and see the hospitality sector’s endless possibilities.

Our industry has so many paths, and we want to ensure the next generation understands the vast array of opportunities available to them. Whether through entrepreneurship, management, or innovation, young professionals can play a vital role in shaping the future of hospitality.

Our mission remains to create a skilled, inspired, and motivated workforce to drive the success of AAHOA and the industry. The contributions of young professionals are essential to fostering creativity, ensuring long-term growth, and securing our place as leaders in the global hospitality landscape. By investing in their development today, we build the foundation for tomorrow’s success.

As we continue this journey, we look forward to witnessing the incredible potential and achievements of the hospitality industry. The future of hospitality is in great hands, and we’re proud to be part of their story. See you in Mexico City! ■



LAURA LEE BLAKE, ESQ.
AAHOA PRESIDENT & CEO

Building the next generation

“The best time to start a business is when you’re young. Your fearlessness and fresh perspective can lead to groundbreaking ideas and innovation.”

– *Richard Branson*

“AAHOA Members have a proud tradition of passing businesses down through generations, creating a foundation of mentorship and resilience.”

AAHOA IS THRILLED TO HOST OUR SECOND HYPE (HELPING YOUNG PROFESSIONALS Evolve) Conference next month in Mexico City. This event highlights our commitment to nurturing the next generation of hospitality leaders.

Young professionals bring fresh perspectives, innovation, and bold ideas that drive the progress of the hospitality industry. We are proud of the contributions of our Young Professional Directors – Dylan Patel (Eastern Division) and Tanmay Patel (Western Division). Their leadership exemplifies the energy and vision essential to navigating the hospitality landscape. Their efforts demonstrate how young professionals play a crucial role in the success of AAHOA and the industry.

The role of young professionals in hospitality is transformative. With their mastery of modern technology and expertise in digital tools, social media, and evolving guest preferences, they are driving innovation across marketing, operations, and customer engagement. By involving young leaders in decision-making, we gain invaluable perspectives that bridge generational gaps. This approach helps leadership teams anticipate consumer needs, refine strategies, and maintain a competitive edge. As seasoned hoteliers pass the torch to the next generation, the entrepreneurial spirit of young professionals ensures that family legacies thrive and the industry continues to evolve.

CONCRETE GOALS TO EMPOWER EMERGING LEADERS

To further empower young professionals, AAHOA is focusing on several key areas:

- **Mentorship Programs:** Pairing young leaders with experienced hoteliers to foster growth and guidance.
- **Development Programs & Leadership Roles:** Launching programs that prepare young professionals for ownership and senior leadership roles.
- **Credentialing Opportunities:** Partnering with industry organizations to offer certifications in areas such as commercial strategy, sustainability, and technology.
- **Tech and Innovation Talks:** Hosting sessions on AI, consumer trends, and cutting-edge practices to inspire forward-thinking solutions.

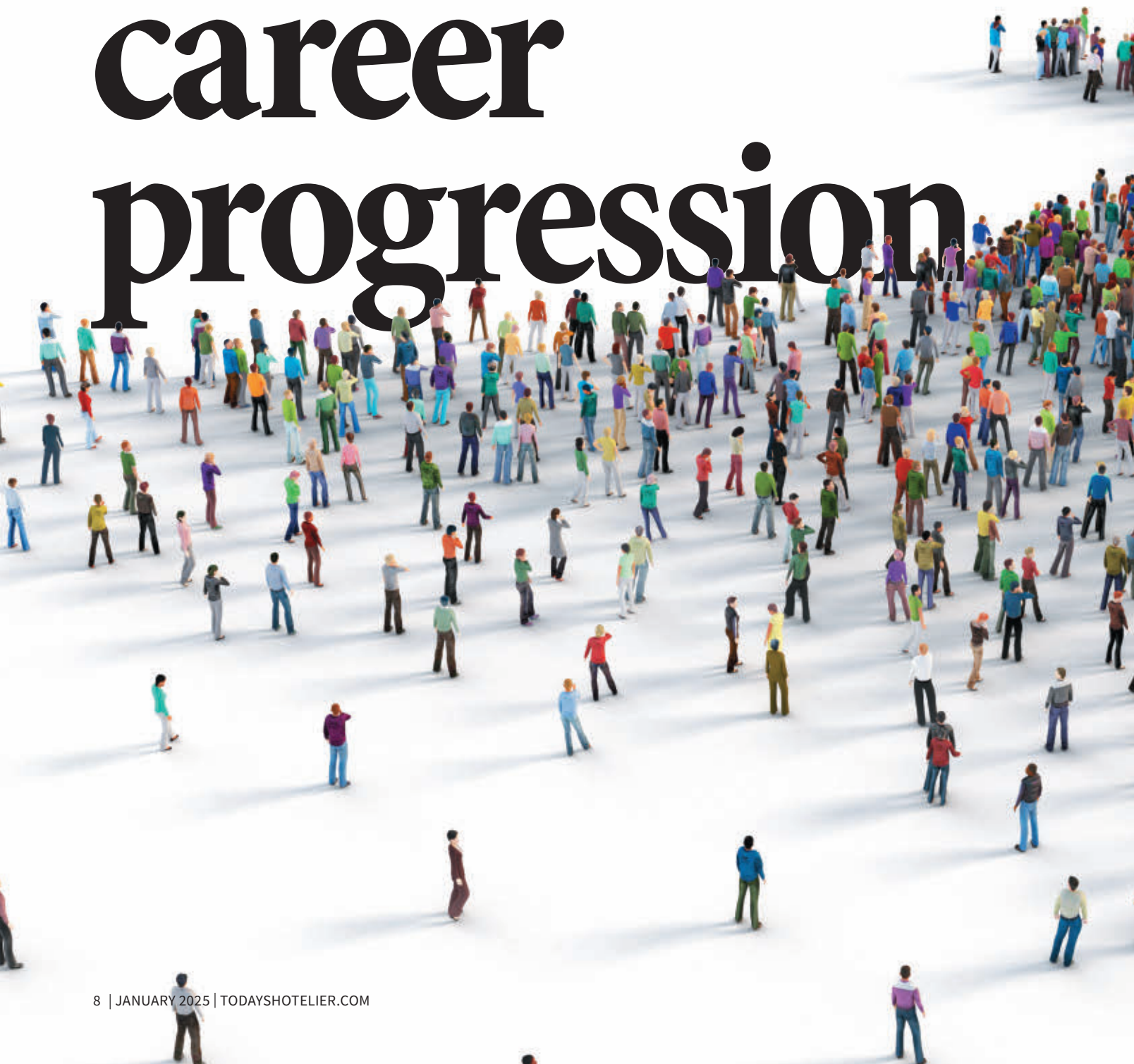
FOSTERING LEADERSHIP AMONG YOUNG WOMEN

We recognize the importance of empowering young women in hospitality. Their leadership enriches decision-making and cultivates an environment that is more representative of the workforce and guests we serve. AAHOA is committed to encouraging more young women to participate in programs like HYPE and step into leadership roles.

AAHOA Members have a proud tradition of passing businesses down through generations, creating a foundation of mentorship and resilience. Today’s young professionals are ready to take on this mantle, honoring the legacies of those who came before them while leading with bold ideas and a passion for innovation.

Programs like HYPE provide the tools and platforms emerging leaders need to succeed. By investing in their development, AAHOA ensures the longevity of our association and the continued success of the hospitality industry. Together, we are building a future that is resilient, innovative, and inspiring. ■

Navigating career progression



Firsthand perspectives from young professionals pursuing a future in hospitality

by TOM GRESHAM



FOR YOUNG PROFESSIONALS AIM-
ing to build long-term careers, the
hospitality industry represents
a wealth of promise and possi-
bility. In fact, Veer Patel, manag-
ing partner of Devi Hospitality,
called the entrepreneurial potential of the
field “unmatched.”

“Hospitality offers unique benefits for those willing to embrace its challenges,” he said. “It’s a highly people-centered industry, allowing us to create memorable experiences for guests while positively impacting our communities.”

With that in mind, Patel and Milly Desai, marketing and management, Miral LLC, shared valuable lessons they’ve learned that could benefit those looking to build fulfilling careers in the industry.

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“

Early connections with local businesses and media create long-term benefits, driving a steady stream of interest and revenue. Had I focused on these partnerships earlier, I could have built this network even sooner. Leverage the right channels to showcase your property, and watch the revenue grow.”

Veer Patel

HELPFUL SKILLS TO KNOW

Desai said she wished she'd brought a stronger foundation in financial literacy to the start of her career.

“The terminology and concepts on the administrative side of the business are vastly different from those in front-office operations, and having a more robust understanding of finance would have been immensely helpful,” Desai said. “For those entering the industry without a finance or business background, I highly recommend taking introductory courses in areas such as business law, statistics, computer literacy, and financial

accounting. These subjects provide valuable insights that can enhance strategic decision-making and operational understanding, making the transition into the industry much smoother.”

Similarly, Patel said he would have focused on hospitality finance and real estate accounting skills earlier in his career had he known he'd pursue a career in the industry.

“My degree in management information systems has been invaluable for streamlining operations and enhancing guest experiences, but a background in hospitality-focused finance would have further accelerated my strategic financial decisions,” he said.

WORKING WITH YOUR TEAM

Desai said it's vital to understand asking for help is not a sign of weakness.

“Early on, it's easy to forget a successful business relies on teamwork, where everyone has a vested interest in achieving shared goals,” Desai said. “Seeking guidance when you're uncertain not only prevents errors but also fosters a habit of learning and making well-informed decisions rather than relying on assumptions.”

In particular, Desai said, she initially believed her academic knowledge and “educated guesses” were sufficient before appreciating the insights of her more seasoned colleagues.

“I quickly realized real-world experience provides invaluable context that can't be gained through theory alone,” Desai said. “Embracing this perspective has significantly improved my decision-making over time.”

Patel said it is crucial to take the time to learn every department's role in your organization.



Veer Patel

“Early in my career, I made it a priority to understand each area of operations, which not only built respect with my team but also provided critical insights for effective leadership,” he said.

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS AND NETWORKING

Patel said one of the key lessons he's learned is the power of strategic partnerships, noting Devi Hospitality used local press coverage to highlight awards its property received – leading to new business from organizations and clients who previously had used competitors.

“Early connections with local businesses and media create long-term benefits, driving a steady stream of interest and revenue,” Patel said. “Had I focused on these partnerships earlier, I could have built this network even sooner. Leverage the right channels to showcase your property, and watch the revenue grow.”

Patel also emphasized that networking is essential. For instance, he's found invaluable connections and guidance through his roles with AAHOA as North Texas Ambassador and Young Professionals Committee Member.

"Don't let ownership or experience level hold you back; whether you own zero, one, or multiple properties, your perspective matters, and you belong at the table," he said. "The industry thrives on diverse voices, so be proactive in sharing ideas and learning from those around you. Hospitality rewards those who show up confidently and are willing to adapt."

KEY QUALITIES

Patel said building an enduring hospitality career requires a dedication to service, an entrepreneurial spirit, and adaptability.

"Staying updated on industry trends and guest expectations is essential, whether through evolving amenities or optimizing operations," he said. "Long-term success requires not just industry knowledge but a genuine investment in your properties, team, and the communities you serve."

CAREER-BUILDING KEYS

To excel in a career, it is important to gain clarity on your interests in the field and to identify areas that don't interest you, Desai said.

"Recognizing what excites you – or, conversely, what doesn't align with your goals – allows you to channel your efforts effectively, ensuring long-term growth and satisfaction in your work," she said. "It's also essential to determine whether you prefer front-office roles that involve

hands-on, day-to-day operational tasks, or back-office positions where you oversee financials and make broader, strategic decisions. Knowing where your strengths and interests lie within these areas will help guide your career trajectory and ensure you're in a role that suits your ambitions and skill set."

THOSE LEAVING THE FIELD – AND THOSE RETURNING TO IT

Industry insiders say they're seeing young hospitality professionals exiting the field – but not always for good.

Patel said he'd seen peers leave the hospitality industry to work in sectors such as technology, health care, and finance, but he'd also seen other professionals exit those fields to join hospitality, "captivated by its entrepreneurial opportunities and growth potential."

"Personally, my diverse experiences – from overseeing firmwide strategies at JPMorgan Chase to managing franchise hotel operations and serving on boards – have shown me hospitality is more than just a business," Patel said. "It's a chance to positively impact community development, tourism, and local economies, making it a dynamic and rewarding field."

Ultimately, Patel said hospitality is an exciting, rich field, "especially for young professionals who want variety, challenge, and fulfillment."

"The industry is constantly evolving," he said, "and those with the vision and adaptability to grow with it can build truly impactful, rewarding careers." ■



Milly Desai

“Seeking guidance when you're uncertain not only prevents errors but also fosters a habit of learning and making well-informed decisions rather than relying on assumptions.”

Milly Desai

Generational Guidance

Hospitality veterans share tips from decades of industry experience

by NICK FORTUNA

FRANK WOLFE HAD JUST CHECKED INTO AN INDEPENDENT HOTEL IN EASTERN TENNESSEE when he suddenly felt like ordering pizza. Maybe it was because the plastic keycard featured the name, logo, and phone number for a local pizzeria, or maybe it was because the phones in the rooms allowed guests to call that restaurant by pressing a single button.

Either way, the pie hit the spot, according to Wolfe, chief executive of Hospitality Financial and Technology Professionals (HFTP).

Wolfe said the young hotelier operating the property had noticed many of his guests would order from the same pizzeria, and since his hotel didn't have room service, he saw an opportunity. The restaurant paid for the keycards, and the hotelier got a percentage of each sale.

"Independent hoteliers often can try things out with very little risk, whereas branded hotels have brand standards, so it's difficult for them to try new things," Wolfe said. "Take the time to know your neighborhood so you can recognize those low-risk opportunities."

Hospitality professionals who become experts in the local scene can provide personalized recommendations to guests, enhancing their experience. That's just the type of customer-service interaction that can build guest loyalty and find its way into online reviews, driving more business to your hotel, Wolfe said.

Ask experienced hospitality professionals for advice to share with the next generation, and you'll get lots of insightful answers. Here's a rundown.

1

ATTEND EVENTS AND EXPAND YOUR NETWORK

Young hoteliers should soak up knowledge at industry events, including AAHOA's major gatherings and brands' investor conferences, to gain a full picture of the industry, according to Andy Ingraham, CEO of the National Association of Black Hotel Owners, Operators & Developers (NABHOOD).

Ingraham, an investor in nine hotels, said the educational components of these events are invaluable, giving young hoteliers a deep understanding of the industry in a relatively short time. In addition, the networking opportunities often lead to enduring friendships and business relationships that can benefit everyone involved.

"If you attend these conferences, you're going to meet people," Ingraham said. "When you walk into the room at a hotel conference, the people you meet may become your next partner."

AAHOA Mid Atlantic Ambassador Montu Patel – also the CEO of Innovative Hospitality Management, which owns and operates 10 hotels – said young professionals tend to find each other at industry events, which is important but insufficient.

More than that, he said, they should be branching out and seeking mentorship opportunities with established hoteliers, who typically are happy to make time in their busy schedules to befriend young people.

Most experienced hoteliers get satisfaction from helping young professionals achieve their goals and avoid the pitfalls they've experienced, Patel said.

"Stay humble, be inquisitive, and ask questions from people who have been in the industry much longer than you," he said. "That's critical. Don't just network within your own friend circle or peer group. Talk to people who have been in the industry for decades, and then leverage that knowledge."

Networking within your community is just as important as networking within the industry, Patel said. Joining local social clubs and civic organizations, and serving on the boards of local charities can lead to meaningful friendships and business opportunities. When entrepreneurs help a community thrive instead of just focusing on their bottom line, community leaders usually want them to succeed, he said.

"You must be civic-minded to be a successful small-business owner in the community you serve," Patel said. "You can't just take. You have to be willing to give as well."

Likewise, HFTP's Wolfe said some hoteliers in storm-ravaged Florida have endeared themselves to their communities by coming through in times of need. Donating rooms, renting them out at cost, and waiving pet fees and restrictions following natural disasters can establish hotels as community assets and build brand loyalty, he said.

2 BECOME A UTILITY BALLPLAYER
At many hotels, a core group of a dozen or so employees keeps things running smoothly, and ambitious professionals should be able to fill all those roles. They should work alongside experienced employees at the front desk, in room service, in housekeeping, and in every other segment of the business, becoming proficient at every task those employees perform.

“

Stay humble, be inquisitive, and ask questions from people who have been in the industry much longer than you. That's critical. Don't just network within your own friend circle or peer group. Talk to people who have been in the industry for decades, and then leverage that knowledge.”

That practice will prepare young professionals to pitch in wherever they're needed, which raises the level of service in a hotel and makes them more valuable. By learning the right way to do things and not just going through the motions, young professionals will gain credibility with frontline workers and set an example.

Young professionals also will become more effective as managers and problem-solvers, giving them an edge in relating to employees and retaining them, according to Patel.

"You must understand and have genuine empathy for every position you gainfully employ," Patel said. "Do the job yourself and remain humble as you do it, learning from the staffers who do it every day and be their colleague instead of their boss. That means wearing the uniform and name badge. When you're learning the job, no exception should be granted to you."

Jin Laxmidas, CEO of Amzim Global Investments, which owns and operates 54 hotels, said young hospitality professionals often want to progress in their careers too quickly, so they don't take the time to learn the nuances of customer service. Too often, he said, their eyes are on their smartphones instead of helping customers find their rooms or amenities.

"The worst is when they're checking a guest in and don't make eye contact because they're looking down at their phone,"

said Laxmidas, a member of AAHOA's Independent Hoteliers Committee. "That's a serious issue that's common among all newcomers to our industry, not just young people. They're not paying attention to the person in front of them, so they're not making a personal connection.

"When you see a guest in the hallway, stop and smile at them, and ask them if there's something you can do to help them," he added. "Pay attention to details. That's what is missing nowadays."

3

EXAMINE LONG-TERM TRENDS

When evaluating investment opportunities, imagine what a hotel's location might look like in a decade or more instead of focusing on what it looks like right now, NABHOOD's Ingraham said.

Decades ago, for example, many neighborhoods in New York City's outer boroughs, including Brooklyn and Queens, were considered undesirable, but as Manhattan became increasingly unaffordable, they swiftly became tony neighborhoods for young professionals, he said. Similarly, hoteliers who invested early in fast-growing metropolitan areas in Florida, Georgia, and Texas typically have done quite well.

"You need to understand trends and population growth," Ingraham said. "If you look at the urban market, hotels are being put in locations today where 20 or 30 years ago, you'd never have thought about building. So, pay attention to where the market is going. Where will it be 10 years from now? As a young professional, I wish I would've had more help to understand the real-estate market better because that's the key."

Overall, young hospitality professionals who learn the industry, remain patient, expand their network, and work hard have much to look forward to, Laxmidas said.

"It's a rewarding industry and a rewarding journey," he said, "but some young professionals get frustrated because they want to move up quickly and they don't see the rewards of their effort, so they move on to something else. If they're patient and work through the system, they'll get where they want to be because there's so much opportunity in our industry." ■

Participate in Progress

VOTE IN AAHOA ELECTIONS

Requirements for Eligibility

- Be a current member who has renewed their membership at least forty-five (45) days prior to the election; and
- Become a Lifetime Member no later than the calendar year prior to Election Day, or paid Annual Member dues no less than twice in the previous three calendar years; or
- Be an eligible spouse whose name was included on the membership application; and
- Present proper photo identification (e.g., driver's license).

Requirements Explained

OPTION 1



Deadline Passed

Become a Lifetime member on or before **December 31, 2024**

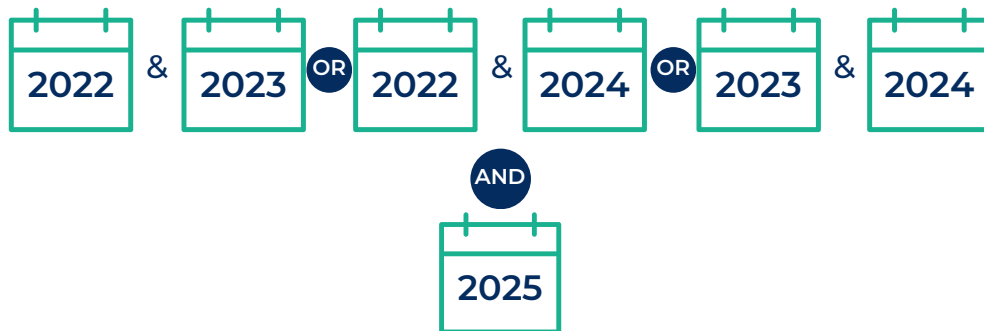
OPTION 2



Pay your Annual Membership dues on or before **March 2, 2025**

Annual Members Must also Satisfy the Following

If you're an Annual Member, you must have paid your Annual Membership dues no less than **twice** in the previous **three calendar years** and renew your annual membership for 2025 on or before **Sunday, March 2, 2025**. If you're a Lifetime Member who joined on or before **Dec. 31, 2024**, you satisfy the requirements to participate in the 2025 AAHOA election.

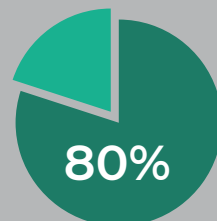


Reminders



- Renewing your 2024 membership also **impacts your eligibility** to vote in the 2025 AAHOA election.
- You can sign up for automatic renewals or upgrade your membership 24/7 at MyAAHOA.com.
- The 2025 AAHOA Elections will take place online, and all eligible voters will be able to participate, regardless of geographic location.

Did You Know?



80% of voters are Lifetime Members

Believe the HYPE

Previewing AAHOA's second annual conference for young professionals

by NICK FORTUNA

AFTER A SUCCESSFUL launch in the Big Easy last year, AAHOA's HYPE Conference will have an international flair in 2025, with the second annual event for young professionals set for February 6-7 in Mexico City.

Attendance was strong at the inaugural Helping Young Professionals Evolve conference last winter, with about 200 AAHOA Members packing into the Harrah's New Orleans for two days of panel discussions and networking. Feedback from attendees was overwhelmingly positive, and the 2025 event figures to build upon that momentum, according to Dylan Patel, AAHOA Young Professional Director Eastern Division.

"It's going to be a great event," Dylan said. "Our first conference had 200 attendees, and our goal is to surpass that this time. We're on track to do so, with more than 100 people having registered in just the first week, which exceeded our expectations. And who doesn't want to visit Mexico City?"



Tanmay Patel, AAHOA Young Professional Director Western Division (left), and Dylan Patel, AAHOA Young Professional Director Eastern Division.

PURPOSEFUL PLANNING

Dylan Patel is organizing the event with Tanmay Patel, AAHOA's Young Professional Director Western Division. They considered half a dozen U.S. cities to host HYPE in 2025 but ultimately decided Mexico City offered the perfect mix of vibrancy and convenience.

Flights from major U.S. cities into Juarez International Airport are plentiful and

affordable, and attendees will get a low room rate at the conference's stunning venue, the Andaz Mexico City Condesa. The Hyatt Hotels Corp. property opened in 2022 and features a casino, health club, spa, rooftop pool, and bike paths.

The luxury boutique hotel is located six miles from the airport in the artistic La Condesa neighborhood, a "sophisticated and bohemian district that celebrates local

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This is an event where young professionals can gain the knowledge and motivation they need to take the next steps in their career.”



history,” according to Hyatt. The property is steps away from the popular urban park Parque Mexico, numerous art galleries, cafes and boutiques, connecting visitors with authentic Mexican culture, the hotel chain says.

“I think Mexico City is going to be a very appealing location for our young professionals,” Tanmay said. “With its rich culture, diverse food scene, and amazing lifestyle, the city will be an engaging backdrop for networking and learning.”



WHAT TO EXPECT

As of late 2024, organizers were still finalizing the conference agenda, but Dylan said the event will revisit several themes from last year. The first HYPE Conference featured panel discussions on the basics of the hospitality industry, legislative advocacy, effective leadership, accessing capital, opportunities in multifamily housing, new technologies affecting the industry, and how independent properties can thrive in competitive markets.

In addition, last year featured a fireside chat with Bharat Patel, AAHOA’s chairman at the time, and Miraj S. Patel, who was vice chairman and subsequently became the youngest chairman in the AAHOA’s history. The event also included a business





roundtable, and a keynote presentation on data security from Michael Hyatt, executive chairman of DataStealth. This year's event will feature a keynote presentation from Rahul B. Patel, managing partner at Patel Gaines, PLLC, one of the nation's fastest-growing law firms. Attendees should expect equally excellent, top-tier presenters and content during this year's installment.

Further, Dylan said the 2025 HYPE Conference will feature numerous panel discussions and informative presentations, along with fun activities to keep attendees engaged. The event will open with a welcome reception and networking events on the first day, followed by educational seminars on the second day, he said.

"The challenges we face as second- or third-generation hoteliers are different from those faced by hoteliers who have been in this industry for 20 or 30 years, so we want to address those topics," Dylan said. "This is an event where young professionals can gain the knowledge and motivation they need to take the next steps in their career."



THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF SUCCESS

Tanmay said attendees in 2024 appreciated the panel discussion on multifamily housing because that topic typically isn't addressed at brand-sponsored events. With the federal government considering solutions to the national housing shortage, hoteliers may have opportunities to convert underperforming assets into apartments or to build new units, he said.

By diversifying their real estate portfolios, hoteliers may be better positioned to weather disruptions to the hospitality industry such as COVID-19, Tanmay said. His Dallas-based company, SG Hotels, owns and operates seven hotel properties.

"Obviously, we're going to remain focused on hotels, but most hospitality conventions





don't mention other real estate opportunities hoteliers can take advantage of," he said. "A lot of hoteliers have had great success converting properties into apartments, but you won't hear about that at a brand convention. This is something different we can do as an organization supporting hotel owners."

At HYPE, industry experts will compare strategies for success between branded and independent properties. Additionally, the conference will explore outside-the-box hospitality opportunities such as boutique hotels and glamping, which combines camping with modern luxuries for an enhanced recreational experience, Dylan said.

Also at HYPE, AAHOA will unveil its new "35 Under 35" awards, which aims to celebrate young members who are excelling in hotel ownership, management, associations, hospitality brands, or related sectors.

THE TIME IS NOW

In years past, AAHOA held events for young professionals, but the idea for a major conference didn't gain much traction until – at least in part – Dylan and Tanmay joined the AAHOA Board of Directors and reintroduced the idea, along with several other champions of the concept on the board. Today's young hoteliers face numerous challenges, including high labor and borrowing costs that eat into profit margins, so it's vital for industry groups like AAHOA to support their career development, Tanmay said.

"Dylan and I work well together, and we represent AAHOA's young professionals, so we wanted to do something specifically for them, and AAHOA's Officers were very involved and supportive," he said. "We have a new generation coming into this industry, and we want to give them the tools they need to be successful."

Dylan, whose family business owns and operates eight hotel properties, said everyone who attends AAHOA's 2025 HYPE Conference will leave with tangible information they can use to improve their businesses and careers.

"The goal of the conference is to network and to expand your knowledge of the industry," he said.

Tanmay said HYPE's educational components make it a must-attend event for young hospitality professionals, but the networking opportunities can be just as important.

"When it comes to networking, I think AAHOA does it best," Tanmay said. "The friends you make are going to stay with you throughout your life and career. They're facing similar challenges and are having similar experiences, and their knowledge is something you can leverage to make progress in your career."

"The inaugural HYPE Conference was a fantastic success last year," he added, "and the 2025 event is going to be even better." ■



AAHOA's 2025 HYPE Conference

**THURSDAY & FRIDAY, FEB. 6-7, 2025
ANDAZ HOTEL, MEXICO CITY**

Registration is free for AAHOA Member hoteliers but costs \$199 for non-members.

Space is limited, so visit AAHOA.com/HYPE now to reserve your spot.

Sponsorship and speaking opportunities are available. Contact sales@aahoa.com.

Be sure your passport is up to date.

To learn more, visit AAHOA.com/HYPE

with the flow

Industry insights,
predictions, and advice
from the AAHOA Board
of Directors

by CARTER DAVIS

WHAT BETTER WAY TO ENTER A NEW YEAR THAN BY GATHERING THE COLLECTIVE WISDOM from the AAHOA Board of Directors on the biggest challenges facing the industry, as well as compiling their thoughts on the ways members can best serve – and be served by – AAHOA? Here, we invite you to take a look at hospitality through the eyes of a group of experienced industry leaders who also have dedicated themselves to serving AAHOA.

Miraj S. Patel, Chairman

What's your resolution for the new year for the industry and/or AAHOA?

My resolution for the new year is to continue building tomorrow, today. Achieving this means fostering collaboration across all facets of our industry – working hand-in-hand with industry associations, vendor and allied partners, hotel brands, and most importantly, each other. Together, we can tackle the challenges ahead, innovate to drive success, and ensure a stronger, more sustainable future for hospitality. By uniting our efforts and leveraging our collective strengths, we can create opportunities that empower AAHOA Members and elevate our industry to new heights.

What do you anticipate will be the most significant challenge facing hoteliers in 2025?

The most pressing challenge hoteliers will face in 2025 is the continued rise in operational costs. From skyrocketing insurance premiums and increasing labor expenses to ever-growing technology requirements and escalating brand mandates, these pressures directly erode net operating income (NOI).

As an industry, we must prioritize solutions that address these cost drivers. This includes advocating for competitive options in insurance markets, rethinking labor



strategies to improve efficiency, and challenging brand requirements that do not add value to the guest experience. Reducing operational costs will remain a cornerstone of my focus to safeguard the profitability and sustainability of our industry.



Rahul Patel, Treasurer

What's your resolution for the new year for the industry and/or AAHOA?

Looking to the future, I'm focused on harnessing technology to elevate AAHOA to new heights. MyAAHOA has been a transformative step toward creating independent, cost-effective systems that allow us to control and innovate our technology. This freedom enables us to adapt to our members' needs and pushes boundaries on how associations can deliver value in a fast-evolving digital age.

What do you anticipate will be the most significant challenge facing hoteliers in 2025?

The industry faces a combination of complex challenges, including over-regulation, higher borrowing costs, increasing labor expenses, ongoing labor shortages, and significant changes to the traditional hotel business model. Additionally, natural disasters and rising insurance costs will continue to add financial pressure on hotel owners. At the same time, the need for innovation and the adoption of new technologies will play a critical role in how the industry evolves to remain competitive.



Pinal S. Patel, Secretary

What's your resolution for the new year for the industry and/or AAHOA?

My resolution for the new year is to remain open, transparent, and committed to doing what's right for AAHOA and its members. Hard work truly pays off, and I promise to uphold the trust placed in me by focusing on the association's best interests. Together, we'll continue to make a meaningful impact for our members and the industry.



Kamallesh (KP) Patel, Vice Chairman

What's your resolution for the new year for the industry and/or AAHOA?

As I prepare to step into the role of AAHOA Chairman next year, my resolution is to build on our legacy of empowering hotel owners. I'm committed to driving initiatives that address key industry challenges, expanding member engagement, and strengthening AAHOA's advocacy efforts. My focus will be on ensuring our association continues to be a powerful force for positive change and growth in the hospitality industry.

**Sanjay M. Patel,
Alabama
Regional
Director**



What do you anticipate will be the most significant challenge facing hoteliers in 2025?

The most pressing challenge in 2025 will likely be rising insurance rates and their impact on overall profitability. Insurance costs directly influence net operating income (NOI), which, in turn, determines asset valuation. As these rates rise, hoteliers may face tough decisions, such as delaying renovations or scaling back essential services, both of which can impact guest satisfaction and operational efficiency.

Furthermore, advocacy is crucial. As an industry, we must work collectively to lobby for fair insurance practices and seek solutions through AAHOA and similar organizations. By tackling this challenge head-on, we can protect our businesses and ensure continued growth.

**Vik Zaver,
Georgia
Regional
Director**



What do you anticipate will be the most significant challenge facing hoteliers in 2025?

I anticipate the most significant challenges facing hoteliers will be tort reform, which will affect insurance, human trafficking, and significant liability issues.

How can AAHOA Members make the most of their experience and contribute effectively to the association’s mission?

I highly suggest attending all the events their regional director attends first and foremost. If they can commit the time and energy to that, that’s a huge stepping stone toward ensuring this position is right for them.

**Ajay Patel,
Mid South
Regional
Director**



What do you anticipate will be the most significant challenge facing hoteliers in 2025?

I firmly believe rising insurance rates, the ongoing labor shortage, and an increase in wages will be our biggest challenges. Inflation will also be a challenge for overall hotel operations.

How can AAHOA Members make the most of their experience and contribute effectively to the association’s mission?

I commend any and all volunteers who step up and help AAHOA. That being said, I suggest signing up for various committees we offer that interest them so they can contribute their time effectively.

**Viral Patel,
Central
Midwest
Regional
Director**



What do you anticipate will be the most significant challenge facing hoteliers in 2025?

Technology adoption will likely be one of the most significant challenges hoteliers will face in 2025. As pervasive tech-centered trends like artificial intelligence, automation, and personalized experiences evolve, integrating these advancements into daily operations without disrupting the customer’s experience will be crucial.

Another challenge could be labor shortages. With ever-evolving skillset demands in the hospitality industry and enhanced competition for talent, attracting and retaining skilled professionals can be challenging. Moreover, potential changes in immigration policy could further exacerbate labor shortages in many regions worldwide.

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



How can AAHOA Members make the most of their experience and contribute effectively to the association’s mission?

Volunteering is a cornerstone of civic duty. To achieve success, preserve resources, and safeguard investments, everyone must contribute their fair share. True progress demands collective effort, and each individual’s participation is essential.

Building meaningful relationships requires a spirit of giving. By offering a little upfront – whether time, effort, or resources – we create the foundation for greater rewards in return. This principle is at the heart of successful business and community endeavors alike.

When we come together, putting action before gain, we pave the way for stronger connections and lasting success. It starts with a willingness to contribute, and the rewards will follow.

**Pinkesh
Patel,
North
Carolina
Regional
Director**



What do you anticipate will be the most significant challenge facing hoteliers in 2025?

I believe the challenges we faced in 2024 will continue into 2025, particularly labor shortages and insurance costs.

How can AAHOA Members make the most of their experience and contribute effectively to the association’s mission?

If you believe in yourself, you can help our hotel community. AAHOA is the best platform for achieving that.

Dhiren Masters, North Texas Regional Director



What's your resolution for the new year for the industry and/or AAHOA?

For the upcoming year, my resolution for the hospitality industry and AAHOA is to foster a culture of innovation, sustainability, and inclusivity. This includes embracing emerging technologies to enhance guest experiences and protecting franchisee's investments. For AAHOA specifically, a commitment to furthering the professional growth of hotel owners and operators through education, advocacy, and networking is essential to ensuring their success and resilience in an ever-evolving market. Together, these efforts can drive positive change and strengthen the industry's long-term sustainability and success.

Preyas Patel, Northeast Regional Director



How can AAHOA Members make the most of their experience and contribute effectively to the association's mission?

The book "Start with Why" by Simon Sinek comes to mind. He talks about how great leaders inspire others with a clear sense of purpose. In taking on any leadership role or anything you do in life, for that matter, it's important to always know your "why." Your sense of purpose will help you navigate through moments of doubt and brave all challenges you encounter if you know why you do what you do.

The success of every organization is ultimately through its members. So, my advice is for them to continuously learn and leverage collaborative efforts and build relationships in pursuit of individual growth that would create a strong legacy towards long-term impact for AAHOA as an organization and what it represents - to serve and fight for the good of all members.

Vimal (Ricky) Patel, Gulf Regional Director



What is your resolution for the new year for the industry and/or AAHOA?

My top business resolution for 2025 is for AAHOA to build an affordable, owner-friendly property insurance program. This has been my focus as chair of our ad hoc Insurance Committee, and we've recently started a dialog with one of the world's largest insurance agencies. Now, we can start developing policies that directly address the concerns of hotel owners, especially arbitration and no immunity for bad faith. If damage occurs in one state, we shouldn't have to travel hundreds or thousands of miles for settlement discussions with the carrier.

Fenil Desai, South Carolina Regional Director



How can AAHOA Members make the most of their experience and contribute effectively to the association's mission?

As a volunteer leader, you represent AAHOA Members. Engaging with them - whether in person or through digital platforms - allows you to understand their concerns, gather valuable feedback, and serve as a genuine advocate for their needs. It's equally important to seek mentorship from experienced leaders. Connecting with current and past AAHOA leaders can provide you with insights and guidance. Their experience offers valuable lessons to help you navigate your role effectively and maximize your contributions.

Vikash K. Patel, South Central Texas Regional Director



What's your resolution for the new year for the industry and/or AAHOA?

My resolution for the new year is to make substantial changes in the hotel insurance and OTA landscape for hotel owners and AAHOA Members.

How can AAHOA Members make the most of their experience and contribute effectively to the association's mission?

AAHOA is an organization that prioritizes hotel owners first and foremost. This organization has the most reach in terms of the owners' voice in the industry. Volunteering and taking on a leadership role within AAHOA is an educational stepping stone to becoming effective hotel owners and leaders in the industry.

Chetan (Chris) Patel, South Florida Regional Director



What do you anticipate will be the most significant challenge facing hoteliers in 2025?

Rising insurance costs and property taxes will be the biggest challenges for hoteliers in 2025. These are becoming harder to manage and can hurt our bottom line. To improve NOI, we must find ways to reduce expenses and increase efficiency wherever possible.

Another major issue is short-term rentals. They need to be regulated like hotels so we can compete on a level playing field. If we can address these challenges, it will help protect our businesses and make a positive impact on profitability.



**Bhavik Patel,
Southeast
Texas
Regional
Director**

**What's your
resolution for
the new year for the
industry and/or AAHOA?**

My resolution for the industry and AAHOA is twofold: The first is to continue the momentum of advocating and educating our members on various issues and providing solutions with all the resources available. Second, members want to see restoring the bottom line and progressing a path forward in increasing a revenue stream on charging line items because costs are increasing due to inflation.

How can AAHOA Members make the most of their experience and contribute effectively to the association's mission?

Be actively engaged in the industry and share the knowledge to help and educate hoteliers.

**Nalin (Neil) Patel,
Director at Large
Western
Division**



**What do you
anticipate
will be
the most
significant
challenge facing
hoteliers in 2025?**

I see 2025 as a year of hope for making AAHOA stronger and more focused. This can only be achieved when we share an equal slice of the pie with brands.

How can AAHOA Members make the most of their experience and contribute effectively to the association's mission?

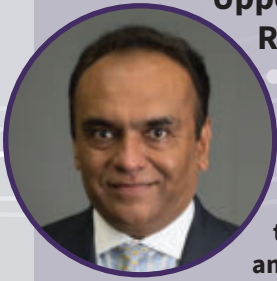
Volunteering is an act of service – *seva* – and an opportunity to give back to the community. The more you invest your time and effort, the more rewarding the experience will be. Leadership is about service, and through dedication and collaboration, you can help strengthen AAHOA and its mission.

**Shetal Zina Patel,
Women Hoteliers Director,
Western Division**



**What do you
anticipate will
be the most
significant
challenge facing
hoteliers in 2025?**

The most significant challenge facing hoteliers in 2025 will be managing rising operational costs, particularly as more cities implement drastic wage hikes for hotel workers. These increases disproportionately impact small, independent hotels that already struggle with slim margins, forcing tough decisions about raising rates or cutting services. Combined with rising insurance premiums and labor shortages, these wage ordinances threaten the survival of many mom-and-pop hotels that lack the resources of larger chains. Advocacy for fair policies and a united industry response will be essential to ensure small hoteliers can continue to compete and serve their communities.



**Kalpesh Joshi,
Upper Midwest
Regional
Director**

**How can AAHOA
Members make
the most of
their experience
and contribute
effectively to the
association's mission?**

Public service is very different from running a business, but it's important. My advice is simple: get involved. If you're an AAHOA Member, start by staying informed about local and federal issues. It makes it easier to protect your business and your investment. You can take small steps – become an ambassador, join the Board of Directors, or find other ways to help your fellow hoteliers. The key is to commit your time. It will make a big difference, not just for you but for your community.



**Dylan Patel,
Young
Professional
Director
Eastern
Division**

**What's your resolution
for the new year for the industry
and/or AAHOA?**

My resolution is to focus on fostering growth and innovation within the industry, including empowerment through education, community engagement, and advocacy. My goal is to help our members navigate challenges while inspiring the next generation of hospitality leaders.

What do you anticipate will be the most significant challenge facing hoteliers in 2025?

The drastic increase in insurance premiums and lack of availability for hotel insurance caused by natural disasters, economic volatility, and inflation will heavily impact hotel profitability. Retaining skilled labor has been a challenge and will continue to be a major issue in 2025.



**Tanmay Patel,
Young
Professional
Director
Western
Division**

**What's your
resolution for the new
year for the industry and/or AAHOA?**

My resolution is to focus on bringing our industry together and ensuring AAHOA continues to deliver value to our members.

What do you anticipate will be the most significant challenge facing hoteliers in 2025?

If I had to name just one, labor shortages would still be one of the toughest challenges in 2025. Finding good talent and keeping them engaged is already difficult, and it's something that isn't going to fix itself overnight. As an industry, we'll have to think outside the box to create workplaces where people want to stay – whether through better benefits, training, or even just more recognition of their contributions. ■

Small-business backer

Get to know AAHOA Lifetime Member Rep. Joe Wilson (R-SC)

BY NEAL A. PATEL

REPRESENTING SOUTH Carolina's Second District, which stretches from Columbia to the Georgia-South Carolina border, Congressman Joe Wilson (R-SC) is a longtime friend to AAHOA and its members. An AAHOA Lifetime Member himself, he consistently makes time for AAHOA and is an ever-present fixture during the Fall and Spring National Advocacy Conferences. As plainly evident in the conversation below, he greatly values the contributions hotel owners make on his district and in the overall U.S. economy in providing jobs and helping stabilize the economy – not to mention providing a great breakfast.

WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES FOR THE UPCOMING CONGRESS?

My top priorities are to create jobs, reduce inflation, and maintain a strong national defense for peace through strength. I support policies to reduce inflation and, thus, increase opportunities for job growth. Current policies



AAHOA Lifetime Member and U.S. Representative Joe Wilson (R-SC)



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It's critical Congress address and extend many of the expiring provisions of the *Tax Cuts and Jobs Act* of 2017 – in particular the preservation of the Section 199A small business deductions and the like-kind exchanges for real estate, encouraging hoteliers to reinvest capital, expand their businesses, and create jobs.”

of spend, borrow, and tax have produced 40-year high inflation, and the average family has been assaulted. This effect has created a 20% reduction in the value of family income, resulting in an additional annual cost increase of more than \$13,000 for basics like groceries, housing, and energy.

A strong national defense starts with our service members. As a member of the Armed Services Committee, I remain committed to ensuring our military is well-funded and capable of defending the country from emerging global threats. In addition to strengthening our defense, I am committed to supporting military families and increasing military pay, ensuring the men and women who serve, as well as their families, are compensated fairly for their sacrifices. I will continue my membership in the Caucus of India and Indian Americans, which I have previously been chairman and was with Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New York City, Washington, Houston, and New Delhi.

WHAT SORT OF POLICIES, SUCH AS TAX AND REGULATORY REFORMS, DO YOU HOPE TO WORK ON TO SUPPORT SMALL BUSINESS OWNERS AND THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY?

It's critical Congress address and extend many of the expiring provisions of the *Tax Cuts and Jobs Act* of 2017 – in particular the preservation of the Section 199A small business deductions and the like-kind exchanges for real estate, encouraging hoteliers to reinvest capital, expand their businesses, and create jobs. I am grateful to support H.R. 7024, the *Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act*, which passed the House by a vote of 357-70, and extends and expands several key business tax provisions that would increase business investment and economic growth. Supporting all-of-the-above energy policies will reduce gas prices, which will enable travel and reduce energy costs, which cause delivery inflation costs.

WHAT EXCITES YOU THE MOST ABOUT SERVING IN CONGRESS?

As a member of Congress, I'm inspired to be accessible and available to serve the people of South Carolina's Second District and defend the conservative values that have made our state and nation strong. Throughout my time in Congress, I have worked to support our military, protect our veterans, and advocate for fiscal responsibility, lower taxes, and job creation. My commitment to these principles remains steadfast as I seek to ensure South Carolina families have a secure future. I want to continue being a voice for limited government, strong national security, and free market economic opportunity, reducing regulations.

WHAT INDUSTRY (OR INDUSTRIES) DID YOU WORK IN BEFORE YOU WERE ELECTED TO CONGRESS?

After receiving my undergraduate degree from Washington and Lee University in Lexington, VA, I earned my law degree from the University of South Carolina. A real estate attorney by trade, I was a founding partner of the West Columbia law firm Kirkland, Wilson, Moore, Taylor & Thomas. My real estate law practice was focused on serving Indian-Americans purchasing hotels, inspired by my father who served in the Flying Tigers in India during World War II. I grew up understanding the entrepreneurial skills of Indian business leaders. Additionally, I have been grateful for Indian-Americans on staff at the highest levels.

My career in public service began when I served on the staffs of South Carolina legends Senator Strom Thurmond and Congressman Floyd Spence. As part of the visionary Ronald Reagan administration, I was deputy general counsel to the United States Department of Energy secretary, and former South Carolina governor, Jim Edwards. Before being elected to the U.S. Congress in 2001, I served 17 years with perfect attendance in the South Carolina State Senate where I was elected chairman of the Senate Transportation Committee.

Throughout this time, I was grateful to serve as a member of the U.S. Armed Forces

for 31 years; first in the U.S. Army Reserves from 1972-1975, then the South Carolina Army National Guard. In the summer of 2003, I retired as a colonel, having served as a staff judge advocate.

WHAT LED YOU TO RUN FOR CONGRESS?

I have all my life been committed to public service, with Rotary membership and active local chambers of commerce service. Along with public service, I appreciate serving citizens.

WHAT DO YOU MOST ENJOY ABOUT STAYING IN HOTELS?

A warm welcome and the limitless breakfast, as that's my favorite meal.

WHY ARE HOTELS AND HOTEL OWNERS IMPORTANT TO YOUR DISTRICT/STATE?

Jobs! Entry-level jobs. My many friends in the district are civic-minded, and providing opportunities at all levels is so meaningful.

THE HOTEL WORKFORCE WAS ONE OF THE INDUSTRIES MOST AFFECTED BY THE PANDEMIC. DO YOU SEE CONGRESS PLAYING A ROLE TO SUPPORT BUILDING BACK THE HOTEL WORKFORCE?

Unfortunately, building back and retaining a vibrant hospitality workforce in a competitive labor market has been particularly challenging since COVID-19. I continue to work closely with and hear from members of South Carolina's vast and exceptional tourism and hospitality industry to address this issue and many others. We see how employers are enduring record inflation and economic constraints, all while attempting to operate at a reduced capacity due to lack of labor. I will continue to work with my colleagues in Congress on immigration and workforce solutions to address these labor shortages. ■

Neal A. Patel is Managing Partner of Patel Partners, a bipartisan, bicameral government affairs consulting firm located on Capitol Hill, and he can be reached at neal@patelpartnersdc.com.



AAHOA Chairman Miraj S. Patel steps up to give the AAHOA Lifetime Membership pin to Rep. Joe Wilson.



Rep. Joe Wilson, a longtime supporter of AAHOA, fills out the application to become an AAHOA Lifetime Member.

The foundation for success

A guide for young professionals
in the hotel industry

by AARYAN PATEL and JIN LAXMIDAS

AS THE HOTEL INDUSTRY continues to evolve, young professionals face unique challenges and opportunities. To thrive in this competitive field, it's essential to take proactive steps that not only enhance their skills but also position them as future leaders in hospitality. From embracing emerging technology to building a strong network, here are eight key strategies young professionals should focus on now to set themselves up for long-term success.



EMBRACE LIFELONG LEARNING AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT

The hotel industry is dynamic, and staying current with trends and best practices is essential. Young professionals should commit to continuous learning, whether through formal education, certifications, or attending industry seminars. Areas of focus might include revenue management, customer experience, digital marketing, and sustainability practices – each crucial to the modern hotel business.

Investing in skill development, especially in areas like data analytics and revenue management, can be particularly advantageous. As hotels increasingly rely on data to make informed decisions, professionals who understand these analytics will be valuable assets. For instance, revenue management knowledge enables staff to understand how pricing and availability impact a hotel’s profitability, a crucial skill in today’s competitive market.



DEVELOP STRONG INTERPERSONAL AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Success in the hotel industry depends heavily on effective communication and strong interpersonal skills. Hospitality is a service-oriented field where personal interactions can significantly impact guest experiences and company reputation.

Young professionals should hone their communication skills to be clear, empathetic, and responsive. Additionally, mastering conflict resolution is essential in handling challenging situations with guests, vendors, and team members.

Leadership qualities are also rooted in strong interpersonal skills. Young professionals should seek to develop these qualities early, as they lay the foundation for future managerial roles. Regularly engaging in teamwork, taking leadership roles in projects, and even joining professional groups can provide valuable opportunities to refine these skills.



LEVERAGE TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION

The hospitality sector has rapidly adopted technology to enhance operations and customer experiences. For young professionals, staying informed about technological advancements and understanding how to implement them is vital. Familiarity with property management systems (PMS), customer relationship management (CRM) platforms, and emerging trends like contactless check-in, mobile key access, and AI-driven guest services can make them valuable team members.

Technology also plays a crucial role in revenue management – an area young professionals should prioritize. Familiarity with forecasting software and data visualization tools can aid in making informed decisions that boost occupancy rates and optimize room pricing. Becoming comfortable with these tools early will streamline career



FOCUS ON SUSTAINABILITY AND CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY

As environmental concerns grow, hotels are increasingly expected to operate sustainably. Young professionals who understand eco-friendly practices and can help integrate them into operations are highly desirable in today’s job market. Learning about energy-efficient systems, waste reduction, and water conservation practices can help future leaders make meaningful contributions to their properties.

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) also extends beyond environmental efforts. Hotels today are expected to contribute to the local community and create positive social impacts. Young professionals who understand and can support CSR initiatives, from sourcing locally to creating community partnerships, will stand out as forward-thinking leaders in the industry.



BUILD A STRONG PROFESSIONAL NETWORK

Networking is invaluable in the hotel industry, where relationships often open doors to new opportunities. Joining industry associations, attending conferences, and participating in local hotelier groups can expand one’s network significantly. Young professionals should also consider seeking mentorship from experienced industry leaders. Mentors can offer guidance, share insights on career paths, and provide constructive feedback.

Networking extends beyond in-person events. Social media platforms, particularly LinkedIn, are excellent tools for connecting with industry peers, staying updated on trends, and even discovering job opportunities. Building a visible



professional presence online can showcase expertise, interests, and accomplishments, which can draw attention from potential employers or collaborators.



GAIN HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE ACROSS DEPARTMENTS

To become well-rounded leaders, young hotel professionals should strive to gain experience in various departments. From front desk operations to housekeeping, food and beverage management, and sales, understanding the workings of each department provides a holistic view of hotel operations. This cross-departmental knowledge not only enriches problem-solving skills but also helps professionals make more informed decisions when they reach management roles.

Rotational training programs, often offered by large hotel chains, are excellent opportunities for young professionals to gain diverse experience. These programs expose individuals to different roles, allowing them to discover their strengths and interests while equipping them with a comprehensive understanding of the business.



CULTIVATE ADAPTABILITY AND RESILIENCE

The hotel industry is unpredictable, and being adaptable and resilient is key to thriving. Market shifts, economic downturns, and unexpected events like the COVID-19 pandemic all impact the industry, requiring professionals to pivot quickly. Young professionals should be prepared to take on new responsibilities and develop creative solutions to overcome challenges.

Cultivating a mindset of adaptability and resilience will not only help young professionals navigate industry changes but also set a strong foundation for leadership. Building resilience can be as simple as practicing stress-management techniques, setting realistic goals, and learning from each setback or success.



PRIORITIZE CUSTOMER-CENTRIC THINKING

The hotel industry is fundamentally about creating memorable guest experiences. Young professionals should always keep the guest at the center of every decision. Whether working on the front lines or in a support role, understanding guest needs and preferences is crucial. Professionals who demonstrate empathy, attentiveness, and a commitment to quality service are better positioned to advance in their careers.

One way to enhance customer-centric thinking is by seeking guest feedback and actively looking for ways to improve service. Understanding and anticipating guest needs fosters loyalty and can set a property apart in a crowded market.

CONCLUSION

For young professionals in the hotel industry, the path to success requires a blend of technical knowledge, interpersonal skills, and a proactive mindset. By focusing on continuous learning, embracing technology, networking, and developing a guest-centered approach, these emerging professionals can build a strong foundation for their careers. The hospitality industry is ever-evolving, but those who prepare and adapt will be well-equipped to lead in the future. ■



Aaryan Patel



Jin Laxmidas

AAHOA Independent Hotelier Committee members Aaryan Patel and Jin Laxmidas share a commitment to help hoteliers become – and stay – independent.



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Great expectations

How will the new administration affect the commercial real estate capital markets?

by RUSHI SHAH

THIS PRESIDENTIAL election was one like we've never seen – one candidate wasn't an immediate incumbent, and the other one wasn't elected via primary voting. From a fiscal standpoint, the outgoing and incoming administrations couldn't be more different. With Trump's historic win, the capital markets are now bracing for a wave of changes. Some players expect the next four years to be a repeat of 2016 to 2020 – sans COVID. Most believe the new regime will bring positive economic outcomes. Good or bad, the change in leadership will have a direct impact on commercial real estate prices, because of the executive branch's ability to influence regulation, tax implications, labor supply through immigration, the country's fiscal health, our foreign policy, and in general psychology of dealmaking.

REGULATION

According to the Trump doctrine, the market can expect less regulation of banks, regulatory bodies such as the SEC, and other entities that oversee investment banks and bond issuers. When the government imposes a less heavy hand, the free markets typically reign. This new leniency could unleash a massive inflow of capital, including foreign capital seeking a safe haven in the United States. Early rhetoric also suggests there will be massive changes including but not limited to the privatization of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. The subsequent influx of private institutional capital pouring into the housing sector could help alleviate supply shortages and spark a private commercial real estate construction boom. Future executive actions could even make local governments more receptive to zoning changes that will allow additional multifamily buildings and hotels. Banks looking to

capitalize on regulatory relaxation should have increased credit appetite for new construction and existing asset loans.

TAXES

Under the new administration, the threat to cap 1031 tax gains is no longer looming. In fact, further tax code changes that make 1031 even more compelling are expected. Lower corporate taxes will translate into increased disposable income for corporations to distribute to their employees and shareholders as bonuses, dividends,

or reinvestments. The increased income can be used to fuel innovation and enable everyday Americans to save and invest, creating an investment boom.

LABOR SUPPLY

The new administration’s labor policy will be among the biggest opportunities and risks facing the hospitality industry. Some analysts argue that tighter immigration laws will pinch the supply of housekeepers, servers, and other essential employees who keep hotels operating smoothly. To fill the gap, hotel owners may need to increase pay, resulting in wage inflation for these types of roles and putting pressure on hotel gross margins. We saw this during Trump’s first administration. If the new government can implement smart immigration reform, however, it could have a positive impact on hotel operations by bringing an additional supply of hospitality workers into the labor force.

FISCAL HEALTH

Fiscal policy is one of the greatest areas of opportunity for Trump’s presidency. To keep the wheels turning for the economy during COVID, the United States Treasury had to do a significant amount of borrowing and deficit spending. Because of the increased interest rates, the debt service of U.S. treasuries comprises a large portion of the country’s annual budget. Expectations are there will be enough of an increase in GDP, due to growth in the tax base that arises from a larger economy and tariffs on goods and services that can be easily produced in the U.S. at a comparable

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Optimistically, 2025 could go down in the history books as one of the most active dealmaking years for the hotel industry. Owners and developers seeking capital, either to recapitalize or to purchase existing assets, should engage an adviser now.”

price, to get back on track. Some producers of those goods and services will take a hit in the medium and long term. In the short term, these changes could also be inflationary for consumers. The hope is the simultaneous increase in wages will enable consumers to effectively absorb this inflation. Additionally, the government efficiency initiatives may also deliver fiscal savings to the U.S. balance sheet.

FOREIGN POLICY

Capital markets dislike uncertainty and reward clarity and predictability. When there are wars happening around the world that are almost uncontrollable – and where the U.S. can be less influential – it leads to major risk in the markets’ pricing mechanism of future growth of companies and real estate assets. The hope is, under the new administration, there may be amicable solutions to the geopolitical risks miring capital markets. This could unleash the massive amount of risk on capital that has been sitting on the sidelines.

PSYCHOLOGY OF DEALMAKING

Our world economy runs on consumer confidence and the U.S. economic machine is heavily reliant on the psychology of an

average Joe consumer. If the administration delivers on its promises, there should be a renewed sense of optimism within consumers and additional discretionary income in their checking accounts. This increased consumer confidence has the potential to grow American GDP at a rapid pace. Additionally, with relatively lower interest rates commercial real estate owners, developers, and new entrants will be better positioned to get back to the dealmaking table. The only blemish marring the above optimistic picture is the possibility that something could go wrong. Because expectations are so high within the markets and their participants, even a small error in the execution of policy changes could put our country at risk of recession.

HOTEL FINANCING

Optimistically, 2025 could go down in the history books as one of the most active dealmaking years for the hotel industry. Owners and developers seeking capital, either to recapitalize or to purchase existing assets, should engage an adviser now. Choose someone who has his or her ears to the ground and access to all available capital. Don’t wait to get your deal financed before maturity or before prices reach new highs. Start your financing search now to take advantage of the current optimism and capital flows. ■



Rushi Shah is Principal and CEO of the commercial mortgage and real estate investment banking firm 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.

Cutting costs

How AI is reducing energy expenses in the hospitality industry

by ERIN MCDANNALD

HOTELS ARE A 24-HOUR, seven-day-a-week business, and resource optimization is a significant factor in their operation. The average guest room incurs nearly \$2,200 in energy costs annually. Multiplied by 160 or so keys, many properties are looking at a substantial price tag for power. Artificial intelligence (AI) and smart building software can play a powerful role in reducing wasted energy and lowering the bills hotel owners pay. Simultaneously, smart technology enhances the overall guest experience through elevated comfort and convenience.

UPGRADED PREDICTIVE MAINTENANCE

Predictive maintenance is one of the most immediate ways the use of AI contributes to energy efficiency. These types of intuitive analytics software are particularly valuable in large properties with complex operations. By identifying where energy is being wasted, hotel managers can implement targeted solutions by adjusting the temperature in low-traffic areas, upgrading inefficient equipment, or modifying operational protocols. Over time, these incremental improvements lead to significant savings.

One example is that an AI system can identify trends that indicate inefficiencies in cooling systems. If an HVAC unit in a specific building wing begins to consume more power to maintain the same temperature, the programming can flag this issue early. This enables hotel operators to perform

maintenance proactively, extending the equipment's life cycle and preventing costly breakdowns. By anticipating when systems need attention, advanced technologies help reduce downtime, lower energy consumption, and avoid guest disruptions.

SATISFYING GUESTS WITH TAILORED COMFORT

AI also plays a role in enhancing the guest experience while improving efficiency. Smart room controls powered by advanced technology can automatically adjust lighting, temperature, and other amenities based on guest preferences and behaviors. For instance, a smart thermostat can remember that a returning guest prefers cooler temperatures and adjust the room before arrival, offering a personalized experience from the moment they check in.

By design, AI systems conserve power when rooms are unoccupied. These smart controls can increase the room temperature when guests leave for the day and reset to the preferred settings just before they return. Similarly, lighting and entertainment systems can adapt based on guest schedules, further personalizing their stay. Over time, the tool learns guest preferences and routines, making each stay more tailored and seamless while ensuring energy is well-spent when rooms aren't in use.

TRACKING EMISSIONS FOR ECO-CONSCIOUSNESS

Hotel operators can track their carbon emissions with AI, providing insights

on where to reduce consumption. Management can quickly identify high-emission areas, such as conference rooms or kitchens, and take steps to reduce the carbon footprint by adjusting energy usage or upgrading equipment. The systems also can monitor water usage and waste production, identifying areas where conservation is possible, like reducing water heating needs by optimizing shower or laundry operations during off-peak hours.

Some smart systems can even provide guests with real-time data on the sustainability impact of their stay with in-room tablets or apps displaying the energy saved due to eco-friendly settings or suggesting low-carbon activities during their visit. This transparency educates visitors on how they contribute to the hotel's footprint and enhances the company's reputation as an eco-conscious brand.

As the hospitality industry continues to evolve in a more connected, sustainable, and guest-centric direction, AI and smart building technologies are essential tools for enhancing operational efficiency, reducing energy costs, and elevating the overall guest experience. By embracing these tools' predictive capabilities, personalized room environmental controls, and real-time emissions tracking, hotels can reduce their environmental impact and appeal to the growing number of eco-conscious travelers. In an industry where comfort and sustainability are becoming equally important, leveraging AI is no longer just an option – it's the future. ■



Erin McDannald is CEO of *Lighting Environments* and its sister companies, *Elevated* and *Environments*. Honored as a 2022 *Bisnow* "Innovator of the Year" in commercial

real estate, Erin is recognized as a top female leader in the D.C. real estate field. Her latest endeavor, *Elevated*, is revolutionizing the building management industry's digital transformation with a groundbreaking interface for engineering sustainable, interactive, and engaging spaces where the human experience is top-of-mind.

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The substance of *SOUND*

How acoustic lighting transforms the guest experience in hospitality spaces

by JASON BIRD

IN TODAY'S FAST-PACED HOSPITALITY industry, guest experience is a top priority. Hotels, restaurants, and lounges are always looking for ways to enhance their spaces and create environments that leave lasting positive impressions. One often-overlooked aspect that plays a critical role in guest satisfaction is acoustics. Noise pollution can significantly impact how guests perceive a space, and addressing this issue through innovative design solutions – like acoustic lighting – can make a real difference.

A well-crafted space balances aesthetics with functionality, including how sound interacts with the environment. Acoustic solutions, particularly those integrated into lighting fixtures, not only improve the acoustic landscape but also elevate the overall guest experience.

THE HIDDEN IMPACT OF NOISE IN HOSPITALITY SPACES

Noise pollution consistently ranks among the top guest complaints in hotels and restaurants. Whether it's the constant hum of street traffic, loud conversations in hallways, or the clattering of dishes in

dining areas, unwanted noise can disrupt a guest's sense of comfort and relaxation. This not only affects immediate guest satisfaction but also can impact repeat business. In fact, guests often associate noisy environments with poor service, leading to negative reviews and decreased bookings.

For today's discerning travelers, addressing noise is critical to meeting their expectations. General industry guidelines advise designers to create healthy, comfortable, and productive environments for occupants and end-users and recommends that reverberation time in hospitality interiors be kept under one second to ensure diners can easily communicate with each other. One of the most effective solutions to this issue is acoustic lighting, which can reduce noise levels by up to 40% while preserving the design integrity of a space.

MERGING FUNCTIONALITY AND AESTHETICS

Acoustic lighting serves a dual purpose: enhancing the visual appeal of a space while also controlling sound. These fixtures, crafted from sound-absorbing materials, reduce ambient noise and

reverberation, creating quieter, more comfortable environments. The combination of aesthetics and functionality benefits both designers and guests, offering a seamless integration of acoustic solutions into a space's overall design.

Traditionally, acoustic treatments were limited to walls and ceilings, which could restrict design freedom. Acoustic lighting offers a particularly effective solution, as it's positioned to impede sound waves near their point of origin – conversational speech generated at head level reverberates from the ceiling, making acoustic light fixtures ideally placed for optimal sound absorption. Unlike traditional acoustic treatments, acoustic lighting blends seamlessly into the design, doubling the functional surface area for sound absorption with both the interior and exterior of the lampshade exposed. This allows it to absorb more sound and to do so before the sound has the chance to travel throughout the room. As a result, it provides greater flexibility in hospitality settings, from expansive hotel lobbies to intimate dining areas, while maintaining the acoustic comfort and tranquility essential for a positive guest experience.

GUEST WELLBEING AND SOUND DESIGN

While acoustic lighting balances aesthetics and functionality, its impact goes even further by significantly improving guest well-being. These fixtures not only shape the look and sound of a space but also create an environment that promotes relaxation and comfort. Excessive noise can lead to stress and discomfort, whereas a well-designed acoustic environment fosters calmness and enhances the guest experience. Consider the difference between a hotel lobby filled with echoing footsteps, loud conversations, and ringing phones vs. a space equipped with acoustic lighting, where noise is softened and absorbed. The result is an inviting atmosphere that encourages guests to relax from the moment they enter.

For designers, acoustic lighting opens new possibilities to improve both the visual and auditory experience of a space. These solutions not only elevate the design but also contribute to the well-being of guests, making them feel more at ease throughout their stay.

WHAT'S AHEAD?

As the hospitality industry evolves, so do the expectations of guests. What was once considered a “nice-to-have” is now essential for creating a memorable and satisfying experience. Acoustic lighting is one of the most effective and innovative ways to ensure guests are not only visually impressed but also comfortable and relaxed.

From reducing noise pollution to enhancing guest comfort, acoustic lighting is more than just a design feature – it’s a key component in reshaping the future of hospitality. ■



Jason Bird founded Luxxbox in 2006, designing and manufacturing furniture, lighting, and objects for both commercial and domestic use. With a long and varied career,

accolades and exhibitions in Los Angeles, London, New York, Tokyo, and Australia, Jason’s skills are channeled into Luxxbox’s unique aesthetic version of urban design. Luxxbox has become a major manufacturer exporting his designs throughout Asia, Europe, and North America.

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Addressing rising costs
and implementing
actionable strategies

2026 202

The Federal Reserve and inflation

by DR. DONALD W. WISE

IN SEPTEMBER 2024, THE INDUSTRY welcomed the rate decrease from the Federal Reserve, with expectations of an additional range of decreases between an approximately 25-50 basis point reduction to follow. While this will provide some relief, the real question is whether inflation will stabilize at around approximately 2%; if current consumer spending, currently at 3% as of this writing, will hold up; and whether these interest rate reductions by the Fed are too late to avert a potential recession.

One of the Fed's primary mandates is full employment and, faced with unsettling unemployment numbers, it would appear their focus is now more on jobs than inflationary pressures. Regardless, there's hope this will lead to further interest rate reductions. However, it's exceedingly unlikely we'll return to pre-pandemic interest rates, which were influenced by significant concessions during the post-recession recovery and a massive influx of capital during COVID-19 relief efforts.

CONSTRUCTION COSTS AND LOGISTICAL IMPROVEMENTS

Construction costs remain a critical factor. According to HVS, costs have risen by about 3% vs. the previous year, and this marks a significant and dramatic slowdown compared to the sharp increases seen in recent years.

From a logistical standpoint, the signs of improvement are encouraging. For example, at one point, there seemingly were hundreds of ships anchored off Los Angeles Harbor, but today, only a nautical sextet of ships are seen anchored off the Southern California coast. Additionally, container freight through the Los Angeles and Long Beach ports has surged by approximately 37% in recent months, further indicating progress. However, this good news was offset by the bad news of businesses preparing for a potential strike by dockworkers on the East and Gulf Coasts. That strike

was averted, but the threat remains as a long-term contract is yet to be finalized.

REVPAR AND CONSUMER FRUSTRATIONS

Despite these improvements, RevPAR growth is essentially flat in many markets, with projections of a slight decline in early 2025. Post-COVID “revenge travel” spikes have dramatically cooled, and consumers are voicing their frustration over rising costs. These are individual market-by-market specific comments and need to be understood accordingly.

The hospitality industry has faced a backlash due to high prices and diminished guest services. The days of nighttime bed turndowns and lavish morning breakfasts seem to have disappeared. Having financed and transacted hotels in Hawaii since 1994, it’s disconcerting that recent consumer surveys have expressed approximately 56% of visiting families advised that they wouldn’t return to Hawaii for at least five years because their vacations were so expensive.

This is just one transient leisure market, but universally – from simplified breakfast offerings to the lack of fresh towel rotation with reduced housekeeping – consumers are noticing the difference, and it’s becoming a bona fide pain point. Operators must take notes and adjust, as guests are growing weary of paying more for less.

RISING COSTS AND THE IMPACT ON HOSPITALITY

It’s no secret the hospitality industry is grappling with rising expenses across the board. The impact of increased labor costs, insurance premiums, and borrowing rates is placing significant pressure on properties. In Los Angeles during the Meet the Money conference, speakers were advising that some insurance premiums for hotels and resorts have increased by 300% to 700%.

Natural disasters, such as wildfires, earthquakes, and hurricanes, have further exacerbated the situation, with many insurance companies either increasing premiums or pulling out of markets altogether. Strikes many times targeting the major brands like Marriott, Hilton, IHG, and Hyatt are adding another layer of complexity, further increasing labor costs. Regrettably,



It’s exceedingly unlikely we’ll return to pre-pandemic interest rates, which were influenced by significant concessions during the post-recession recovery and a massive influx of capital during COVID-19 relief efforts.”

hoteliers can’t dodge the bullet on any of these newer costs of doing business.

STRATEGIES FOR 2025: FRIENDS, FAMILY, AND EQUITY

As 2025 approaches, properties must be more strategic in their thinking. One simple approach to many debt-related issues is pooling together equity from friends and family to pay down debt or having additional equity available at the time that the current existing debt rolls over and becomes due. This is particularly logical for smaller deals where institutional support may not be available. This can help reduce the need for high-interest loans and give property owners more negotiating power when it comes to securing more favorable lending terms with their lenders.

Institutional preferred equity is expensive at 15%-17%. This is a costly option and not available to all. For most hoteliers who don’t wish to consider selling their property, friends and family equity can be the answer to the riddle – use cash, use equity, and borrow later when debt is cheaper. We aren’t there yet, as to a favorable cost of borrowing.

STAYING THE COURSE IN TOUGH TIMES

Despite the difficulties ahead in 2025, property owners are committed to the long-term success of their businesses. While the future remains challenging, the brands have been relatively patient as to PIPs, and many properties haven’t experienced substantial renovations or

updates since 2020. Room product quality has declined in many areas, making it essential for owners to plan for necessary upgrades once financial conditions improve. Making those needed improvements can increase both market share and competitive advantage.

It’s crucial to remember the hospitality industry operates on a market-by-market basis, and what holds true for one area may not apply to another. Each region has its own unique set of circumstances, and understanding these nuances is key to weathering any storm.

STABILIZATION IN SIGHT?

Looking ahead, it’s clear the hospitality industry faces numerous wildcards – from interest rates, soaring insurance and labor costs, and the looming short-term uncertainties of an election year. In demanding times like these, patience and prudence are vital for hotelier peace of mind. While it may take time for pre-COVID full stabilization in some markets, there are bona fide reasons to remain optimistic.

As we navigate these challenges, it’s important to remember lessons learned from past industry leaders. At Cornell University, Professor Stephen Rushmore taught that barriers to entry are the most important consideration in buying or developing a hotel, and it takes three to five years for a new hotel to stabilize. These same metrics need to be toned down but might hold true for the industry’s recovery post-pandemic, with hopes stabilization could come within the next one to two years.

For now, staying informed, making savvy financial decisions with the fiscal support of friends and family, and adapting to market-specific trends will be critical to navigating the road ahead. ■



Dr. Donald W. Wise is a seasoned institutional investment banking executive with more than 40 years of experience as the Founder of CBRE Hotels and a former Managing Partner for Johnson Capital, now Walker & Dunlop. He leads his senior team as the co-founder and Chairman of Newport Beach-based Turnbull Capital Group, continuing to transact and finance hotels and resorts.

Expanding the labor pipeline

International talent as a solution for hospitality staffing

by NAJAH S. ALLAHAM

A RECENT INDUSTRY SURVEY revealed staffing shortages are affecting 67% of hotels, with 12% reporting these gaps are severely disrupting their operations.

Housekeeping has emerged as the most critical area in need of workers. Across the U.S., more than 70,000 hotel positions remain unfilled, even as wages in the industry soared to record highs by December 2023 – according to the latest data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

To address these labor shortages, several solutions have been proposed, including:

- Expanding the H-2B guestworker program
- Expediting work authorization for asylum seekers
- Passing the *H-2 Improvements to Relieve Employers (HIRE) Act* (H.R. 4708)

While these initiatives offer potential relief, nonimmigrant visa options such as the H-1B, H-2B, J-1, L-1, TN, O-1, and E-2 visas provide specific pathways for hotels to recruit foreign workers and address critical staffing needs.



1

H-1B/H-1B1 VISA: FILLING SPECIALIZED ROLES WITH GLOBAL EXPERTISE

The H-1B visa allows hotels to recruit foreign workers for specialized roles that require a bachelor's degree or equivalent experience in fields such as management, IT, or engineering. The H-1B1 program is similar but limited to nationals from Chile (1,400 visas) and Singapore (5,400 visas) annually.

Benefits:

- **Addressing skill gaps:** The H-1B visa helps hotels fill specialized roles that are challenging to staff locally.
- **Diverse perspectives:** International employees bring new ideas and practices that enhance guest satisfaction and operational efficiency.

Challenges:

- **Annual caps:** The H-1B program has a cap of 85,000 visas, leading to competitive selection processes.
- **Time limits:** H-1B visas are initially granted for three years, with a maximum stay of six years, though extensions may be available.

The bottom line: Employing H-1B and H-1B1 professionals helps fill high-demand roles while fostering a diverse and innovative work environment.

2

H-2B VISA: SEASONAL STAFFING SOLUTION

For hotels facing increased demand during peak seasons such as holidays or major events, the H-2B visa provides a solution for hiring non-agricultural seasonal or temporary workers.

Key features:

- **Temporary work:** Ideal for roles that are seasonal or based on one-time needs.
- **Annual cap:** The H-2B program is capped at 66,000 visas annually, divided between two halves of the fiscal year. Some years, supplemental visas are available to meet business demands.

The bottom line: Employers must complete a labor market test to demonstrate the unavailability of U.S. workers. Early planning and application are critical to ensure timely access to seasonal labor.

3

J-1 VISA: FOSTERING INTERNATIONAL HOSPITALITY TALENT

The J-1 visa offers hotels the opportunity to host foreign interns and trainees through work-and-study exchange programs, making it ideal for those looking to train and mentor hospitality professionals from around the world.

Key features:

- **Versatile programs:** Suited for internships, training, and summer work.
- **Cultural exchange:** Participants gain valuable U.S. work experience, enhancing their future career prospects abroad.

The bottom line: Hotels must partner with designated sponsor organizations and create detailed training plans to ensure participants receive meaningful educational experiences.

4

TN VISA: STRENGTHENING LEADERSHIP WITH NORTH AMERICAN TALENT

Under the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), the TN visa offers an efficient way for hotels to hire qualified professionals from Canada and Mexico, including hotel-management positions.

Advantages:

- **Fast processing:** TN visas can be processed more quickly than other work visas.
- **Renewable:** TN visas can be renewed indefinitely, offering long-term stability in key roles.

The bottom line: The TN visa is particularly suited for hotels seeking experienced management professionals from North America.

5

L-1 VISA: INTERNATIONAL TRANSFERS OF GLOBAL TALENT

For hotels with international locations, the L-1 visa facilitates the transfer of executives, managers, and specialized knowledge employees from foreign affiliates to U.S. locations.

Benefits:

- **Extended stay:** L-1 visas allow up to seven years for executives and managers and five years for specialized knowledge workers.
- **Global integration:** L-1 visas enable seamless transfers of international talent, ensuring continuity in leadership and specialized roles.

6

O-1 VISA: ELEVATING YOUR HOTEL WITH EXTRAORDINARY TALENT

The O-1 visa allows hotels to attract individuals with extraordinary ability in areas like business, the arts, and sciences. This is particularly valuable for hotels in competitive markets aiming to distinguish themselves by employing elite professionals.

Benefits:

- **Top talent access:** The O-1 visa enables hotels to recruit renowned chefs, designers, or industry leaders.
- **No annual cap:** Unlike many other visas, the O-1 visa isn't subject to an annual limit, offering more flexibility in hiring.

7

E-2 VISA: STRENGTHENING HOTELS WITH INTERNATIONAL INVESTMENT AND SKILLED WORKFORCE

For hotel owners and operators from treaty countries, the E-2 visa allows for the establishment or expansion of U.S. hotel businesses. This visa not only covers investors but also permits hiring essential foreign workers with specialized skills.

Benefits:

- **Investment-based entry:** The E-2 visa allows investors who have made a significant financial commitment to live and work in the U.S. while managing their hotel.
- **Hiring flexibility:** E-2 visa holders can bring in skilled foreign workers, from executive managers to specialized staff, enhancing operational efficiency.
- **Indefinite renewal:** As long as the hotel continues to meet visa requirements, the E-2 can be renewed indefinitely.

The bottom line: The E-2 visa is a powerful tool for hoteliers seeking to expand operations and ensure the business is supported by skilled workers and robust management.

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By strategically utilizing visas like the H-1B, H-2B, J-1, L-1, TN, O-1, and E-2, hotels can access a diverse talent pool, ensuring smooth operations and exceptional service during peak seasons and beyond.”

CONCLUSION: LEVERAGING VISA PROGRAMS FOR HOTEL SUCCESS

Nonimmigrant visa programs offer hotels essential tools to address staffing shortages and operational needs. By strategically utilizing visas like the H-1B, H-2B, J-1, L-1, TN, O-1, and E-2, hotels can access a diverse talent pool, ensuring smooth operations and exceptional service during peak seasons and beyond. These visa pathways allow hoteliers to build a competitive, dynamic workforce that meets both short-term demands and long-term growth goals. ■



Najah S. Allaham is an associate in the Immigration Practice Group at Dickinson Wright. She has years of experience

assisting employers in obtaining employment-based immigrant visas, including PERM labor certifications, EB1, EB2, and EB3 immigrant visas as well as various non-immigrant employment based visas including E-2, L-1, H-1B, H-2B, and TN visas. She can be reached at nallaham@dickinsonwright.com.

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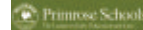
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AAHOA MEMBERS IN ACTION



The North Texas Hotel Owners Conference & Trade Show featured 350 attendees, nine new member signups, and nearly \$50,000 raised for PAC.



AAHOA Past Chairman Nishant (Neal) Patel (2022-23) met Rep. John Carter (R-TX) during an election night watch party.



North Texas Regional Director Dhiren Masters, and Lifetime Members Ketan Masters, Sanjay Kumar, and Chetan Patel met with Rep. Beth Van Duyne (R-TX) in her Dallas office. Van Duyne asked to meet with AAHOA Members as she was unable to meet with them during the Fall National Advocacy Conference.



South Carolina Regional Director Fenil Desai met recently with South Carolina Gov. Henry McMaster, Attorney General Alan Wilson, and Rep. Joe Wilson (R-SC).



Alabama Regional Director Sanjay Patel and Lifetime Member Yogesh S. Patel met with several legislators while attending a University of Alabama game. They met with Sen. Katie Britt (R-AL) – with whom Yogesh shares a hometown of Enterprise, AL – former Secretary of State of Alabama Jon Merrill, and Senior Policy Advisor to Sen. Tommy Tuberville (R-AL) Emory Cox.



Southeast Texas Regional Director Bhavik Patel and Chairman Miraj S. Patel met with Rep. Lizzie Fletcher (D-TX) to discuss issues of importance to the hotelier industry and how her office can assist AAHOA.



AAHOA Treasurer Rahul Patel and AAHOA Lifetime Member Kishor Patel took part in the Florida Charity Golf Tournament.



North Florida Region Lifetime Member Mitesh (Tish) Patel joined Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, Florida Department of Health Surgeon General Joseph A. Ladapo, and other local leaders during a press conference held in Pensacola in opposition of proposed Amendment 3, which would legalize possession of certain quantities of marijuana and cannabis concentrate for adults 21 and older.



Members of the Arkansas Region, including Ambassador Narendra Krushiker, hosted a Back-of-the-House Tour for Rep. Steve Womack (R-AR). Womack spent an hour with staff at the Courtyard by Marriott in Rogers, AR.



Wrapping up our final AAHOA Charity Golf Tournament of 2024 in style! Held in Daytona Beach at the beautiful LPGA International, the North and South Florida Regions hosted AAHOA's final Charity Golf Tournament of 2024 in Daytona Beach. The event brought 90 golfers and 12 sponsors, raising nearly \$76,000 for the AAHOA Charitable Foundation.



The Florida Region Hotel Owners Conference & Trade Show drew 226 attendees, 70 vendors, and raised \$80,128 for AAHOA PAC.

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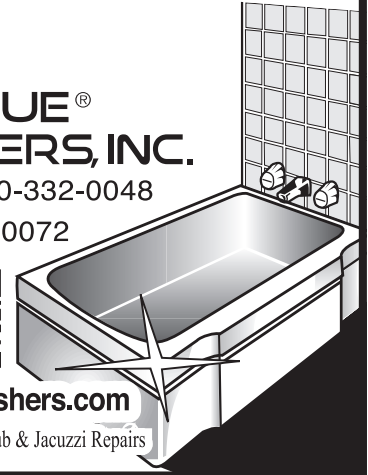
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