# HOTELyearbook 2013

Scenarios for the year ahead

# Engaging your employees

IN THE YEAR AHEAD, HOTEL EMPLOYEES WILL HAVE EVER GREATER ACCESS TO MORE AND DIFFERENT WAYS OF UNDERSTANDING THEIR COMPANY'S PERFORMANCE, CULTURE AND LEADERSHIP, WRITES **STEVE LAWLER**, MANAGING PARTNER OF ST. LOUIS-BASED **OPINIONS INCORPORATED.** NEW SOCIAL MEDIA TECHNOLOGIES WILL CATALYZE CHANGES IN THE RELATIONS NOT ONLY BETWEEN EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYEES, BUT ALSO THOSE BETWEEN EMPLOYEES AND GUESTS. ENGAGING EMPLOYEES WILL THEREFORE BE A KEY OBJECTIVE FOR ENLIGHTENED MANAGERS.

Although the exact metrics of employee engagement are evolving, the general framework is already solid enough to justify the increased attention paid by leaders and managers in the hotel industry.

Engagement increases when employees understand their organization's strategy and direction, know how their role contributes to success, have the resources they need to be effective and are treated with dignity and respect. When these things are true, employees make greater contributions to financial goals and guest satisfaction. Employee activities become more aligned. There is an increase in employee engagement. Effectively leading and managing employees requires tracking those emerging developments that are having high impact on the relationship employees have with their employers. In our work, we see several such developments that can change the way employees engage with their work and their employers in the year ahead.

First, micro and macro shifts in the world of hospitality work require continuous adaptations to strategies and practices for assessing and engaging employees. In the near term, we see no slowdown in this accelerated rate of change. Of significance are higher percentages of women students in hospitality schools and management training programs, more regionally born managers succeeding Europeans and Americans, especially in Asia, and the shifting career aspirations of younger hospitality moving more towards real estate, banking and finance, affecting recruitment for careers in operations, food and beverage, marketing and sales – to name a few.

Yet the most significant employee mind shift is towards higher levels of expectation and experience in both parts of the high tech/high touch equation. The right mix of high tech and high touch that is a challenging balance for achieving an exceptional guest experience is of growing significance in the realm of employee engagement and satisfaction. Customization, authenticity and transparency join high speed, rich data and robust metrics as essentials for successfully understanding associate engagement. Tracking these shifts involves developing a richer understanding of the employee experience, and this

# Engaging your employees

## cont.

requires greater use of customized employee research combining both qualitative and quantitative tools. Employees, like guests, expect a more personalized experience. There is great pressure for hospitality organizations to deliver new features and upgrades to the employee/employer relationship at every turn. First rate technology and superior internal customer service are necessary to effectively engage contemporary hospitality employees.

Second, the accelerated use of social media tools is having greater impact on the way employees understand their roles and frame their expectations within existing organizational structures. Worth noting here are changes in employee communications channels, the increase in more direct employee/guest social media connections, and greater employee access to strategic information, all of which are introducing both increased risks and greater opportunities. With new social media technologies, effective plans for employee communications are rapidly growing past voicemail, e-mail, and newsletters to texting, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Google + with the future bound to include as yet undeveloped options.

With Web 3.0, unfolding information is free to show up in spaces and places not formally sanctioned, with users expecting customized content and delivery. As greater use of social media influences employee/guest relationships, we see direct connections supplanting some elements of a company's role as intermediary and owner of the relationship. It is not outlandish to imagine a guest having a lively and engaging conversation about a hotel with a new, tech savvy associate found through the guest's social media connections as a way to gathering information ahead of actually visiting a location's website. This dynamic context has a larger set of variables. The conversations organizations are having with their guests are growing on multiple levels and into new channels as well. Although still delivered through official channels, brand messaging and information flows more and more through relationship instead of roles.

Social media becomes a broader horizon for managing employee branding and feedback as well.

Employees have access to more and different ways of understanding a company's performance, culture and leadership. Potential employees look for innovative ways of recruiting, training and managing current employees, ways that express a relational, not functional, sense of work. Deepening

> ## Social media becomes a broader horizon for managing employee branding and feedback as well

employee engagement involves being more connected, more of the time, and in ways that are increasingly collaborative. Social media connectivity and collaboration as a work-style are increasingly important essentials with younger employees. Such collaboration involves a great sense of the local and particular within the larger organizational whole. Shaping one's work and one's role are extensions of expressing one's particular identity. High potential employees want work that is a worthy expression of their unique giftedness.

Finally, we see sustainability motifs emerging as a key element in positive regard from younger employees for a location and a corporate brand. This is not in place of traditional elements like career potential, salary and benefits, working conditions and location. Yet along with these traditional expectations come additional ones. Organizations that have clearly articulated sustainability practices and that are making some specific contribution to sustainability in a broader context are held in higher regard with younger workers. Steps taken to practice sustainability both "inside and outside the walls" signal to these employees that the organization is moral and realistic both. Although it is not clear as of yet if there are preferences for certain types of external sustainability projects (water, reforestation, alternative energy sources, etc.), there are preferences for internal practices that use greener products and that practice the basic principles of reduce, reuse, recycle. ∎