

How to lead your GMs to success

29 August 2011 9:33 AM
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Story Highlights

The best GMs are out there, and the company must invest in the implementation of great hiring practices to ensure the best of the best are leading the properties in the field.

The GM's goals need to be aligned with the company's long-term goals.

Set crystal-clear expectations and goals.

The hotel general manager is the leader in the field. He is the investment for a hotel operating company that needs the most attention. If a hotel property is hundreds, sometimes thousands of miles away from the corporate office, it's paramount that executive leadership ensures the GM produces the results expected. The recent recession should not require a change in how we lead field managers; it should remind us how to do it right. Here's how:

The following is a simplified list of six actions and practices that will allow the property goals to be achieved, aligning field operations with investors and owners in the process.

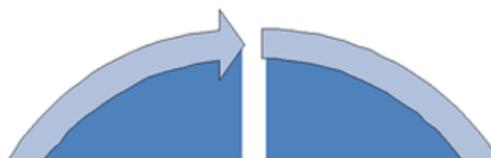
1. Hire the best. This hard work comes before you can expect any results. The best GMs are out there, and the company must invest in the implementation of great hiring practices to ensure the best of the best are leading the properties in the field. The company can benefit from an "above property" leader that has lived and learned (and made mistakes) in hiring the best person for a property. Nothing can replace trial and error; however, the company should use science when applicable. Pre-hiring tests or surveys can help sift through the unqualified candidates and make sure your final candidates are a good fit for a particular location and/or company. Steve Picarde, VP at PI Midlantic, a company specializing in behavioral assessments, says, "A pre-hiring plan is essential for properly placing a GM in a role to ensure the unique demands are met."



2. Set crystal-clear expectations. Get the company leaders in a room, close the door, and have a honest discussion on what results are truly going to satisfy all of the customers of the hotel company (e.g. the employees, guests, brand and owner/investors). Expectations are different than goals. A goal is to have guest satisfaction scores above the brand's average. An expectation is to always have a fully stocked, colorful and attractive gift shop/convenience market for the guests at all times. John St. Omer, a GM in New Jersey with 15-plus years of experience in the role, says, "I'm happier and work better when I know the expectations of the company. Different companies have different expectations. I know that if I'm hitting my boss's goals, then I'll be hitting mine. This opens the gate to exceed expectations, not just meet them. Everyone wins."

3. Align interests. The GM's goals need to be aligned with the company's long-term goals. Initiatives and priorities of the company will be discussed "above property," though without the GM's input, it will cost dearly. When assessing talent, Jim Hartigan, a partner at Orgwide Services, a training/e-learning, communications, surveys and consulting firm, suggests asking the following questions to consider Ability, Motivation and Personality: "Can they, will they and do they fit?"

So, you found a GM that fits your company's culture and has the ability to do the job. Will they do it and stay loyal? That depends on the alignment of interests. Create a total compensation package including bonuses that makes sense for the particular GM. Consider the demographics, psychographics and the motivational needs of the GM, and then align the company's interests with the GM's interest through a motivating compensation program.





4. Build trust and confidence. Creativity, dedication and motivation live in the same house as confidence, loyalty and teamwork. Creative solutions to cost cutting and revenue generation become habit and will be spread throughout the hotel. When confidence is low, the results are fear and feelings of inadequacy, which leads to selfishness, lack of ownership and limited responsibility. Bumpy roads will occur no matter what economic environment we're in, and these feelings will surface, so anticipate it and take action. Attack low confidence like a 4-alarm fire and make plans and execute ways to increase confidence levels. While creating confidence, you are building trust. This will create loyalty among all of the GMs company-wide.

5. Train, develop and grow the talent. Create a culture of "family" and "oneness" within the company. This will create ownership and honesty when making difficult decisions like cost cutting and will inspire "creative" thinking. Do this by sharing information with the GM and including him in major company decisions. Educating and trusting the GM are also keys to developing the talent in the field, because the GM will educate and trust those at the property level. Get the GMs out of their office and invite them to the corporate office for some specialized training, such as revenue management or e-marketing/social media tools. There's no better way to grow talent than by putting them in the same room and asking the question, "How are you?" and thanking them for doing all they do.

6. Balance. This may be the No. 1 key to partnering with a GM who is loyal and committed to the organization. If all of the steps above have been followed in some form, then you have got a powerhouse of a GM—and that powerhouse needs to be fueled. That fuel comes from his direct leader. In addition to the above steps, this direct leader must deliver a life/work balance to the GM. Most GMs are servant leaders. They serve many people and entities (employees, guests, boss, peers, brand, owners, vendors and more). By serving them, the GM must also manage their expectations. But who is managing the expectations of the GM? His leader must. Fuel that powerhouse with support, understanding and random acts of kindness and flexibility. This is much more effective than holding a carrot in front of them and promising rewards.

Bonus step

Buy a tomato plant. At your next company executive meeting, insist that everyone purchase an indoor tomato plant. Explain that they must bring it home and in three months, there will be a company event where the execs will bring the plants to the office and the one with the most tomatoes wins a large, flat-screen TV. Once the contest is complete, ask the winner to explain what he/she did to win. The answer will be eerily similar to the perfect relationship you can have with your hotel GM:

- Pay a little extra for a healthy plant.
- Immediately start watering it and acclimating it to the climate of its new home.
- Select the place in the home that is the best environment for growing and place it on a stable foundation to ensure it doesn't get knocked over.
- Inspect it daily for insects and poisons.
- Protect it from outside interferences such as pets and appliances.
- Water it in small amounts several times per day to ensure ultimate absorption.
- Find a creative way to institute natural elements from the outside, such as mulch and leaves.
- Use innovative techniques such as hand-pollinating or invest in a solar powered UV light to use at night.
- Speak to it often—giving it love and a healthy dose of CO₂.

It may not be a best practice to call your GMs tomato plants, but I think the message is loud and clear. Contests and fun interactions like this will kick start any company's talent management initiatives and will help ensure long term success.

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