

5 steps for interviewing a hotel GM

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Story Highlights

Put some science behind this traditionally "subjective" decision.

Invest at least four hours during the final interview process.

Throw job candidates in the fire with a case study to test how they operate under pressure.

We've all made "that" hire. Great résumé, great interview, great job stability, great appearance, great references and great personality. Hired!

The GM hired offers a solid year's performance. Then, something happens. A couple of guests complain about the GM's attitude. Financial auditors find a few "missed" invoices. Guest satisfaction scores take a slight dip. Several "issues" from the corporate payroll department about timeliness arise. There's a misstep on the recent brand quality assurance exam.

Maybe the GM is bored or maybe he is having a bad couple months. Whatever the truth is, the GM's boss should be focused on the point when the GM was hired and placed at that property. It's possible the right person wasn't hired for the right property. If it is determined he is not right, then swift action should be taken. But for this article, we'll focus on how NOT to let it get to that point.



The best hotel leaders see things others don't

Here are five unique steps the boss could have taken during the final phase of the interviewing process to crack through the surface and discover the good, bad or ugly truths underneath the GM's great résumé and interviewing performance.

1. Hire a scientist.

Put some science behind this traditionally "subjective" decision. There are some excellent companies out there that specialize in making sure of three things: right person, right job, right time. This could be an ego hit to many hiring managers who suggest they can do it on their own. That's a whole other article. In this case, a personality and talent assessment test would have helped greatly.

2. Schedule to "invest" at least four hours

This GM will be running a multi-million dollar asset for you and the company. Spend a day with him. I use the word "invest" above because it is exactly that—an investment in time with your most crucial asset to the company's profitability and stability. If you need more incentive, consider this: The wrong hire could mean your own job stability is in question and could knock your whole world out of balance.

3. Immerse yourself in the candidate's leadership and hotel skills

Start the day at the hotel. This is a great way to see what kind of "eyes" the candidate has. Stand in the lobby and ask him to tell you what he sees. If he goes on for 25 minutes, you've got yourself a GM with a great attention to detail, and you've also got yourself a dirty lobby!

Another good task is to identify the hotel's best housekeeper and have the candidate inspect one of those recently cleaned rooms. It's not just the attention to detail you're looking for; it's the process of how he goes about it. Does he ask for an inspection sheet? Does he remove his jacket, roll up his sleeves? How does he present the findings? Timid? Judgmental? Positive? Confident?

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4. See what others don't

See past the savvy interviewing skills, the impressive appearance and seemingly great, positive attitude.

What's the first thing great GMs do when the hotel is caught in a downpour of rain? They get wet. They walk outside and look at the roof, retaining walls, parking lot and gutters. At this time, the building and

property is under stress, and that is when the real blemishes show up (leaks, cracks, etc.).

In the morning conversation, casually mention you like cheeseburgers. When it comes to lunchtime, have the candidate choose the restaurant. When you arrive, have him pick the table and then have him order for you. Is he uncomfortable? Probably, but look past that and see how he deals with being uncomfortable. He will act that way as a GM when in uncomfortable situations (i.e. presenting next year's budgets to executives). Was he listening to you when you said you like cheeseburgers or did he take you out for seafood? Does he respect the server and look him in the eye? Ask him why he chose that restaurant. Is it because it is usually quiet and you would be able to talk? Then, give him your credit card and ask him to pay while you go make a phone call. If he does it without issue or mention, that's how he will act as a GM when you give him tasks. If he bombards you with questions about how much to tip and what about your signature, that's how he will act as a GM.

5. Case study review and response session

As a hiring manager there are countless "case studies" you can use to offer a challenge to the GM candidate.

You can use the same case study for every interview. For example, pick two hotels in your company, print out the most recent full-month STR report, trailing 12-month profit-and-loss report, recent guest satisfaction report and brand quality assurance exam. Tell him he's got to make a recommendation to an owner to buy one of these hotels. Tell him these hotels are in the same city and the market is healthy. Give him two hours, a pen and a notebook and do not offer any other rules.

5 GM interview tips

1. Apply science
2. Invest time
3. Immersion Interview
4. See what others don't
5. Case Study

See what he comes up with and make your own conclusions. The actual recommendation is not important. The process he used to get to the answer is everything. Good writing skills? Creative? Does he remember major aspects of the project such as seasonality or market segments? Are his findings clear and concise or fragmented and unfocused?

Finally, how the applicant acts in the interview process is how he will act when he is a GM, and his actions will be accentuated after about six months when he gets comfortable. Look for the signs of potential conflict, and also look for signs of greatness. Each will grow exponentially.

Don't leave interviewing to good luck. Prepare, invest and see what other don't.

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