

MENTORING MATTERS

Why mentorship in the hotel industry is crucial to employee – and company – success.

by ALICIA HOISINGTON

MORE AND MORE HOTEL COMPANIES ARE recognizing the value of mentorship as a way to support the next generation of leadership. Not only are mentors and mentees benefitting from personal and professional development thanks to mentorship, but companies are developing stronger employees and in turn stronger organizations.

Fern Kanter, executive vice president and managing director of CHMWarnick, has worked in the hotel industry for 35 years and has taken many mentees under her wing during her career. She says the mentor/mentee relationship works best for her when it develops naturally.

“The relationship begins when you connect with a person. It begins organically, and it begins with helping,” she says. “You are never teaching how to do something; you are teaching how to think and what things to consider when problem solving.”

Kanter says being a mentor not only benefits her personally but also professionally because she looks at the relationship as a way to continue learning.

“As I get older and they’re younger, they bring a fresh perspective. I get a satisfaction learning things that I’ve never been exposed to. It’s like a new lens on the same problem,” Kanter says.

Kanter is a mentor to Kristie Dickinson, executive vice president at CHMWarnick, who says that having a mentor has been invaluable to her throughout her career.

“Having someone I trust, who serves as a role model, challenges my thinking, holds me accountable and instills the importance of self-advocacy has no doubt given me the tools and confidence to keep on climbing,” Dickinson says. “This type of relationship goes beyond traditional training. It’s a relationship, and the good ones are typically life-long.”



Dickinson, who in addition to being a mentee is a mentor to a student in the University of New Hampshire’s hospitality program, says that the best mentors typically have more than one mentee.

“It’s in their nature, and beyond that, they view it as their responsibility to bring out the best in people in which they see potential, and likely see a bit of themselves at some point in their career,” she says.

But being a mentor casts benefits on a larger scale, Dickinson adds.

“For those considering becoming a mentor, you have the opportunity – and I might argue the responsibility – to share your knowledge, which can’t be found in books, and help shape someone in a way that will have a positive impact on them, you and quite possibly the industry overall,” she says.



A STRONGER COMPANY

Kanter says that mentorship allows companies to mold leaders, which will only benefit a business now and in the future.

“Having a mentee and being able to provide guidance allows you to grow strong leaders in your organization and create succession,” Kanter says. “It’s critical to the success of a business.”

Peggy Berg, founder of The Highland Group, says the performance of a company’s team determines how successful a business will be, and that’s why mentorship is important.

“Nobody does business all by themselves,” she says.

Berg is also director of The Castell Project, a nonprofit organization that she says has one purpose: to make leadership of the hotel industry more diverse (See sidebar: “Women in leadership roles: The importance of mentors”). As such, mentorship plays a huge role in the project, which provides training for

DATA DIVE: WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

One key goal of the Castell Project is to publish benchmark statistics about women in the hotel industry. Some key stats from the organization’s recent report, “Women in Hospitality Industry Leadership 2017,” include:

- More than **50 PERCENT** of hotel industry employees are women.
- In 2016, **5 PERCENT** of hotel CEOs were women; **9 PERCENT** were presidents, principals or partners; **15 PERCENT** were chiefs; **20 PERCENT** were executive vice presidents or group presidents; **28 PERCENT** were senior VPs or managers; and **30 PERCENT** were VPs or district directors.
- Most women in the industry work in human resources, with **77 PERCENT** of senior executives in HR being women. Of HR chiefs in the industry, women comprise **58 PERCENT** of the share.
- **21 PERCENT** of attendees on pre-conference rosters were women in 2016-2017, and **15 PERCENT** of conference speakers were women.
- Men are **10 TIMES** more likely than women to be promoted to the principal/partner or president levels in a company.



WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP ROLES THE IMPORTANCE OF MENTORS

Women represent more than half of the hotel industry's workforce, and 60 percent of hospitality college students are women, according to Peggy Berg, founder of The Highland Group and director of The Castell Project. That's why it's important for hotel companies to recognize the value women bring to business leadership and the industry overall.

"When you have more diverse leadership, companies tend to make better decisions and be more profitable," Berg says. "It's an important benefit to the industry overall."

Programs such as the Castell Project, which was formed last year, seek to support women in the hotel industry, helping them to rise through the ranks by providing training and mentorship along the way.

"We don't see many women on the podium, in the C-Suite or making presentations – all those visible leadership decision-making spots," Berg says. "To get there, every woman needs more than an advocate to get on podium. It's vitally important to making our leadership more diverse."

Berg says women involved with the Castell Project are nominated by a champion at their companies who sponsors them. The nominated women then send in applications to be formally accepted into the program. Along with their champion or mentor, the women are provided with career development support.

"We develop a plan and set their sights high and to the right place with their natural skills. It's a way of helping them figure out what's possible. If they don't think about it they can get stuck somewhere [in their careers]," Berg says.

"What makes this program truly unique and revolutionary is that it's geared toward senior management and executive women within the hospitality industry seeking advancement where the competition is greatest for the highest-level positions in the hospitality industry, the majority of which are currently occupied by men," says Kristie Dickinson, executive vice president at CHMWarnick, who is a participant in the program this year. "Not only does this program include leadership development specifically tailored toward women, but also provides ongoing executive coaching and networking, akin to successful mentorship programs."

Dickinson also acts as a mentor to a student in a formalized program with the University of New Hampshire's hospitality school. The program is focused on sharing career-path stories and exposing mentees to career options, networking opportunities and practical life lessons, as they look to transition from the classroom to the workplace. Dickinson says that a large reason she is involved in the university's program is due to her experience as a mentee.

"I have been fortunate to have a mentor for most of my career, which in turn has inspired me to seek similar relationships with others, as well as integrate various aspects of mentorship into my management style," she says.

Fern Kanter, executive vice president and managing director of CHMWarnick, serves as Dickinson's sponsor for the Castell Project. But she is no stranger to recognizing the value of mentorship programs. She is also the co-chair of a mentorship program with the Boston University's School of Hospitality Administration. Within this program, junior and senior women are invited to take part in a weekend-long workshop that educates them on skills that will empower them to become leaders in the hotel industry.

"We focus on confidence, communication and change," Kanter says, adding that those pillars were established after interviewing women in the industry.

"Women need to believe in themselves. More women didn't have the confidence level necessary when entering the workforce," she says about the confidence pillar.

When it comes to communication, it's clear that women are different than men, she says. "Women are not men in skirts. They are different. We talk about the language necessary to project the confidence needed."

And finally, change is needed because women don't often stand up and ask for the promotion, Kanter says.

"What happens when women are offered a position, they will say, 'I haven't done that before, but I'll try,'" she says. "That's what needs to change."



high-potential women at the point where many women are deflected off the leadership path. The program makes use of advocates, or what Berg calls “mentor extraordinaires.”

“An advocate is someone who goes beyond a mentor,” she says. “They might give a challenging assignment [to a mentee] because that person is ready to grow, or they might put them up for a promotion because it makes for a stronger company.”

She says this type of relationship is beneficial for companies. “The person who is an advocate will move up the mentees to make the company perform better. It’s a mutually beneficial relationship.”

In fact, many hotel companies have started to create formal programs because they see the value mentorship brings to their organizations. AAHOA and Carlson Rezidor Hotel Group are just two examples of organizations that have established mentorship programs.

AAHOA’s Mentor Match program was established last year to connect seasoned hoteliers to those just starting out in the industry or those who want to try something new with their portfolios.

JOIN AAHOA’S MENTOR MATCH PROGRAM

Interested in becoming a mentor or being paired with one? Sign up for AAHOA’s Mentor Match program. For more information, call 404-816-5759 or email mentors@aahoa.com.

“Within this highly competitive industry, we are able to match those that would like one-on-one guidance with members that have already been in their shoes and are willing to take them under their wing,” says Purvi Panwala, president and CEO of Purvi LLC and AAHOA Young Professional Director Eastern Division. “Having a mentor in any line of work, but more specifically the hospitality industry, creates an accepting and nurturing environment for professionals that might not know exactly where to start or how to proceed, or those that need help elevating their family business.”

Panwala adds, “Most of the people who sign up for the program are second or third generation hoteliers who are taking on their parents’ business right out of college or after transitioning from a different profession and want to learn, or grow and upgrade their business to remain competitive. Some may be taking that business in a new direction and need the guidance of someone that has gone through the steps and already knows what to expect.

“What I love, is that [the program] gives experienced hoteliers that want to help others an avenue and platform to pay it forward. Being able to make one phone call to ask questions without being judged when you’re stuck or for someone to check on your progress periodically is priceless,” Panwala says. “Although it’s a highly competitive industry, we’re all in it together.”

Meanwhile, the Rezidor Mentee Program is a fast-track talent initiative to give high-performing people the skills and experience to take on a general manager or leadership role, according to Iñigo Capell, executive vice president and global chief resources officer at Carlson Rezidor Hotel Group. Mentees are nominated by their supervisor or GM and must pass a pre-program assessment in order to join the development program. During their time in the program, which lasts about 12 to 18 months depending on development needs, mentees are offered peer-to-peer support, participate in bespoke training and workshops, are partnered with specialist skills mentors, participate in a personalized skills and knowledge roadmap, and create a personal development plan. Before ending the program, mentees are required to deliver a business project and take part in budget and forecasting preparations.

“The mentor/mentee relationship is crucial,” Capell says. “The mentor is a general manager or an experienced and trusted leader who knows what it takes to become a future leader. They have a keen interest in developing people to grow for the benefit of the company as well as the individual.”

He says the program has seen employees go from food and drink managers, for example, to general managers or operations managers by the end of the program. Last year, 32 mentees grew their careers thanks to the program.

“The mentor becomes that professional friend and supporter of the mentee and is there to challenge and support the mentee through the program successfully,” Capell says. “The mentor, in addition to assessments and development steps during the mentee program, acts as a quality check ensuring that the mentee has what it takes to become a Rezidor leader.”

DEVELOPING THE RELATIONSHIP

For those looking to lend their expertise and become a mentor to others in their company or via a formalized program, sources say there are a few things to keep in mind.

Kanter says it’s important to really consider the role, let the relationship begin organically, but then recognize the impact it plays.

“My mentorship started as all work related with people working for me,” she says, adding that it has since grown into more, especially when it comes to women in the industry. “It’s particularly important for professional woman in leadership positions to provide mentorship to those coming up in their careers.” (See sidebar: “Women in leadership roles: The importance of mentors.”)

Dickinson says that the sky’s the limit for the mentor/mentee relationship – and it’s never too late to get involved.

“If you can find a role model who has achieved what you aspire to and possesses values and work ethic that match your own, the possibilities are endless,” she says. “You’re never too old to find or be a mentor.” ■