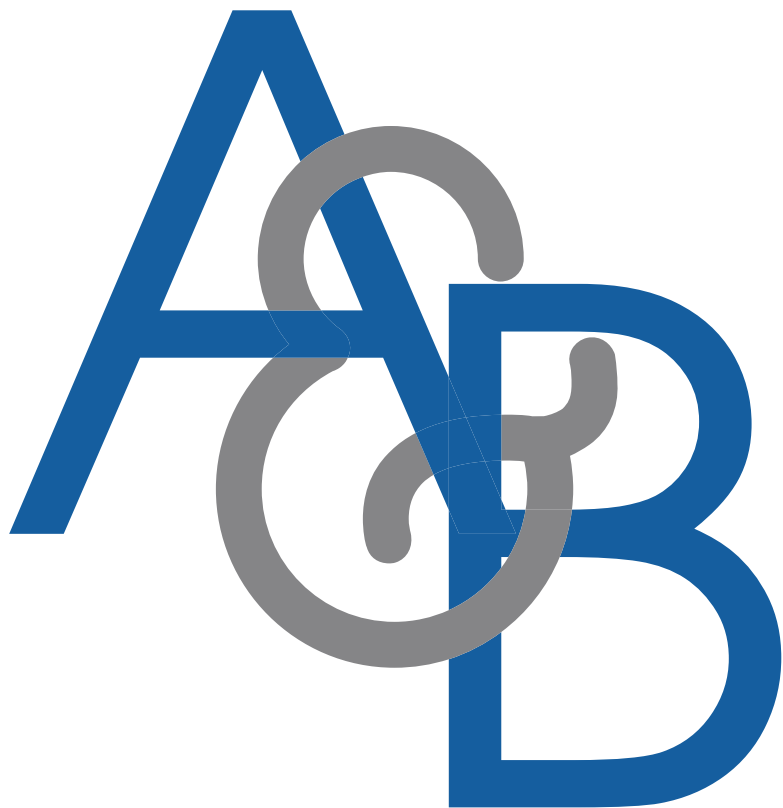


HOSPITALITY IS NOT JUST HOTELS



A BROADER VIEW

Hospitality is the UK's third largest employer; it represents 10% of all employment and generates more than £137 billion in revenues. The industry comprises hotels, restaurants, caterers, theatres, prisons, charities, clubs and so much more but when asked what defines it, people's first thought is hotels.

This is partly because the four main areas in hospitality – F&B, accommodation, entertainment tourism and travel – can be found in hotels. But people are at the core of the industry, alongside standards, profit and shareholder returns, and that is consistent with all sectors.

The degree to which those working in hospitality interact with guests or customers varies. A waiter or waitress might take a booking for a restaurant, show people to their table and look after them while they are choosing and consuming their meal, and that might add up to three hours. But someone working in a private members' club has long-term relationships with tens of thousands of people.

"The RAF club has nearly 25,000 members, many of whom have been members for more than 50 years and the club becomes part of the fabric of their life. We also have long-serving members of the team; my assistant has been at the club for 38 years," says chief executive and club secretary Miles Pooley FIH MI. And, many members visited the premises as a child with their parents, a tradition that can go back generations.

In segments like contract catering, the foremost transferable skill is relationship management, making sure the caterer and its host venue get the utmost out of it. This could be relatively uncomplicated for an organisation providing meals at a workplace but at a London venue like the Honorary Artillery Company (HAC), there are many more balls in the air.

The incumbent caterer at the HAC is Searcy's, which handles events that include livery dinners, regimental events, ceremonial work for the Royal family, drinks receptions, Christmas and summer parties, and sporting events, for guests that number from 10 to 9000 over three days. "Our team does everything and the opportunity to learn and enjoy that every day is optimum," says general manager Matthew Randall FIH. And, to the potential envy of many in hospitality, at the time of writing Searcy's was employed to capacity.

HAC's breadth of operation is unusual and caterers in most conference and event venues in any city are most likely to be running gala dinners or drinks receptions. However, relationship management remains crucial in all circumstances and the aptitude is transferable to hotels, which are active 24/7.



MANY SKILLS

It is also true at The Clink, a hospitality training and development charity that runs restaurants in prisons across the UK. These are staffed by residents, who benefit from training that gives them multiple skills such as making mocktails (no alcohol allowed), cheffing, waiting, meet and greet, and more. They can, and do, take these out into the world when released, and the charity helps them with job hunting, CV writing, and much more, to ensure that they can put these competencies to good use in hospitality, a sector that around 90% of them aspire to and succeed in.

"We train and develop prisoners in hospitality, and we support them on release. As a result, we have very low reoffending rates," says operations director Jane Sanderson FIH.

The work is massively rewarding because employees can see prisoners develop as they become more competent and confident. "Most of my team join The Clink because they want to train to change. They are all experienced and well qualified, and they gain their assessing qualification from City & Guilds, while also running a business," she says.

"We promote from within, and some become area managers and IQAs (internal quality assurance), a qualification that can take up to two years to gain; we offer progression," says Sanderson. Some former employees are now university lecturers or have gone to other training establishments to be assessors or education providers.

The environment is diverse and satisfying and as Jane Sanderson FIH points out, "It is different from other hospitality outlets in that you have a challenging cohort but once you have set boundaries, training prisoners is easier because they want to learn, and running the business is almost identical to anywhere else in hospitality," she says.

"I'm all for encouraging people to experience as many parts of the industry as possible. The senior living market is growing rapidly, which presents another opportunity. I never want to hold people back and in the Royal Air Force Club, we are proactive in encouraging our colleagues to grow in their role," says Pooley. Also, whether someone wants to have regular contact with clients or customers, or would rather work behind the scenes in finance, marketing or the kitchen, the opportunity to get a kaleidoscope of experience is huge, giving everyone the chance to forge a defined career path and to have a varied and impressive CV.

CROWNING GLORY

At the other end of the hospitality scale is the Royal Household, where events range from a royal jubilee and coronation to state visits. The learning curve is steep and candidates need to be adaptable and flexible. Footman Jupiter Humphrey-Bishop AIH joined the royal household from a promotion in a hotel to head waiter and restaurant manager. "A more senior role in the royal household would be looking after the team and in management would be overlooking events," she says.

As the above illustrates, hospitality is vast and covers many options but throughout, how the industry approaches careers and the opportunities for training and development is the common thread; it is possible to start in an entry-level job and end up running the company.

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Hospitality is about treating people as you would like to be treated, leading by example, and the core values and skills that inform that will cover every aspect of good leadership.

"I think about hospitality as an orchestra or band; people in hospitality are the musicians and each one has a role to play and, in an orchestra, you need a conductor to bring it all together, and that's what a leadership role does," says Jupiter Humphrey-Bishop.

And going back to hotels, employers in all segments want the abilities people gain in hotels but hoteliers could also take a broader view and consider the experience people from those segments would bring in, whether from contract caterers, the royal household or the prison system. And given the paucity of entry-level candidates, hoteliers would benefit from employing someone who has worked in a pub bar or a similar job in a 5-star property.



TRAIN OF THOUGHT

Training is key and if it has enough breadth and depth, anyone should have the skills to move between segments. In The Clink restaurants, residents are making “fantastic non-alcoholic cocktails and we are making a decent margin on them”, says Sanderson. “We are preparing our students to go out and work in pubs or cocktail bars.”

Customer service is always transferable. “One of our students had never answered the telephone in a professional capacity and is now working for a Tesco call centre in Cardiff. That may be entry-level, but the aptitude is still relevant. It’s all about working as a team, keeping Health and Safety standards, and projecting a professional image,” she says.

And The Clink runs a large variety of projects; Clink Events caters dinners at the Guildhall for 900 people and the bakery in Clink Brixton won an order for 200 hampers in 2023 thanks to a mention on Rory Stewart and Alistair Campbell’s podcast ‘The Rest Is Politics’. And there are two gardens where the charity works with some of the most damaged prisoners. “We are transforming their lives and you can’t put a price on giving people a second chance,” says Sanderson.



It is considered by some to be a mistake that over the past 25 years, hospitality has ceased to train many of the traditional skills such as being able to carve a joint, fillet a fish, flambé or to open and decant bottles of wine. "Those attributes allowed people to interact with guests and create a good experience," says Matthew Randall FIH.

"It is part of the dumbing down of our industry which allowed that perception to proliferate. Everywhere I've gone, I've tried to reintroduce those abilities and get people excited about showing them; we should celebrate them," he says. It is up to all of us to promote hospitality positively to everyone, of any age, colour or creed. Every sector has its downsides and long hours and working when others are not are two of those; but the warm, embracing environment that is hospitality is a compelling argument for joining any segment in any position, and it is time to broadcast that loud and clear.



WITH THANKS TO

Jupiter Humphrey-Bishop AIH Footman at The Royal Household

Miles Pooley FIH Chief Executive & Club Secretary at The Royal Air Force Club

Matthew Randall FIH General Manager at Searcys at The Honourable Artillery Company

Robert Richardson FIH MI CEO, Institute of Hospitality

Jane Sanderson FIH Operations Director at The Clink Charity

