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Talent Identification

One of the fundamental challenges hoteliers are up against is 'cost-control', a dreaded word for all, oft-repeated during recessionary times.

The major cost centres in hotels lie within Payroll, Sales & Marketing, F&B Costs, Heat Light Power (HLP) & Repairs and Maintenance (R&M). Of these, payroll stands out in India; it could be anywhere from 16-22 per cent of total revenues, depending on variables like staff to room ratio, emphasis on services, property layout and size, old or new property, etc. In fact, labour being comparatively cheap in India, this cost is nowhere near international standards. Luxury hotels in Europe for example, are operating on 30-35 per cent (payroll costs to revenue) while cities like Paris and Vienna operate at a 42 per cent payroll cost!

With the current recessionary trends, the pressure is on general managers to reduce staff by up to 15 per cent. This cannot be done on a knee-jerk reaction and it needs to be spelt out as a strategy over a period of time. While some hotels, especially those launched this millennium, began operations on a leaner number of staff as compared to their older counterparts, it is those who have been around longer who have been operating with higher staff to room ratios employees towards effectiveness, rather than only efficiencies. Efficiency is about doing things right and effectiveness is about doing the right things.

To make employees more effective, talent management becomes an important tool. You can use these most commonly found talents as you decide which talents you should be selecting when you are working towards making your team members more effective.

A) Striving Talent

- **Achiever:** A drive that is internal, constant, and self-imposed
- **Stamina:** A capacity for physical endurance
- **Competition:** A need to gauge your success comparatively
- **Desire:** A need to claim significance through independence, excellence, risk and recognition
- **Competence:** A need for expertise or mastery
- **Belief:** A need to orient your life around certain prevailing values
- **Mission:** A drive to put your beliefs into action

- **Service:** A drive to be of service to others
- **Ethics:** A clear understanding of right and wrong which guides your actions
- **Vision:** A drive to paint value-based word pictures about the future

B) Thinking Talents

- **Focus:** An ability to set goals and to use them every day to guide actions
- **Discipline:** A need to impose structure onto life and work
- **Arranger:** An ability to orchestrate
- **Work Orientation:** A need to mentally rehearse and review
- **Responsibility:** A need to assume personal accountability for your work
- **Concept:** An ability to develop a framework by which to make sense of things
- **Performance Orientation:** A need to be objective and to measure performance
- **Strategic Thinking:** An ability to play out alternative scenarios in the future
- **Business Thinking:** The financial application of the strategic thinking talent
- **Problem Solving:** An ability to think things through with incomplete data
- **Formulation:** An ability to find coherent patterns within incoherent data sets configurations in favour of more effective/appealing ones.

C) Relating Talents

- **Woo:** A need to gain the approval of others
- **Empathy:** An ability to identify the feelings and perspectives of others
- **Relator:** A need to build bonds that last
- **Multirelator:** An ability to build an extensive network of acquaintances
- **Interpersonal:** An ability to purposely capitalise upon relationships
- **Individualised Perception:** An awareness of and attentiveness to individual differences
- **Developer:** A need to invest in others and to derive satisfaction in so doing
- **Stimulator:** An ability to create enthusiasm and drama
- **Team:** A need to build feelings of mutual support
- **Persuasion:** An ability to persuade others logically
- **Activator:** An impatience to move others to action

Let me cite an example to make the applicability of talent management clearer: Sidney, a bartender worked evening shifts so that he could practice with his band in the mornings. His manager realised his passion for music and was able to identify the following talents strongly prevalent in his DNA, which he felt could be utilised effectively to make Sidney's job more interesting.

- **Desire:** A need to claim significance through independence, excellence, risk and recognition (Striving talent)
- **Creativity:** An ability to break existing configurations in favour of more appealing ones (Thinking talent)
- **Woo:** A need to gain the approval of others (Relating talent)
- **Stimulator:** An ability to create enthusiasm and drama (Relating talent)

Sidney's manager asked him if he would like to sing every alternate day for an hour during their evening promo – 'sundowner cocktails'. Sidney jumped at the suggestion and even brought in his own keyboard to work so that he could sing ballads to guests. Now known by guests as the "singing bartender", Sidney excelled while playing at work! The identification of talent and its effective utilisation thereafter did not necessarily

We often see managers spending time on employee's weaknesses, trying to improve them; rather than concentrating on their strengths and guiding them to use these more effectively at their work places. The benefits gained on elaboration of strengths are obvious to enhancing employee morale, and from the employee's perspective this shows them how to over-shadow their weaknesses with their strengths.

From the organisation's perspective, this process helps identify the individual performer as a potential leader, finds the right place for him within the company, discovers personal growth challenges and finds out how the organisation can bring out the best in him. ■■

(Ramiah Daniels has over two decades of operational expertise in the hospitality industry, including significant tenures with five-star luxury brands, chiefly Oberoi Hotels, Leela Palaces & Resorts and Bharat Hotels. A graduate in Economics and an alumnus of the Oberoi Centre for Learning and Development, Daniels now runs a hospitality training and consultancy firm – Hospitality Paradigm)