



# Abrogating Attrition

One constant problem that has been incessantly proving a bothersome malady for the hospitality industry is the shortage and retention of skilled manpower, as this makes or mars the future of the property. Possessing innovative and problem-solving capabilities the workforce can add to the success of the hotel. Skills like patience, multitasking, positivity are a few of abilities which attribute to the success of the hotel as it helps in the hotel being able to provide excellent customer service in all circumstances. But shortage of skilled manpower has been a constant problem of the industry. **Ashok Malkani** delves on several aspects of the shortage and retention of employees.

**H**ospitality industry, where service excellence and guest satisfaction play an extremely significant role for a hotel's success has been a constant stigma for the industry which is persistently beleaguered and plagued with the attrition problem. Retaining skilled labour has been a difficult proposition. According to the Bureau of Labour Statistics there was an annual employee turnover rate of more than 74.9% in 2018. This means more than 6% employees departed every month. The Skill Gap report by Ministry of Tourism states that the attrition rate in hospitality industry was high. The total employment and attrition rates, according to Skill Gap report, are as mentioned in the table:

It was believed the Covid pandemic, when several hotels curtailed employment,

would ease the problem, but did it do so or does the problem still exist?

Mahesh Khade, HR manager, Sayaji Pune, maintains, "Every hotel is facing shortage of skilled manpower. Branded hotels require quality people every year and this requirement is growing day by day. Most branded hotels in India today are severely underpowered. The gap between the sector's requirements and its growth is humungous. It's very alarming. There is about 40% - 50% attrition and there is a paucity of students entering the sector.

Poor compensation, increased workloads, lack of support and poor work-life balance are other issues in the industry. The average wages in the hospitality sector have traditionally been lower compared to other industries,

making it challenging to attract and retain talent, especially in a competitive job market. Despite efforts to increase wages, many hospitality workers still find themselves struggling to make ends meet, leading to high turnover rates."

He states, "Tourism and hospitality industry was hit because of COVID 19 pandemic. Statistically, I find, a significant impact on the income and wage of individuals engaged in the tourism and hospitality industry in India. A loss of livelihood in tourism and hospitality led individuals to leave this industry and this has also resulted in discouraging future entrepreneurial activities due to heightened uncertainty. In many tourist destinations, several skilled employees who left the industry did not return."

Purnima Kumari, HR Manager Courtyard

All Categories of Hospitality Establishment	Estimated Manpower Employed	Estimated Attrition (including Retirement)	Estimated Manpower Requirement (including Attrition)
2018	78,08,555	2,56,898	80,65,453
Estimated for 2022	95,44,738	3,32,921	98,77,659
Estimated for 2025	115,71,017	4,26,742	119,97,759

Marriott Pune Chakan, opines "Hotels have always grappled with shortage of skilled manpower, but it is one that can be overcome by investing in training and development programs. Skilled manpower are the pillars of the hotel industry."

Speaking about the effect of the pandemic, she disclosed, "The closure of hotels during the pandemic led to a decrease in the demand for workers. However, a lot of skilled resources moved onto other industries. As the hotels reached its pre Covid demand levels the shortage of skilled manpower became a bigger threat."

Srinivas Rao - Cluster Director Human Resources, Hilton Bangalore Embassy Golflinks Hilton and Hilton Garden Inn Manyata Business Park, says, "I can confirm that there is indeed a shortage of skilled manpower, particularly in departments such as F&B, kitchen, housekeeping, Reservations and Revenue. Post-pandemic challenges have intensified this shortage, leading to an estimated deficit of 25% to

35% in certain positions. To address this shortage, it is crucial for the industry to connect with Hotel Management Colleges as well as investing on skill development, training programs, internships, and other initiatives that can help bridge the skills gap."

He adds, "While it is true that some hotels did experience a temporary easing of the manpower shortage during the peak of the pandemic, the situation has evolved as the industry has begun its path to recovery. One of the challenges that the industry is currently facing is the rehiring of talented individuals who may have chosen to pursue alternative career paths. Many individuals are still apprehensive about the job security and growth prospects within the hospitality sector, resulting in a shortage of skilled manpower. Despite these challenges, the hospitality industry remains resilient and adaptable, and we are continuously working towards finding innovative solutions to address the manpower

shortage

Deepika Lohani, Director of Human Resources, Hotel Marriott Whitefield, affirms, "Indeed, the growing skill gap is a challenge in hospitality industry. The industry is extremely dynamic in nature and has seen significant transformation in recent years, emphasising on higher demand for trained professionals in every segment be it rooms division, culinary or services to cater to the guest's preferences."

She adds, "The closure of hotels during Covid-19 provided a temporary respite in manpower demand, but the shortage persisted. Moreover, pandemic-induced shifts in consumer behavior and operational requirements highlighted the ongoing necessity for adaptable and competent professionals. Thus, while closures provided a temporary reprieve, the overall manpower shortage in the hospitality sector remains an ongoing challenge."

Srivasta Allampalli, General Manger,



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Hyatt Place Jaipur, agreeing about the shortage of skilled labour states, "The extent varies, but it's generally high, impacting various sectors within the industry. While some hotels closed during Covid-19, it hasn't entirely eased the manpower shortage. The pandemic reshaped workforce dynamics, but the shortage persists in certain areas."

Rajiv Gandhi, HR Manager, Angsana Oasis Spa & Resort, is of the opinion that the manpower shortage depends on the location. He claims, "Hospitality has been going through a serious challenge post Covid. While the temporary closure of hotels during the COVID-19 may have provided a short-term respite from manpower shortages in the hospitality industry, the long-term impact depends on multiple factors such as the pace of recovery, changes in consumer behavior, and shifts in workforce dynamics."

Neha Kumari, Human Resources Manager, Hyatt Centric MG Road Bangalore, stressed, "The challenge of skilled labour shortage has become even more pronounced in the post-pandemic world, especially with hotels expanding by 20-25 percent. As the hotel industry rebounds from the pandemic, it is experiencing promising growth tempered by a shortage of skilled manpower. However, this situation presents an opportunity for innovative recruitment and training initiatives to cultivate a talented workforce capable of delivering exceptional guest experiences."

Sarbendra Sarkar, Founder & MD, Cygnett Hotels & Resorts, reveals, "The industry is facing over 60 per cent demand-supply gap in manpower with hotels expanding at the rate of 18 to 20 per cent per year. The shortage of skilled manpower is being noticed at each level of the hospitality sector."

Delving on the effect of the pandemic he said, "With reduced travel and tourism activity leading to decreased demand for labour during the pandemic, some hotels implemented layoffs, furloughs, or reduced work hours for employees. Additionally, the closure of hotels resulted in a larger pool of available talent in the job market as displaced workers sought employment

opportunities elsewhere. Hence, the industry is currently facing challenges in rehiring and retaining skilled employees as travel demand has rebounded strongly."

Ojas Vagal, Director of Human Resources, The Ritz-Carlton, Bangalore, declares, I would not say that there is a shortage of skilled workers, but I would say that there is an increase in demand which has led hotels to train and develop workforce for the future. The year 2023 saw a large number of hotels being opened across brands in India."

He adds, "The closure of hotels due to COVID-19 has not been received very kindly by a large number of youths who are looking to begin their careers or who are on the lookout for new opportunities. It spiked stability concerns among job seekers. On the other hand, the workforce that remained committed to hotel careers explored new opportunities with corporates."

Aditya Sanghi, CEO and Co-Founder, Hotelogix, avers, "The hotel industry worldwide is grappling with a critical shortage of skilled and qualified employees, with the deficit reaching up to 30% in some areas. This shortage is primarily due to the industry's long-standing issues with offering low wages, demanding long working hours, and failing to provide a satisfactory work-life balance. These conditions have significantly deterred the younger generation from pursuing careers in hospitality, exacerbating the labor crunch."

He adds, "The closure of hotels amid the COVID-19 crisis temporarily decreased the demand for staff within the sector. However, it didn't address or alleviate the pre-existing workforce shortages. In fact, the crisis intensified the challenge of staffing in various ways. As the pandemic unfolded, many hotel employees were either let go or placed on temporary leave, prompting many to reassess their professional choices and lean towards sectors offering more attractive compensation, benefits, and a better balance between work and personal life. This migration has posed a significant challenge for hotels in drawing in fresh talent as the demand for travel and

**Mahesh Khade****Neha Kumari****Ojas Vagal****Purnima Kumari**

hospitality services rebounded.”

Annepaul Vemagiri, Head of Learning & Development, Atmosphere Core, avers, “I would say there is a shortage of highly trained staff. That said, there is no shortage of young people wishing a career in hospitality. The industry offers endless opportunities for “people” persons. Genuine hospitality comes from the heart, it’s a sub-conscious way of living your life putting others before yourself - hence our company ethos is ‘Joy of Giving’ – where we embrace heartfelt hospitality from all our associates.”

He adds, “The impact of Covid brought around a seismic shift in the employment landscape of hospitality across the world. This was mostly witnessed in Asia where we saw an exodus of Western hoteliers who sent the workers home to wait out the pandemic. This was a strategic move to assist in the financial recovery of hotels that literally lost millions of dollars to the point of almost closure, and some properties sadly didn’t manage to weather the devastating financial aftermath. The move to employ and train local talent has had an incredibly positive impact on Asian hospitality and we are seeing the growing trend of homegrown talent rising quickly through the ranks to senior management and General Manager positions.”

Shweta Singh, Human Care Manager, Chiranjeev Restaurant and Food Pvt Ltd, House of Malaka Spice, is also of the opinion that there is a shortage of skilled labour. “However,” she adds, “candidates nowadays know where they want to work and they choose jobs accordingly. For example, there are candidates who come to us and say that they have always wanted to work with Malaka Spice or a Southeast Asian cuisine restaurant and hence choose to work with us. So that makes the entire hiring process challenging, because candidates know what brands they want to work for, what cuisine restaurants they prefer, if they want to work in hotels or restaurants and the kind of role they would want to be hired for. At the House of Malaka Spice, though we do have a shortage of good quality managerial recruits, our attrition rate is 3-4% which is lower than the

industry standard.”

Speaking about the effect of pandemic, she says, “A lot of staff went back to their native place during the pandemic and chose not to come back and have now settled back home, started new small scale businesses or changed their industry altogether. Now 4 years after the pandemic, there is a boom in the number of restaurants coming up and the skilled labour available in the market has gone down. Also, newer restaurants, in an effort to retain staff, have increased the salary brackets and other perks thus leading to a lot of staff attrition and hiring competition amongst restaurants.”

### Retaining & Training Manpower

The abrupt layoffs in the hospitality industry, during the pandemic, due to the curtailment in travel and tourism, has created an increased talent drain in the industry. Skilled and experienced workers, from front-line staff to chefs, sought alternate employment and several of them migrated to different sectors. The result is that the situation, which was already not very favourable for the industry before the pandemic, became more pronounced. The challenges faced by the industry; post COVID-19 are multifaceted. It has not only to retain manpower but also to train their staff. So how does the hospitality industry retain and train their manpower adequately to make the property a success?

Sarbendra avers, “Career development opportunities, work-life balance, and positive work culture are at the top of the list to retain and attract the best talent. Investing in the professional development of employees also helps foster loyalty, engagement, and a sense of belonging among staff, reducing attrition rates and cultivating a skilled workforce. We, at Cygnet Hotels & Resorts, strive to ensure that employees are our first asset and open communication, collaborative decision-making, and recognition programs are the tools we use to nurture a supportive environment where employees feel valued and motivated. The focus is to create an employee-oriented brand where we

are committed to giving a great working environment to all our employees."

He adds, "In the ever-evolving hospitality industry, training and development play a crucial role and cannot be underestimated. Continuous training at organizations is one of the key factors to unlock success, ensuring exceptional service delivery, guest satisfaction, and sustained growth in a highly competitive market. In fact, as per research, 78% of people rank great quality service above all when selecting a hotel. Providing outstanding staff training ensures quality deliverables. There are many different trainings that hotels should focus on for example skills training especially cross-department knowledge to develop multitasking abilities, product training, technical training, behavioural development training and standard operating procedure training. Learning and development should also consider aspects like ethics and morality; attitude and behaviour; leadership and determination. Development isn't restricted to training - it's anything that helps a person to grow

in ability, skills, confidence, tolerance, commitment, initiative, interpersonal skills, understanding, self-control, motivation, and other skills."

Deepika declares, "Manpower retention has become a pressing concern for organizations. The work force is now more concerned about advancement, growth opportunities outside domain, work-life balance. There is also a certain section of these workforce demanding for higher workplace diversity, sustainable footsteps. We, at Marriott, are constantly evolving ourselves and introducing best of career practices like, opportunities for being SME (subject matter expert) through our program of Integrated Jobs (iJobs), career growth across country and even globally to our sister Marriott properties. For potential managers we have robust training program like Emerging Leadership Plan and Future Forward Talent. We are pioneers in the industry to introduce Life on Time (LoT), which emphasis on work life balance. By offering overtime pay under LoT, we

acknowledge and respect the time and effort that associates contribute beyond their regular schedules."

Shweta states, "Whenever there is a manpower shortage, the general tendency is to increase salary and perks for the employees in an effort to retain them. However, here, at the House of Malaka Spice, apart from the monetary benefits, our crew gets constant trainings, skill upgradation, a set growth plan for every individual and a very involved Human Care department that knows the personal and professional details of every crew member. Apart from this, our crew participates in various engagement activities, meditation sessions and our open door policy ensures that all crew issues and grievances, if any, are addressed in a timely manner.

In the orientation programme, our new employees are taken through the organisation's DNA and our mission statement where our crew comes first! Our commitment lies in generating employment and nurturing the capabilities of our crew, ensuring their journey towards

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prosperity and thereby contributing to a sustainable ecosystem while also ensuring that we manage to impact the lives of our guests in a thoughtful way. To summarise the response, at the House of Malaka Spice, we believe in 'Samasta Janakalyane Nirantaram' which means highest good for the maximum people for the longest period of time. Hence, we have some crew who have been a part of our family for more than 2 decades, while our first ever employee who was hired in 1997 continues to work for us even today!"

She maintains, "Training is an extremely important part of every crew's journey at the House of Malaka Spice. Every crew member has a master training tracker sheet, which has his/ her entire list of trainings that he/she has undergone or has to undergo and the overall growth plan of that employee. Our crew are given skill based trainings, partake in certification courses through external agencies and also get the opportunity to attend industry specific sessions online and offline. Every month, our Learning and Development team sends out an email for training requirements of the crew and a planned training calendar is sent out to the entire crew at all our locations."

Srinivas Rao informs, "At Hilton, we understand the importance of retaining our talented employees and have implemented several strategies to address this issue. One of the key initiatives we have launched is our new reward and recognition program, which includes STAR Rewards & Recognition Programme for all our Team Member for outstanding performance at all levels.

The other programmes are: Catch Me at my Best, Diversity & Inclusions and Women @ Hilton. We also have another great initiative "Thrive Sabbatical and Thrive Reset" which gives Team Members the opportunity to take time off to live a dream by pursuing a passion. Besides these and several other initiatives we also offer opportunities for internal transfers and mobility, as well as regular performance reviews every six months or quarterly, with promotions and raises for top performers."

Neha asserts, "With a shortage of manpower, the work pressure can be overwhelming for our present employees. However, retention is key when it comes to sustaining our manpower. We, at Hyatt Hotels, focus on creating an immersive onboarding process, providing regular trainings, and fostering employee engagement."

She adds, "Hotel Industry heavily relies on special skills and unique talents as it is a very niche industry hence that is one of the deciding factors when it comes to investing in manpower in this sector. As a skill intrusive industry, we understand the importance of having added specialized expertise and distinct capabilities hence we, at Hyatt, conduct skills- based trainings in order to enhance the productivity and confidence of the associates."

Ojas disclosed, "Today, a large number of associates, disassociating themselves from a property are those who have a work tenure of less than 90 days at the property. Thus creating an onboarding experience that is engaging and personalized has never been more important. Well, planned and leadership driven strategic orientation to the job description helps the associates settle in and move from learning to the performing stage at a faster pace.

We invest in the training and development of our associates as it gives them the guidance, ability, and confidence to perform at the highest level. The training programs at our hotel are personalized on the basis of the analysis study conducted by the Learning and Development Manager along with the certified departmental trainers of The Ritz-Carlton, Bangalore."

Mahesh disclosed, "Due to manpower shortages, existing employees often bear the burden of additional responsibilities. Increased workloads can lead to employee burnout, reduced job satisfaction, and higher turnover rates. The negative impact on employee well-being can undermine organisational stability and productivity. Implementing a well thought out employee retention strategy can improve retention rates and reduce

recruitment costs significantly. Investing time in building relationships with your employees will increase loyalty and create a happier team overall. People are more likely to stay in a job which offers career prospects. Showing you're willing to invest in them and their future is a proven employee retention strategy."

He adds, "As far as training is concerned, since Sayaji Hotels brand strives to provide high-quality service, operational efficiency and maximum revenue, our focus is always on providing training of extremely high quality. According to the LinkedIn Workplace Learning Report 2023, the skill sets needed for jobs have changed by around 25% since 2015. By 2027, that number is expected to double. We have designed different types of Training program to train our team members and always equip them with necessary knowledge, skills, and competencies to perform their role effectively."

Srivasta Allampalli says, "Retaining manpower is challenging amidst shortages. Hotels can enhance retention through competitive benefits, career growth opportunities, and fostering a positive work culture. Hyatt Place Jaipur prioritizes ongoing training to equip our team with the skills crucial for hotel success."

Purnima affirms, "Shortage of manpower can make it difficult to retain manpower. This is because when there is a shortage of workers, employees have more options and can be more selective about where they work. Hotels can retain manpower by offering competitive wages and benefits, creating a positive work environment, offering opportunities for advancement, offering skill enhancement opportunities."

She asserts, "Working in hotels requires a diverse set of skills to ensure the smooth operation of the establishment and provide high levels of service to guests. Hotels continue to develop & upgrade self-paced & instructor based learning courses for associates to hone their skills."

Aditya, while condescending to the general concept that hospitality industry faces manpower shortage, asserts, "The challenge isn't just to fill positions but

to make staff feel valued, supported, and motivated to stay. Here are several strategies to enhance staff retention:

**Offering competitive compensation and benefits:** This is fundamental. However, beyond basic pay, benefits like health insurance, retirement plans, paid leave, wellness programs, safety measures, etc., can distinguish a hotel as an employer of choice.

**Ensuring work-life balance:** Supporting a balance between work and personal life by introducing flexible work schedules and advocating for regular breaks and holiday time can significantly revitalize staff. This approach not only diminishes the risk of job fatigue but also nurtures a strong sense of loyalty and dedication over time.

**Promoting existing employees:** In today's competitive environment, retaining seasoned, existing, and well-trained staff members is more crucial than ever. These individuals are deeply familiar with hotel standards, guest expectations, and SOPs. Extending an array of incentives—from further professional development and training opportunities to financial rewards, the option for flexible work schedules, or increased vacation time for those with extended service—is also essential.

**Leveraging technology:** It's crucial to prioritize efficiency and accuracy in hotel operations. Implementing a suite of technological solutions, including a cloud-based property management system (PMS), channel manager, booking engine, revenue management system, accounting software, virtual concierge, and others, can automate routine processes and minimize mistakes. These tools enhance department-wide collaboration by providing a real-time dashboard of key performance indicators (KPIs). The goal is to alleviate staff burnout by simplifying and automating repetitive, non-productive, and error-prone tasks.

Rajiv states, "Hotels can retain manpower by implementing strategies such as competitive compensation & benefits, career development opportunities, R&R, work-life balance, optimistic work environment, investing in employee well-being & building a strong

company culture. These initiatives help create a supportive and engaging work environment that encourages employees to stay with the organization for the long term, even in the face of manpower shortages.

At Angsana Oasis Spa & Resort we recognise the importance of equipping our staff with the necessary skills to deliver exceptional service and contribute to the success of our hotel. We invest in comprehensive training programs that cover areas such as customer service, product knowledge, technical skills, health and safety, and revenue generation.

Annepaul says, "Businesses today have to go beyond the paycheck when it comes to staff retention. We, at Atmosphere Core, take staff Learning & Development very seriously, with a focus on skill development and mentoring. We send our colleagues to other departments for cross training which eventually equips them for multi-tasking. Atmosphere Core truly believes in Training & Developing its most dynamic resource that is People.

We have curated trainings as per individual and business needs. We believe that training is essential, and we abide by the orthodox teaching that training starts from day one. Having said that, we ensure that every colleague who joins our company is imparted with the information which is required for them to stand confidently in their workplace. At Atmosphere, training starts from on boarding, wherein a colleague is shared with a soft copy of the handbook. This handbook comprises of information about the country they would be travelling to."

Shortage of adequate manpower and retention of the same has been a constant problem. Getting the right employees, training them and retaining them is a constant problem of the industry. Besides the various aspects discussed in this article, there are several other aspects like changing work patterns post COVID-19, advancement opportunities for employees in the industry, seasonal demand fluctuations in the industry, future of hospitality hiring, etc. which will be discussed in the next issue. ■