

Six Tips to Welcoming New Hotel Employees and Building a Loyal and Grati ed Team

By [Shannon Colbert](#) Vice President of Sales and Marketing, Endeavor Hospitality Group | November 04, 2018

There's no place like home. And when your career is in hospitality, top priority is creating a welcoming sense of home for your employees, a place where they feel they belong. Hotels provide a space that is both inviting and an escape from your home routine, a place where you can experience a new city and get a taste of a lifestyle different than their own.

Having spent the last 20 years in this industry, I've had a front row seat to experience a myriad of hospitality functions – from front of house customer service and back of house staff positions to hotel operations and executive leadership, and everything in between. The overarching theme I've learned in a career spent amongst countless hospitality workers and guests is the importance of taking impeccable care of employees and treating them with the same level of intention and attention provided to guests.

Ensuring guests have the best possible experience starts with making employees feel at home and treating them like dear family. Having a staff that feels wholly welcomed and connected to one another provides the atmosphere for our guests to recharge and explore their destination with a sense of ease.

Below are six tips and best practices for onboarding new team members and keeping them happy and engaged.

1. Look Beyond the Resume

While resumes serve as a great starting point when seeking out a new candidate, there's tremendous value in understanding each person's individual core values, attitude and methods for handling difficult situations. For instance, at Endeavor Hospitality Group, we are incredibly intentional in our hiring process all the way through to our welcome ritual. We want to know the human nature of an individual, their personality, and the distinct contributions only they can make. As a company, you can teach the skills needed to fulfill the requirements of a job. However, what makes teams dynamic and competitive are the personalities, individual skill sets and unique vantage points that commingle to make up your hotel's approach to the guest experience and to differentiate your brand from others.

2. Create Your Own 'Welcome Ritual'

A thoughtful welcome ritual for employees sets the tone for what hospitality looks like in action. Our ritual is designed to invite new employees into the work family by giving them individual recognition and by sharing in their excitement as they begin a new professional endeavor. We go as far as to give our new staff members a gift personalized with their initials, a bottle of bubbly to celebrate, handwritten welcome cards from senior management, and over-the-top 'welcome home' desk decorations.

In addition to a celebratory lunch with leadership during their onboarding process, we ensure their work perks are tailored to their personal interests, such as added healthy living (gym perks) and continuing education benefits and incentives. Once someone has experienced the welcome ritual personally, we find they are quick to pay it forward to both new team members and guests who walk through our doors. How tangible are the rewards for going the extra mile when you bring on a new hire? Organizations with standardized onboarding processes benefit from a 50 percent increase in new-hire productivity. The first impression you impart during each new employee's initial weeks has lasting impact on their effectiveness as an employee and their longevity at the company.

3. Provide Thorough Training at the Onset of Employment

From the moment a new team member joins the ranks, it is the hotel's responsibility to set them up for success through adequate training. A staggering 25 percent of companies conceded their onboarding does not consist of any formal training period. This can mean hotels may lose up to 60 percent of their workforce within four years. Don't let this happen at your hotel; begin day one with a well thought out training program and a dedicated team member to serve as a mentor for the new hire. Don't bombard them the first day-let them acclimate – perhaps leaving a bit early so they may digest what they have learned.

Starting a career with limited context, structure and guidance can be demoralizing for employees and costly for business. In fact, researchers from the Society for Human Resource Management report, "new employees who are part of a well-structured onboarding orientation program are 69 percent more likely to remain at a company for up to three years."

At Endeavor Hospitality Group, we enroll existing team members to serve as an advocate for new hires and a guide to smoothly navigate our policies and procedures. This onboarding system serves as an extension of our family culture and helps integrate our team members more effectively than any manual ever could. Learning hands-on from someone who has already 'been there, done that' is invaluable experience. Talya Bauer, Ph.D., author of *Onboarding New Employees: Maximizing Success*, explains "the faster new hires feel welcome and prepared for their jobs, the faster they will be able to successfully contribute to the firm's mission."

4. Show Hospitality Inward and Expect to See It Outwards

For any great hospitality company, people matter more than any other asset, initiative or goal. You cannot expect the face of your brand to provide unparalleled hospitality toward guests if they do not know the joy that comes from experiencing it firsthand. Therefore, it's important to hold the company to exceptional standards and new employees to similarly high expectations when it comes to practicing both internal and external hospitality. We don't just cultivate a culture of high standards, though.

We also know the importance of recognizing great workplace performance. In a Psychometrics study, when questioning employees on what leaders should do more to boost engagement, 58 percent responded "give recognition where deserved." As a natural extension to our welcome ritual, we place an emphasis on celebrating team successes in order to cultivate deeply positive and productive working relationships as employees grow their career with the company.

5. Empower Employees in their Decision Making

Trust your employees to make the right decisions on behalf of your brand and empower them with the ability to make judgement calls on their own accord. You can learn a lot about employees by paying attention to their decision making process. As the saying goes, how you do anything is how you do everything. During the interview process, walk through possible scenarios potential new hires may encounter on the job and make sure their instinct is in alignment with the brand's ethos. Their answer may not hit the nail on the head, but you should be able to clearly identify if they are a good fit and may just need a little additional coaching to help them identify appropriate solutions.

Your hiring process should vet candidates thoroughly enough that you end up with emotionally intelligent employees. How does this serve you well? Talent Smart compiled decades of research around the subject and found 90 percent of top performing employees ranked high in emotional intelligence. Trusting you chose the right person for the job should leave you feeling confident in their ability to effectively manage their reactions while addressing issues that arise -- without needing to constantly ask for permission to proceed.

By empowering employees and eliminating policies that unnecessarily require manager approval, your team can often identify their own solutions to keep a guest experience positive. While you can't always prevent issues from occurring during a guest's stay, you can give your employees the chance to turn the issue into a client service win right on the spot.

6. Be Authentic and in the Moment

Genuine and consistent touch points with the team are essential. Regularly touching base with employees and connecting in authentic ways helps team members grow professionally and personally. Have fun, establish an environment where humor is welcome and encourage people to be themselves. By doing this in the hotel industry, we are ultimately establishing a cycle of long-lasting, mutually-beneficial relationships with our employees and guests.

In *Creating an Engaged Workforce: The Impact of Authentic Leadership, Transparent Organizational Communication, and Work-Life Enrichment*, research demonstrated in order to gain increased levels of trust with individuals, groups and on different levels of the organization, authentic leaders are more often than not engaging in positive and transparent communication.

By taking a few moments each week to speak with your team individually and be in the moment with them, we demonstrate how we value them not only as employees, but as people. These kinds of connections make the difference between having long-term, loyal employees and dissatisfied, disconnected former-employees. The Center for American Progress estimates that it can cost around 20 percent of an employee's salary in the process to find a replacement. Do everything you can to show employees you care about their development within the company to avoid losing a valued member of your team. These small gestures, like listening to their personal goals and aspirations for professional growth, have a huge impact in workplace happiness and retention rates in the long run.

Caveat-some employees don't know what they don't know-everyone has blind spots when it comes to their self-development and what they need to improve on to progress in their career. It takes diligence to help your team develop, so keep communication open, be honest, make sure they want to grow and learn what piques their interest. Always ask yourself how you can help them continue to have a fulfilled career with the company.

The takeaway? Always see your people for who they are as individuals, create your own welcome rituals, offer a wealth of training, pay kindness forward, trust your people, and take the time to connect meaningfully. Life in today's hectic world can often make it easy to get swept up in the "business" of daily tasks and mean missed opportunities for authentic interactions with employees and guests.

By mindfully implementing these simple tips with your internal teams, you can make all the difference in creating not only a positive company culture, but also phenomenal guest experiences. In the hotel industry, we are all trying to provide the kind of stay that transports guests out of their day-to-day routine and inspires them to be more productive, have more fun or simply relax. Our continued dedication to improving our guest experiences starts within, so let's keep learning and growing together as the hospitality industry evolves.



Ms. Colbert

As Vice President of Sales and Marketing at Endeavor Hospitality Group, Shannon Colbert is accountable for all areas of hotel sales, brand marketing, revenue generation and revenue management. Coming on board the team in June, she is based out of the company's Manhattan headquarters in Midtown. Prior to joining Endeavor Hospitality Group in 2018, Ms. Colbert spent five years as the director of sales and marketing for Hazens Group, Pyramid Hotels, a hotel group with over 100 hotels and resorts under their hotel and asset management umbrella. During her time there, she opened and repositioned the Four-diamond Luxe City Center Hotel as a chic boutique hotel in a then fledgling Downtown Los Angeles. Shannon Colbert can be contacted at scolbert@endeavorhg.com

Extended Biography