
Editorial: Addressing the lack of Black representation

Editorial

5

A survey of Black hospitality management students in the USA reflects a growing concern with the lack of representation for Blacks in the industry at the managerial level. One student's expression showed concern about never meeting a Black GM throughout all her years of academic study and work in the hospitality industry.

The commitment voiced by an encouraging number of hotels and resorts between 2020 and 2022 suggested that the movement initiated by the Black Lives Matter organization, on the heels of the George Floyd murder, had begun to influence and shape the industry's recognition of the need for diversity and inclusion in leadership roles (IHG Hotels & Resorts, 2020; Marriott International, 2020; Saunders Hotel Group, 2022; Tourism Diversity Matters, 2021; Travel Update, 2020). However, the results to date have been short lived.

Data garnered from the 2022 Black Representation in Hospitality Industry Leadership review of company websites shows that not only have Blacks not been included as executives, but there has also been a reduction in the number of Black workers employed by these organizations (Castell Project, Inc., 2022a, b). A paltry 11% of these websites show Black executives, and a comparison of other men to Blacks at the CEO levels shows a ratio of 80 to 1. The case for women interestingly reflects an under representation of women in general, so that the ratio of other women to Black women executives is a comparable 25 to 1.

This data raises questions regarding true commitment and inclusion in the hospitality industry.

Hospitality management students again weighed in clearly feeling that so-called efforts being made were token lip service, "all just talk".

A growing number of Black employees who have just begun their careers in the field of hospitality have expressed their dissatisfaction with the lack of opportunity for upward mobility in the organization, the lack of recognition of Black talent, and the double standard at work in the companies. Aggravating the situation is the failure of management to recognize and discourage existing acts of microaggressions against employees of color on the job. It is evident in general that Black employees are held to a different set of standards than their white counterparts and are forced to work in an environment that is less than welcoming. It could also be that they are held to similar standards that are not inclusive; the expectation being assimilation, where output and performance expectancy is the same regardless of skillset.

Pointing to another piece of evidence that there is racial discrimination in the industry, a study out of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, highlights the experience of hospitality students who face such hostile behavior on the job, as a matter of course (Shum, Gatling, & Garlington, 2020). The study suggests that these students experience low levels of career satisfaction, leading to low levels of employment for Black executives.

The lack of real support from hospitality leaders seems at odds with well-documented expert views that diversity in the workplace allows for increased creativity and efficiency, and creates opportunities for growth in the industry.

© Miranda Kitterlin-Lynch. Published in *International Hospitality Review*. Published by Emerald Publishing Limited. This article is published under the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) licence. Anyone may reproduce, distribute, translate and create derivative works of this article (for both commercial and non-commercial purposes), subject to full attribution to the original publication and authors. The full terms of this licence may be seen at <http://creativecommons.org/licences/by/4.0/legalcode>



International Hospitality Review
Vol. 37 No. 1, 2023
pp. 5-7
Emerald Publishing Limited
2516-8142
DOI 10.1108/IHR-07-2023-078

When discussing this with a longstanding leader in the lodging industry, they expressed that they felt it could be an issue of companies simply not understanding how to attract and retain Black talent, particularly in management roles. To that note, I offer the following strategies for industry decision makers, as well as for Hospitality educators to bring into the classroom to inform future industry decision makers. Please note that these are just some strategies, not an exhaustive list.

Locating Black talent

A hospitality company that recognizes and values Black talent will invest in a commitment to hiring Black managers and will see the need to create room for a diverse pool of candidates that are readily available when there is a need within the organization.

Many Black employees enter the industry at entry level and work their way up. This creates a wide range of experience and on the job training for them, as they gain a thorough knowledge of the internal dynamics and the intricate workings of the organization. Such qualified Black employees are well in place to move up to leadership levels as these become available, and companies benefit from being able to quickly promote them.

Another pool of Black candidates for promotion can easily be created by instituting a formal management track program, by means of which Black employees are given opportunity to rotate through all departments and thereby experience different lines of work within the company.

Black managers can also be located with the help of career placement professionals whose role it is to know and understand the needs of the hospitality company or owners, as well as the skills and versatility of Black candidates within the labor pool.

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) provide another source of Black talent. Their hospitality management programs create outreach for alumni, with the goal of supporting student excellence in their fields. Professors in these institutions, as well as program leaders are a good source to turn to when seeking Black employees for leadership roles within the hospitality organization.

Hospitality owners and companies can also seek references through a network of Black managers who are already in position to identify other Black professionals who are readily available for the working in the hospitality field. Social media plays an important role in providing professional websites where their skills and profiles can be viewed, and relationships can be easily established.

Additionally, there are opportunities to find Black talent through Black Professional Associations and Organizations. Hospitality companies can reach out to Black professionals in other fields, who might be willing to transfer to a position within the industry.

Retaining Black talent

If a Black manager does not feel supported and welcome within the organization, it can lead to job dissatisfaction. Everyone within the company, but especially departments within the management company with a direct support role (e.g. human resources, accounting and technology), shares an integral part in maintaining proper working environment.

Work relationships are best if developed naturally, so instead of assigning a forced mentor, allow Black managers to choose an internal (or external!) mentor with whom they have built communication and trust over time. Understanding that race is a valid perspective creates space for open communication where Black managers will feel free to offer new ideas and perspectives to the company. Hospitality owners need to be sensitive to the ways that the environment in the workplace can be affected by external issues governing race relations in the country. It is important to recognize that the Black management team member might be a support not just for Black employees within the company, but also for family members and

others within the wider community, especially if this team member has leadership role within a community or church organization. It is important to respect the roles they play and to respect their feelings and perspectives, even when you do not understand them.

Miranda Kitterlin-Lynch

References

- Castell Project, Inc (2022a). Black representation in hospitality industry leadership 2022, February. Available from: https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5c886e36c2ff61063923506b/t/6227833eb9062f091c05f630/1646756671470/2022+Black+Representation+in+Hospitality+Industry+Leadership_final.pdf
- Castell Project, Inc (2020b). Black representation in hospitality industry leadership 2020, June. Available from: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5c886e36c2ff61063923506b/t/5efb523a168f1227d36dc0bc/1593528891796/Black+Representation+in+Hospitality+Leadership+2020+final.pdf>
- IHG Hotels & Resorts (2020). A message from our CEO: Standing up for what is right. Available from: <https://www.ihgplc.com/en/news-and-media/news-releases/2020/keith-barr-standing-up-for-what-is-right>
- Marriott International (2020). We stand against racism, June 18. Available from: <https://news.marriott.com/news/2020/06/18/we-stand-against-racism>
- Saunders Hotel Group (2022). A statement on racial equality from the Saunders family and the Saunders hotel group team. Available from: <https://saundershotelgroup.com/a-statement-on-racial-equality/>
- Shum, C., Gatling, A., & Garlington, J. (2020). All people are created equal? Racial discrimination and its impact on hospitality career satisfaction. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 89, 102407. Available from: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0278431919304888>
- Tourism Diversity Matters (2021). Kimpton hotels & restaurants – Black Lives Matter act to action, April 5. Available from: <https://tourismdiversitymatters.org/kimpton-hotels-restaurants/>
- Travel Update (2020). Is the travel industry co-opting the Black Lives Matter movement?. Available from: <https://travelupdate.com/travel-brands-black-lives-matter/>

Further reading

- Barr, K. (2020). A time for action: Creating an inclusive culture. *Hospitalitynet*, June 30. Available from: <https://www.hospitalitynet.org/news/4099429.html>
- Choice Hotels International, Inc. (2020). Choice Hotels continues focus on increasing diversity across hospitality industry by creating one-of-a-kind Choice Hotels owners African American alliance. *Cision PR Newswire*, December 9. Available from: <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/choice-hotels-continues-focus-on-increasing-diversity-across-hospitality-industry-by-creating-one-of-a-kind-choice-hotels-owners-african-american-alliance-301189481.html>