

Career Longevity of Hospitality Graduates

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A survey of hospitality alumni from two- and four-year programs, including those currently employed in the industry and those who have departed from the industry, shows that within five years of graduation, 38 percent of hospitality graduates have left employment in the hospitality industry or chose to never enter the industry for which they trained. Factors affecting the graduates' career longevity, their likes and dislikes about employment, and their reasons for continuing employment or exiting were examined.

The hospitality industry is facing a shortage of trained managers interested in working at the operations level of food service and lodging establishments. A contributing factor to this situation is the decreased pool of available workers due to the demographic gap between the babyboomers and the echo children. This trend indicates that fewer potential managers will be available to the industry; a related issue is the increased demand for employees. Between 1990 and 2005 there will be 76,200 job openings annually for food service and lodging managers to fill positions due to growth or to replacement needs.¹ Hospitality organizations cannot change the supply or the pool of available managers and will not be able to change the growing demand for managers unless industry growth is curtailed. Therefore, the result will be a continued shortage of available, well-qualified managers.

Hospitality Graduates Have Concerns

It has been suggested in a study of 449 alumni of 11 college and university hospitality programs by Pavesic and Brymer² that a hole exists in the reservoir of managers because hospitality trained college graduates have chosen to take a quick exit from the industry. Graduates have a low percentage rate of staying employed in the industry for which they have trained. Nearly one-third of the alumni of hotel and restaurant management programs have either left the industry by the fifth year after graduation or never entered hospitality management.

From this same survey, these industry employees expressed concerns or dislikes about their hospitality employment. The least liked attributes of the hospitality job were hours, shifts, and schedules; financial concerns; and personal priorities. These researchers found that the top two preferences of hospitality employment included challenge and direct involvement/direct contact with people. Two recent industry surveys indicated that individuals currently employed have many concerns regarding overall desirability of hospitality employment. Woods and Macaulay³ interviewed hotel and restaurant executives, managers, and employees and reported that the quality of supervision, pay and benefits, working conditions, quality of co-workers, and job satisfaction were causes of managerial turnover. Williams and Hunter⁴ reported that junior hotel managers and supervisors believed that pay levels were not comparable to other industries, excessive number of work hours were required, and not enough pay was received for managerial hours worked.

In order to more fully understand the issues regarding hospitality employment longevity of hotel and restaurant majors. A study was conducted of alumni of nine hospitality programs who graduated between 1986 and 1991, including graduates of two- and four-year institutions from various regions of the country. These alumni included hospitality managers and employees currently employed in the industry and those who have departed from the industry. Inclusion of hospitality program alumni who were no longer employed in the industry is a unique aspect of this study.

Hospitality was broadly categorized to include any business that involved food service, lodging, and travel. A survey of 22 questions yielded the following demographic data: age, sex, marital status, ethnic origin, year of graduation from high school, year of graduation from college, type of hospitality degree earned, specific hospitality major, participation in experiential programs, and employment in the hospitality industry as an undergraduate student. Participants were asked to describe their career paths to include all positions within or outside of the hospitality industry. Alumni who were presently working in a hospitality business were asked to indicate their three primary likes and three primary dislikes about working in the industry and their reasons for continued employment. Also, graduates who no longer were employed in a hospitality business reported their three primary likes and three primary dislikes about their previous hospitality employment and their reasons for departure from this industry.

The survey was developed and pretested on alumni from the researchers' institutions. Initially, hospitality programs which were members of CHRIE (Council of Hotel, Restaurant, Institutional Education) were randomly selected to be used. However, when permission was sought from the program chairman or university registrar to use their graduates, most schools were unable to release names of alumni due to confidentiality or because schools lacked adequate alumni records. Therefore, a convenience sample of 2,000 graduates

Table 1
Career Path of Hospitality Graduates

Career Path	Percent
Employed in hospitality exclusively or currently	61.7
Previously employed in hospitality but not currently	30.6
Never employed in hospitality	7.1

was used. There were 548 returned surveys for a response rate of 27.4 percent without any attempt to follow up after the initial mailing since participants were promised complete anonymity.

Factors Can Predict Longevity

Sixty-two percent of respondents were currently working in the hospitality industry. The remaining 38 percent had either left the industry or never worked in it. (See Table 1).

The data from these two groups (the alumni currently in the industry and the alumni who previously worked in hospitality) were analyzed to determine if one or more variables would predict which alumni would remain employed in the hospitality. SAS'S PROC STEPDISC (stepwise) selected the subset of predictors to produce the discrimination function. Wilk's lambda was used to measure the reliability of the contribution of each variable examined. Wilks lambda was significant at 0.0001. Predictors included in the discrimination analysis model were married woman, year of graduation from college, number of raises, number of promotions, satisfaction with academic preparation, satisfaction with choice of college, and satisfaction with career path. Variables with low predictive power and excluded in the model were age, sex, marital status, ethnic origin, year of graduation from high school, type of hospitality degree earned, major, experiential programs, work in hospitality as undergraduate student, and family members working in the hospitality industry.

Discriminant analysis of the data showed that six of the eight predictive variables were significant at 0.3 or greater. Table 2 shows the results.

Satisfaction with college program and with college choice were significant predictors of continued hospitality employment. Intuitively, it might be concluded that if one is employed in the field for which he/she has trained, that person looks back favorably at his/her academic preparation and at the institution where he/she studied. Position responsibilities require him/her to use the theories and principles gained in the undergraduate curriculum giving more meaning and value to the undergraduate degree and the institution.

Discriminant analysis showed that career path satisfaction was a predictor of who stayed employed. Possibly this was a predictive vari-

Table 2
Predictors of Continued Hospitality Employment

Predictor	CAN1
Salary	-0.169150
Married woman	0.305928
Year graduated	-0.197625
Number of promotions	-0.350423
Number of raises	-0.397022
Satisfaction with college	0.463210
Satisfaction with program	0.858568
Satisfaction with career	0.517361

able because those individuals who view themselves as successful wish to continue these positive thoughts about themselves and their fit with their work. In addition, those individuals who stayed were pleased with promotions and pay increases. These became positive reinforcements of their feelings of success. Positive reinforcements are a well established way to encourage behavior patterns. In this case, the pattern was continued employment.

The final predictor was married female. Initially this may seem to be an enigma, but given the relative young age (mean age 29.1) of the population and the short time since graduation, hospitality employment may be a realistic choice for these individuals at this point in their lives when few other demands require their time and energy.

Salary level was not a predictor of longevity. Since this result was surprising, a crosstab was done between salary and career satisfaction. Salary level was not found to be a statistically significant factor in career satisfaction, but when the anecdotal responses regarding dislikes of the industry responses from those currently and previously employed in hospitality were compared, it was found that low pay was cited by 56 percent of the respondents who were previous hospitality employees as a primary dislike and by 46 percent of the present hospitality employees as a dislike. Since pay was not a predictor of longevity nor significantly related to career satisfaction, one might conclude that the apparent discrepancy between the statistical measures and the anecdotal data is that traditionally pay has simply been a long-standing griping point for hospitality employees. Our survey validated this point since both groups cited low pay as a problem yet pay had no statistical relevance to longevity.

Other than pay, the study documented graduates' likes and dislikes. These concerns were further explored by contrasting the lists of dislikes and likes of those currently employed to those concerns from the industry drop-outs. (See Tables 3 and 4). Both former and current

Table 3
Primary Dislikes About the Hospitality Industry

Dislikes	Current Hospitality	Former Hospitality
Long Hours	65%	65%
Low Pay	46%	56%
Inflexible Work Schedule	25%	23%
Lack of Recognition	25%	24%

employees shared the following dislikes: long hours, inflexible work schedules, and lack of recognition. It was found that the top four responses were identical and their percentages of each response were nearly parallel. While the dislikes of those currently employed were similar to findings of other studies, only current employees were questioned in previous studies. This study surveyed both those in the industry as well as those who worked in the industry but have now departed. Apparently these dislikes which relate to quality of life issues were present for all graduates but were not strong enough to cause everyone to leave his or her employment.

Similar to the responses to the question about primary dislikes, the results of the question to identify primary likes from the two groups were also nearly identical. Again previous studies found similar responses when hospitality alumni who were currently employed were asked to identify the positive aspects about hospitality employment. However, information about the likes from those who have left the industry has not typically been gathered. Since both groups expressed strong similarities in their percentages of cited industry likes, apparently for individuals who have departed, these positive factors were overshadowed by the dislikes and the industry was not able to retain the employees.

Long Hours, Low Pay Top Dislikes List

When alumni were asked to cite the foremost reasons that they left the industry for another career field, the top two responses were long hours and low pay, both listed at 17 percent. These were previously identified as top dislikes by those currently employed as well as by those who have left the industry. It is possible that these dislikes may become reasons for attrition. Lost enthusiasm followed with 10 percent and change in family status with 8 percent.

The three primary reasons to continue hospitality employment were variety of job interactions, (18 percent), excitement in change in task and responsibility (15 percent), and success at job responsibility (13 percent). Given the immediate feedback nature of the industry and

Table 4
Primary Likes About the Hospitality Industry

Likes	In Industry	Left Industry
Variety of job interactions with customers and employees	18%	18%
Success at job responsibilities	13%	13%
Excitement of change in task and responsibility	15%	13%

its breadth of job responsibilities, it is natural to have these factors as reasons for continued employment.

Results Can Be Used To Give Direction

The findings regarding employment longevity of hospitality alumni indicated that many chose a quick exit from industry employment. The predictors for continued employment are satisfaction with program, career, and college; number of promotions and raises; and married female. Industry may wish to use these findings in structuring interview questions and in their recognition that salary itself may be less important than the intermittent raises and promotions in order to increase the retention of their employees.

The primary likes about the industry were variety of job interactions, success at job responsibilities, and excitement of change in task and responsibility. Primary dislikes were long hours, low pay, inflexible work schedule, and lack of recognition. Both lists of the likes and dislikes about the industry cited by those currently employed and by those no longer employed were remarkably similar and also match the reasons given to stay employed or depart. It would seem to follow that industry attention to these issues would promote career longevity. Similar characteristics of employment produce opposite choices by employees — to continue employment or to exit from hospitality.

A blanket solution will not likely be an effective direction to enhance industry retention. Rather, employers may want to consider individualistic approaches for improved retention such as use of the many techniques of career pathing. While this study used pay as a possible predictor of career longevity, other likes and dislikes given by the respondents were not analyzed. Future studies may want to address these issues.

References

- ¹National Restaurant Association, *Current Issues Report* (January 1992): 1-28.
²D.V. Pavesic and R.A. Brymer, "Industry retention/attrition of hospitality graduates," *Hospitality Education and Research Journal* (1989): 267-274.

³R.H. Woods and J.F. Macaulay, "Rx for turnover: Retention programs that work," *The Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Quarterly* (May 1989): 79-90.

⁴P.W. Williams and M. Hunter, "Recruitment and retention insights for the hotel industry," *FIU Hospitality Review* (Spring 1991): 51-58.

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