

Tips for Employers: Recruitment and Retention in the Wake of the Pandemic

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The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly impacted the lodging and hospitality industry, especially when it comes to recruitment and retention of employees. From “stay-at-home” orders to mask and vaccine mandates and school closures, the past two years have been a rollercoaster ride. The pandemic has also shed light on the vulnerability of companies whose business relies on social gatherings, with many companies forced to close their doors or lay off workers early in the pandemic.

As COVID-19 vaccines became accessible and case numbers declined, consumer confidence rose and guests started to fill up hotels and restaurants, causing employers to look for workers again. However, finding workers in the wake of the pandemic has not been easy. Hospitality workers have been hesitant to return to the workplace, an inherently consumer-filled environment. Further, workers do not want to put themselves in the same vulnerable position of potentially losing their livelihood the next time there is an uptick of cases. As a result, many individuals went to work in other industries or relocated to less “risky” areas.

The spread of the omicron variant has caused a recent surge in COVID-19 cases, especially in South Florida. Workers, in general, are legitimately getting sick or are fearful of being exposed to the virus.

Over the recent holidays, many consumers had a different experience in their hotel stays or restaurant outings, than what they were accustomed to, pre-pandemic, after witnessing the labor shortages first-hand. As a result of these less than ideal experiences, some may be deterred from traveling or dining out in the future.

As we learn to navigate through the many new challenges and obstacles in the wake of this version of the pandemic, business owners and managers must continue to learn to adapt to remain successful and consider incentives to attract and retain top talent.

My thoughts/recommendations around recruitment and retention are as follows:

Safety first.

The safety of your employees should be a top priority. Prioritizing their safety, as well as the safety of your customers, will make potential and existing employees feel more comfortable working for your business.

Compensation.

Make the compensation opportunity so attractive that potential employees would consider the risky hospitality job over a less risky job outside of hospitality. This also serves as an incentive for your current employees to stay.

Transparency.

Provide transparency with things like the company’s stance on masks, vaccines and testing. Also, be upfront about company expectations, policies and procedures. Employees are leaving because they are told one thing at the interview phase and then discover another upon working for the company.

Be kind.

Workers are putting themselves at greater risk working in the hospitality setting and are dealing with some not-so-nice customers. The least you can do is have management be nice to its workers. Word will travel. Employers should also be understanding and mindful of — and plan for — employees with parental responsibilities and whose children are experiencing school and childcare shutdowns throughout the country.

Compliance.

Offering safety and comfort, and remaining compliant, can go a long way towards recruitment and retention. Workers are leaving hospitality jobs due to unsafe and noncompliant working conditions. Stay in close contact with counsel to assist you with everything you need to know and do to remain in compliance in 2022.

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