

Propel info

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Meeting the Brexit challenge in hospitality – an opportunity for guest experience by Steven Pike

One of the biggest challenges facing hospitality businesses over the next few years is managing the reduction in migrant workers likely to result from the Brexit fall-out. Although the specifics are still anyone's guess, a report earlier this year by the British Hospitality Association and KPMG put the potential employment gap at 60,000 per year if immigration from the EU is too tightly controlled after the UK's exit. This has big implications for guest experience management, which relies on a full team for consistent delivery. Where staff are overworked, it's a huge ask to expect them to affect a positive, welcoming and relaxed service style.

So what's the solution? With the figures showing hospitality businesses in London rely on EU nationals to fill 75% of waiting vacancies in an industry that's known for its fast turnover of staff, a cultural shift is required to plug the gap. Hospitality businesses will need to get better at retaining staff. If they manage to achieve this (I'll talk about how they can do this in a moment), guests benefit. You're more likely to experience great service from staff who are invested in the organisation they work for and fully embedded in its culture. Both of these qualities develop over time and operate on a reciprocal basis. In short, as an employer, you get out what you put in.

Training that emphasises an organisation's values and draws on experiences of staff members who've worked their way up from entry level to the higher echelons of management or head office should be used as inspiring examples of what's possible (and what's encouraged), in the business. There should be a sense of: "This is where we think you can go. Stay with us, there's a future here." At a micro-level, celebrating day-to-day success is key to this and should be enshrined in the running of the business, ensuring staff feel their hard work is noticed and rewarded.

Another way to add staying appeal for employees is to create a culture that offers something extra and unique – a great social experience, perks, flexibility. All of these will maximise the "stickiness" of your business as far as even casual staff are concerned. It's easy to forget as a hospitality provider, there's an equal challenge in

marketing yourself to staff as there is to appeal to your customers. Your business needs to be somewhere staff, as well as guests, want to be. There will always be a transient nature to staffing in hospitality, but people are more likely to stick around if there are a few extra incentives.

The industry may also need to broaden its idea of what an ideal worker looks like. Although endless column inches have been devoted to how to attract and retain millennials, particularly when businesses are looking for staff who are more likely to stay on a longer-term basis, opting for a mixture of ages and life stages among staff makes sense. Enthusiasm, energy and fun – all standard customer service personality requirements – don't have to equate to youth. Older, more experienced staff can match these traits and also have the advantage of being more likely to stay in the job, reducing training costs and inconvenience in the long term.

In a [report](#) by Swiss researchers based on German data of two million employees in 18,000 companies, the authors reference a number of studies that show an age-diverse workforce benefits from an enriched ability to approach problems from a range of perspectives. Where there's a mixture of ages in a team, staff are also more likely to relate better to an age-diverse customer base. The latter could be great news for the guest experience.

Steven Pike is managing director of HGEM

