

Beyond hospitality: The new face of hospitality management graduates

By [Susina Jooste](#)

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Question: What do you think the following people have in common? The guest relations manager in your bank; the principal of a real estate company; the manager of the VIP airport lounge; the food and beverage manager at the Hilton hotel in the Seychelles; the facilities manager of the private hospital in your area and a semi-finalist for the global San Pellegrino Young Chef of the Year award?

Answer: They all obtained a qualification in hospitality management during the last few years.



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A fairly fixed perception and expectation of the role and responsibility comes to mind when we talk about a doctor, a lawyer, an engineer, or a schoolteacher. But what do we know about the careers of professional hospitality management graduates? Are they all employed as hotel managers and chefs?

You will be surprised to find that more and more corporate companies are recruiting hotel school graduates for management positions to ensure that the full needs and expectations of their customers are met. Corporate brands and human resource managers are looking ahead and recognise the important role that hospitality has in the success of their business.

The definition of hospitality has changed from the "cordial and generous reception and entertainment of guests, visitors or strangers" to a whole new perception of what it means to live and work in the hospitality industry, and this is opening up a surfeit of career opportunities for hospitality management graduates.

The future is hospitable, indeed

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The hospitality and tourism industry continues to be one of the fastest-growing and most vibrant sectors of Africa's economy (African Tourism Leadership Forum, August 2018, Accra, Ghana), despite the socio-economic and related challenges globally.

At the 2018 International Travel Trade Show in Germany held in March 2018, South African Tourism CEO, Sisa Ntshona, stated that the tourism and hospitality sectors are vitally important to the South African economy and that the sector should be nurtured for sustained and inclusive growth. The growing number of people employed in these industries provides backing to Ntshona's comment that youngsters should consider the sector when exploring career opportunities.

Hospitality and tourism training institutions, therefore, have to continuously review their curriculums to ensure they incorporate the shifting demands of the industry as well as ensure that graduates are equipped to practise and demonstrate their responsibility and initiative in a wider hospitality context. The demands of a dynamic industry necessitate the development of integrated competencies that draw on various disciplines, including management, entrepreneurship and innovation, finance, law and legislation and leadership development.

A foremost example of this shifting of customer demand in hospitality and tourism is the growing consumer desire to adapt to an all-encompassing wellness lifestyle.

Personal and professional well-being

According to The Global Wellness Tourism Economy Report (November 2018), **wellness tourism has been growing** at more than double the rate and creating new opportunities for all tourism and hospitality-related businesses. Aspects of personal and professional wellbeing must, therefore, feature in a training institutions' curriculum and include topics on health and wellness, nutrition, resorts, retreats and spas as additional services to enhance the guest experience. This focus will further impart valuable information for the personal wellbeing of the hospitality professional.

The new generation of hospitality management graduates is vested to evaluate whether their career choice is compatible with their own wellbeing. The participation of current generation students in the workplace is mainly governed by intrinsic factors such as personal interest, the broadening of horizons, and own ambitions for a prosperous career.

Gone are the days when students can be forced to accept bullying and abuse, ridicule and harassment and exhaustingly long working hours without any or additional compensation as part of their internship practice.

The new generation of hospitality management interns expects to be given substantial, meaningful and career-related job

assignments, not just mindless drudgery.

- They want to participate in learning experiences that are genuine and relevant to their academic studies and which will contribute to their personal and professional development.
- They are willing to take ownership of their expected internship responsibilities but are benchmarking it against their own goals and objectives.
- They are empowered to distinguish between good and bad ethics; to evaluate the effects of planning or the lack of planning visible in the management style of their supervisors; to act on tolerance and reject intolerance and continuously evaluate their role in the bigger world of work while developing a sense of self.

According to Richard Lyon, General Manager at One & Only Hotel in Cape Town, and keynote speaker at the annual graduation ceremony of The Private Hotel School (TPHS) held earlier this year, managerial styles in the hospitality industry have changed hugely over the last few years. He is of the opinion that managers should be more visible in order to keep up with the real every day (professional and personal) issues of their employees. Lyon says that they solve more problems over a casual cup of tea than in an official meeting. Staff members are more open to discussing ideas if the manager is more open to accepting ideas from their staff.

Listen to what recent graduate Logan Leisse has to say when she was asked how it feels to be named as one of the 135 candidates selected from over 50 countries as a semi-finalist for the global S.Pellegrino Young Chef 2020 Edition:

“ It felt amazing! Chef Michael encouraged me to enter a starter that I've developed for the restaurant and I did so without knowing how big a deal this competition is. Cavalli has been so great to me and I'm so glad I did my internship there. The working environment is like no other restaurant kitchen I've worked in; there's a sense of mutual respect and care that makes you want to work in this industry regardless of how tough it gets. There's no bullying and the kitchen team feels more like a family than colleagues. Chef Michael has the perfect leadership style by balancing being strict with being fair, which is why so many respect him. He loves to work with students because his passion is to teach and help them grow. He is the ultimate mentor. ”

Now, isn't it refreshing when a graduate speaks in this way about an industry which is notorious for its long hours, low pay, high staff-turnover and a precedent of bullying and abuse? Dare we place our hopes in the new generation of hospitality graduates to build a more professional work environment and to 'take the hostility out of hospitality'?

'Hospitality Management' represents a study field that is so vast that it should be an independent and established professionals in this day and age, and yet it remains an undeveloped discipline and has not acquired the rightful academic recognition amongst other disciplines such as law, education or medicine.

There is an obligation on all stakeholders - including the industry organisations and employers, the training institutions and the hospitality graduates - to continuously contribute to the professionalisation of this industry. Only then will it be considered as a respected career option by young talented individuals who can contribute to the South African economy and its society.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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