Effective Management Strategies: Millennial Leaders Managing a Multigenerational Workplace

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Introduction

The hospitality industry depends on service-oriented interactions between guest and frontline employees. These interactions institute the success of the business. As the hospitality industry is continuing to grow each year, it has become more evident that employees need proper training, continual learning, and a well-rounded management team (Kotler & Keller, 2009). Moreover, the relationship between employees and managers is more important than ever. Employees need a leader who can assist them throughout their daily work routine. The leader has to empower their employees to resolve guest complaints quickly as possible. The relationship between these two working individuals has to be built upon respect, trust, and understanding. These effective leadership styles, however, have evolved over time. The hospitality industry has now three, very different generations working together.

Furthermore, the hospitality industry is seeing an influx of young, Generation Y (Millennial) managers leading a team of multigenerational employees. As these younger leaders continue to manage the hospitality industry upon college graduation, it is important to understand that this multigenerational workplace is not going away anytime soon (Cahill & Sadak, 2012). As recent graduates and young leaders lead these expanding hospitality establishments, strategies for effective management with multigenerational employees become important. Hiring leaders within hospitality want to know that their front-line managers are willing to adapt and handle the attitudes and work ethics of a multiethnic and multigenerational team. It is also important for more experienced leaders to mold and shape these future leaders within the industry.

This case study provides a scenario about a young Christopher, recently graduated restaurant manager currently leading a multi-faceted establishment at a Four-Star Resort & Spa in Miami, Florida. This resort has a diverse workforce. There are three generations working together to provide services and products for guests. Recently the establishment appointed Christopher as the new restaurant manager. As a millennial many of the other employees have high seniority above him within the organization and some have worked for the company for

over 30 years in the same role. Christopher, feels that he can earn the respect of the more senior employees and can begin to make positive changes that will provide an overall, enhanced guest experience. The pushback from the senior employees for the changes that Christopher wants to introduce begin to intimidate his work ethic as he works hard to earn their trust. However, a successful leader has to mold and shape their leadership style to different generations in the workplace. The case study provides background of understanding generational leadership style differences with a brief overview of the Millennial workforce attributes. It also highlights generational differences with a view on preferred leadership styles. It ends by raising several questions about the young restaurant manager's leadership style and how his willingness to make changes in the workplace can have a different outcome if presented in the appropriate way.

This case study therefore presents a unique opportunity to discuss the realistic leadership challenges for young leaders within the hospitality industry. As recent graduates prepare to lead front-line hospitality establishments, strategies for effective management with multigenerational employees become important. Hiring leaders within hospitality will want to know that now, more than ever, front-line managers are willing to adapt and handle the attitudes and work ethics of a multiethnic and multigenerational team. The discussion topics regarding different generational work values for employees promote critical thinking of management strategies for these up and coming Millennial leaders.

Upon the completion of studying this case study, learners should be able to:

- Define and understand the different generations that are working in the hospitality industry.
- Discuss how different attitudes, beliefs, and work-values vary depending on the specific, respected generation.
- Analyze how Millennials are now leading multigenerational teams.
- Understand the attitudes of Millennials and how leadership styles need to adapt and change to specific employee teams.
- Construct an action plan for leading and managing each, respected generation.

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Theoretical Foundation

Upon entering the new millennium, the workplace was faced with the entrance of another generation of workers, which is Gen Y (Millennial). Previous studies have examined the generational differences within the workplace. Cahill and Sadrak (2012) found that while leaders are aware that the Baby-Boomer Generation are approaching retirement and may have been advised of tensions among employees resulting from generational differences, most leaders have made generational issues a low priority. Specifically, workforce employees within the hospitality industry are more so diverse and multiethnic. Fierce competition and diversity create new challenges for leading hospitality organizations (Chen and Choi, 2008). As these multigenerational employees work together, it becomes more important to examine the differences within these generational values.

The Value in Understanding Generational Leadership Style Differences

This case study focuses on the leaders within Generation Y, or Millennials who were born between 1978 and 2000. This workforce has to understand how to lead and manage the generational differences in work values. Appreciation of the defining characteristics of the Millennial generation has significance (Broadbridge and Maxwell, 2014). There is an increasing challenge and demand for professionals and human resource leaders to create supportive work environments for an increasingly diverse population of multiple generations in the workforce (Maier, 2011). For example, "understanding the differences between these generations relative to organizational behavioral constructs could result in the development of more effective human resource management strategies" (Chen and Choi, 2008, p. 596).

Leading a Multigenerational Workforce

It is important to incorporate organizational policies, procedures, and structures that fit the needs of the multigenerational workforce. Cahill and Sadrak (2012) suggest that organizations need to develop not only leaders but also employees who are generationally sensitive and competent in their business exchanges. It is now more important to address the generational differences with employees. By addressing such concerns, teams can better understand the differences and work harder to accept the ever-changing workplace.

Millennial Career Attributes

Millennials demonstrate behavioral trends that are influencing other generations throughout the world (Crews et. al., 2014). Millennials are focused on a graduate career level of entry where their recently awarded degree constitutes a higher level of job entry than applicants without degrees. There are expectations of having some flexibility in working hours and of having a level of salary proportionate with graduate employment (Broadbridge et al., 2010). Millennials also desire an energizing career, but they also think long-term in their aspirations. Compared to other genera-

tions, Millennials are the hardest to retain in the workplace (Bosselman et al., 2015). Damaske et al. (2014) attribute Millennial's career turnover through dissatisfaction with career progression. Millennials are dissatisfied not only with the speed at which their careers were progressing, but also with the scope of individual promotions and career moves.

The "Three Generations"

Chen and Choi (2007) adapt the concept of three generations in the workforce: Baby Boomers (1946-1964), Generation X (1965-1977), and Millennials (Generation Y - 1978-2000). The research provided by Zopiatis et al. (2012) also uncovers the differences and similarities among preferred leadership styles within the three generations. As noted in Table 1, each generation has distinctive experiences that have influenced their occupational values and beliefs. Upon examination of the leadership style that each generational prefers, industry organizations should focus their attention on the new generation of hospitality employees, the Millennials, which are perceived by members of the other two generations to be different (Zopiatis et. al., 2012).

Case: Background to Christopher Payne

Working part-time while attending a respectable university in Florida, 21-year-old Christopher was in his last semester of college. He would soon receive his Bachelor of Science Degree in Hospitality Management with a focus on Restaurant Operations. His work experience was deeply rooted within the front-of-house restaurant operations and he had a sharp eye for attention to detail. He was a restaurant server and certified trainer within a well-known beachfront, Four-Diamond resort in Miami, Florida. Loved by his guests and co-workers, he was consistently pleasant to work with. He was a quick learner and was a huge part of the new technology rollout that the Resort was adapting.

During his last semester of college, Christopher began looking at management opportunities at a sister property from his part-time serving position. The organization owned over twenty-five properties and had been in the resort spotlight since 1971. The properties had won multiple awards and were highly rated by guests and employees alike. While networking and fine-tuning his résumé, Christopher decided that an entry-level food and beverage restaurant management position was the perfect fit for his next career step. He knew that his classmates and recent graduates were also looking for jobs; competition would make it difficult to gain a management position without previous supervisor experience. However, he believed that his hard work and positive work ethic with his immediate leaders would help him secure a full-time, permanent spot within the Resort organization. Moreover, Christopher felt that he was entitled to receive this position, considering he would soon have his undergraduate degree and had worked hard for the company thus far.

Table 1

Generational matrix with views on leadership style

	Generation Baby Boomer	Generation X	Generation Y
Views on authority	Respect authority and hierarchy in the workplace See organizations with integrity Although respectful of authority, they will challenge the system	Have no problem questioning authority, if they do not get what they want they have no problem to look for a new job Skeptical and unimpressed with authority	Refuse to pay dues Question authority Rules are made to be broken Challenge workplace norms
Views on change	Very resistant to change Feel betrayed by downsizing, re-engineering and restricting but believe they are capable of changing and improving situations	Both expect and demand change Very adaptive to change Comfortable with change and diversity	Addicted to change Embrace change
Views on supervision and guidance	Like being in charge May be insulted by constant feedback although they want their achievement to be recognized Requires little feedback Have difficulty admitting something is wrong	Expect managers to be direct with them They prefer to work independently with minimal supervision, focus quickly to get results and thrive on opportunities to grow Expect specific constructive feedback on their performance	Need constant feedback Expect personal attention to be given to each employee by managers Desire immediate feedback about performance Constantly seek approval and praise Want managers who empower them and who are open and positive
Views on management style	Prefer micro-management Advocate a participatory style of management, nevertheless, they find it difficult to practice	Do not take well micromanagement Respond well to a coaching management style that provides prompt feedback and credit for results	Hate micromanagement Seek managerial support, yet detest micromanagement Favor an inclusive style of management Dislike micromanagement and slowness
Attitude towards respect	Hard to gain respect	Respect towards management should be earned and not automatically deserved due to the title	Tend to value respect and wants to earn it

Source: Adapted from Zopiatis et al. (2012).

Graduation... New Job, New Beginning

After a few panel interviews, Christopher received a phone call that he had received a position within the food and beverage management department. Elated and excited, Christopher started his new position two weeks after graduation. Christopher was placed at a multi-faceted operation. He was now leading a table service restaurant, resort lobby bar and lounge, in-room dining, three quick-service eateries and a large pool bar. Christopher was also attending management and leadership classes. He thought that these classes were generally boring, tedious, and spent too much time delivering theoretical concepts and facts rather than allowing managers and leaders to have more role-playing experiences that could assist them in real life situations.. Christopher felt that he had already learned everything there was to know about the management of people within the industry. He was ready to lead his team to success. He knew if he performed his role well, he would be easily promoted to the next level.

Christopher's team of employees was diverse. Some of them were twice his age; some had worked as a server for over 30 years; some were even younger college students working part-time, just as he did not too long ago. He was continually challenged while trying to earn the respect and trust of the older generations in the workplace. However, the employees who were similar in age with Christopher respected and trusted his judgment and wanted to be his friend. This was a test for Christopher. He felt that there was no initial connection made between him and these older employees. What did they have in common? What did the older generations look for in their ideal leader? How could he keep the younger employees trust without overstepping the boundaries of being their friend and leader? They did not teach him how to lead a team of multigenerational employees in university or management and leadership classes.

The "New Kid"

One day during training, Christopher overheard the employees asking each other about the "new kid" who was wearing a suit. They paid no interest to Christopher as they had seen many young leaders

and managers come and go in their time at the resort. The servers understood their job and what needed to be done to appease their guests. Their line of service was both a skill and an art. Christopher was intimidated and nervous, as he was unsure of how he could now step into this management role and earn their respect. He was not sure how long it would take before they accepted him. Clouded by his thoughts, he only wanted to earn the employees' respect and make a name for himself.

An Attempt at Change

Before long, Christopher was asked by his immediate leader, the Restaurant General Manager (RGM) to begin his attempt at making some positive changes in his work place. The RGM held Christopher at a high level and expected positive results. He also believed that respect towards management should be earned and not automatically deserved due to Christopher's new title. Before long, Christopher started to expand and change the bar and beverage menus of some of the locations at the resort. Some of these changes were not well received by everyone. The older generations of employees were consistently challenging Christopher. They always wanted to know the "why" behind a change. Were they setting Christopher up for failure? Meanwhile, the younger employees were excited for these new concepts and saw their check averages increasing due to the higher point of sales for the new menus.

It was an "Attempt", After All…

To Christopher's surprise, one full year had already passed; to say the least, Christopher was tired and almost burn out. On his own, he had to make tough decisions about discipline and holding his employees accountable for the actions they would take. He felt that the older employees did not take direction well. He even had to be the mediator in multiple conflict management situations where he felt ill prepared and caught off-guard. The RGM was focused on the restaurant's prestigious wine program and working closely with the other managers who were much closer in age. The employees of the restaurant did not understand the technology that was provided to them and Christopher continually became frustrated when he had to keep explaining how to work the newly updated systems.

While Christopher and the RGM spoke about the successes and opportunities of the operation, not much communication took place between the RGM and Christopher about working with this diverse group of individuals. However, the RGM did not like to micromanage; he was impressed with what Christopher was able to bring thus far to the restaurant complex. After all, Christopher did successfully create and bring a new cocktail and beverage program with focus on craft beer and fresh ingredients. As previously mentioned, this change too, of course, did not come without strong pushback from the servers who were used to the same products and offerings for the past decade. As for the positives, Christopher was technologically savvy. There was no computer or point of sale issue that was too small for him. He was comfortable talk-

ing with guests and could handle guest issues or complaints. However, if a guest saw fear in Christopher's eyes, they would pounce and recognize that he was inexperienced. While he had room to grow, Christopher was still quite pleased with his performance.

Christopher's restaurant management experience was quickly turning from something that he had hoped would be a positive learning experience into something he was ill prepared for. He was not sure if he can break through to his employees and utilize his natural leadership talents to lead the team while earning his entire team's respect – not just the younger employees. He wondered if his own leader cared enough to teach him how to deal with the older employees. He had so many questions and wanted to ask but did not want to feel like he was incapable of leading the team. Christopher began to question his leadership capabilities and if he should leave the company for another that respected his willingness to bring change to an organization.

Concluding Thoughts

This case study discusses effective management strategies for Millennial leaders' ability to manage multigenerational employees in the hospitality industry. Christopher has worked hard to make the workplace fun, challenging and exciting. He knows that he learned a lot during his time in leadership thus far. However, the pushback from the older employees has grown to be more of a problem than a solution. He does not want to give up and start somewhere new but knows that he has to make a change if he wants to create a fun and exciting work environment. Christopher is mostly concerned with how he can improve his leadership skills and techniques with employees and managers from multigenerational backgrounds. One thing is certain: he has to earn the respect of his employees if he is going to continue his food and beverage management career. He knows that if he pushes too hard to earn respect and trust, he may overstep and may miss the opportunity to be considered for any future promotion. He has to act smart without letting his emotions grab hold of his reactions.

Discussion Questions

- What should Christopher do to improve his relationship with his immediate leader (Generation X) RGM?
- Should Christopher use the younger employees as "leverage" to influence the older generation of employees?
- Should Christopher use different leadership styles while leading his team or should he use a mixture of leadership styles to breakthrough to his team?
- What should hospitality organizations do to better prepare their younger managers for leading multigenerational teams?
- What should hospitality management programs do to better prepare their students for leading multigenerational teams?
- Table 1 provides a generational matrix with a closer look at respected views on leadership style. In the following example,

Generation Y is a manager/leader within a hospitality organization that in changing all employee shift start and end times to save labor costs. Based upon the respected views of leadership style for the Baby Boomers and Generation X, compare and contrast how this Generation Y leader will need to enforce this new policy without losing trust in their employees.

- At what point do we stop viewing the Millennial Generation as joining hospitality organizations and accept the reality that hospitality organizations have become "their" organizations?

Additional Reading Materials

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