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## In Retrospect: Quest of Hospitality Faculty for Identity

### **Abstract**

It has been 100 years since Iowa State University first offered a program in hospitality education. One of the pioneer educators in the field presents a retrospective based upon a career that spanned much of that period.

# In retrospect: Quest of hospitality faculty for identity

by Donald E. Lundberg

*It has been 100 years since Iowa State University first offered a program in hospitality education. One of the pioneer educators in the field presents a retrospective based upon a career that spanned much of that period.*

Hospitality faculty are often faced with two problems: How to formulate an identity and how to achieve academic respectability, a search for status and definition.

The field of hospitality management lacks a fixed formulary or canon. It grows by accretion, lineaments unclear. The most recent encyclopedia definition of tourism leaves the reader with a vague understanding of its extent and parameters. Those who teach in the field are left without a clear picture of where they fit in and what their status is in the academy.

Fortunately there was Ezra Cornell who in 1865 asserted, "I would found an institution where any person can find instruction in any study." This resolve is emblazoned on Cornell University's great seal which permitted the first university-level hotel management course of study to be offered at Cornell, an Ivy League school, in 1922. Subsequently, a five-foot-tall, hard driving gentleman with New England smarts, Howard Bagnal Meek, was appointed dean. Known as "Prof." by his students, he was a first-class promoter and manager. When a friend of Ellsworth M. Statler, premier hotelman of his time, convinced Statler to visit the Cornell campus, the professor did what was highly unlikely: He converted Statler into a true believer. Statler at first advised students that they were wasting their time at the university. "Go home and get a job," he said. Within three days Meek had changed Statler into a staunch supporter of higher education for hotel managers. Statler set aside stock for hotel education and later his widow dedicated much of the funds generated to the Cornell school's development.

Predating the Cornell hotel program, courses in food preparation, housekeeping, institutional foods, institutional buying, and institution management were offered as early as 1898 at what was to become Iowa State University. As we know, a large number of institution management programs are administered as part of home economics colleges. Michigan State University began offering a course of study in hotel management in 1928 under "Bunny" Prouix. Other schools followed in the 1930s and 1940s.

### **New programs receive mixed welcome**

As new hotel and restaurant programs were introduced they received a mixed welcome. Some administrators wanted more students, whatever their academic majors, mainly for fiscal reasons, to generate more state support. Some faculty however, were openly critical, if for no other reason than this field was the "new kid on the block." Then there was the matter of status, or academic respectability. For some, any applied science was a little suspect. They overlook what is now generally accepted that emotional intelligence in some career fields is more important than intelligence as measured by I.Q., and energy level is often a basic for success in a particular field. Hospitality students often have both in abundance. The critics also overlook the fact that hospitality courses can be rigorous, complex, even profound, depending upon how they are taught.

An experience at a faculty senate meeting at Florida State University illustrates the kind of opposition to hospitality management expressed in the 1950s and later at some schools. A professor of physics rose up in righteous indignation that the university should harbor a department of hotel and restaurant management. He questioned why anyone would need a university level course to learn the trivia taught. His wife, he said, needed no instruction in how to cook pancakes. Would the Department of Hotel and Restaurant Management, he asked, be offering a course called Flapjacks I, followed by Flapjacks II?

Later, the FSU president at the time, a former French teacher at the University of Chicago, became intent on cleansing the university of all courses that lacked intellectual vigor. He abolished the school of journalism, library science and baking science. At the time, much of academia was influenced by Robert Maynard Hutchins, president of the University of Chicago. The great books, according to him, were enough of a curriculum for anyone.

The FSU president instructed the provost to make the hotel and restaurant department part of home economics. The author publicly disagreed with the directive and fought the move, and won, in a way. He left. The department stayed in the School of Business.

How many faculty are needed to conduct a first-rate degree program in hospitality management? Maybe only a few. The best education

according to a widely quoted apothegm of the nineteenth century was an education acquired by sitting on one end of a log with Mark Hopkins, president of Williams College, at the other end. Today, the wonders of the Internet, some say, can enable education to be self taught. Maybe, but learning is expedited when a good teacher explicates a good textbook. And some of the greatest friendships in life are between faculty and students. The faculty of many small hospitality management programs have excellent programs provided they gain the services of experts such as engineers, lawyers, and accountants from other departments, or employ adjunct professors, many of whom are thrilled to be invited to teach, at least for a while. The one-man department is hard to justify, but several such programs have done well and permit a close tutorial relationship impossible with large classes.

### **Close interaction is important**

Among the most valuable courses are those that allow for close interaction between a faculty member or a wise, successful manager, owner, or CEO and a small group of students. Formal lectures by such people are fine, but nothing like what can be learned by facilitating question and answer sessions. Visits to hospitality businesses such as hotels, restaurants, travel agencies, and airlines may be more instructive than textbooks. Project courses in which students delve into a field of interest provide insights that are remembered. Such courses require organizing and writing, lots of writing, and exercises that require practice, criticism, and more writing.

The university's location determines to some extent what courses are included in a hospitality curriculum. Cruise management as a subject loses its zing if the campus is a thousand miles away from the nearest cruise ship. Proximity to a convention center is a factor in offering a course in convention center operation.

Funding for courses may be critical. Too often university administrators have a standard reply to requests from hospitality management directors when they ask for resources: "You go out and raise the money." A job description for a program director of a hospitality management program inevitably includes "the ability to raise funds," or, as someone has put it, "learn to handle a tin cup because you'll be out there with your hand out."

### **New programs face disadvantage**

New programs, no matter where located, are at a decided disadvantage because students and potential faculty both quite naturally would prefer an established program, one with adequate facilities and laboratories. The temptation is to beat the recruiting drums and plan the programs as something for everyone when in reality some hospitality jobs are only for the select few. Managing an independent restaurant or

owning one is a tough, high-risk enterprise. Many are called, but few survive. All men are created unequal and will be made more unequal by their family backgrounds, schools attended, and parents' priorities.

Would it not be better for all concerned for the schools to set enrollment goals that are determined by the present qualified faculty, faculty qualified in both experience and academic credentials, and wouldn't it be nice to have a recruitment policy of taking only those students who evidence the personality (temperament, energy level, and basic intelligence) to enjoy serving others and the ability to make a good income doing so.

### **More than practical courses are needed**

Does being a business or hospitality management major mean that only "practical" courses should be taught? Some of the most practical courses are those that cover analysis and theory courses that give the graduate confidence in associating with people from all walks of life. Hospitality students may never need to know the fine points of ballet or Shakespeare, but it helps to be aware that Swan Lake is a magnificent ballet and that King Lear is considered a milestone in literature. Certainly civility and manners are usually appropriate no matter what the latest fad in dress or expression.

Ellsworth M. Statler is credited with setting up food cost controls and later cost-accounting methods in the business, but throughout the years it has been public accounting firms that have provided the guidelines and analysis that established ratio analysis and trendlines with which to compare operational results. The Horwath and Toth accounting book, *Hotel Accounting*, has a copyright dating from 1928. The other major accounting firm serving the industry in those days was Harris Kerr Forster & Company. Both firms have undergone several incarnations and continue to provide industry spreadsheets, piecharts, bar graphs and trendlines.

In the 1930s the only hospitality management textbook was that authored by Lucius Boomer, president of the Waldorf-Astoria. The author's entry into management writing came in 1950 with *Business Management in Hotels, Motels, Restaurants* with C. Vernon Kane, a hotel and restaurant consultant.

### **Lack of texts provided flexibility**

The lack of textbooks provided latitude for writers at the time to structure the academic development of the field of hospitality management. At Cornell the author taught a general course in personnel management, and from that came *Personnel Management in Hotels and Restaurants*.

Hotel administration as a subject seemed clear enough. So, too, did food management. Allied and correlative fields were less well defined.

Tourism, as an academic area of study, was a case in point. As a visiting professor, in 1974, to the School of Travel Industry Management at the University of Hawaii, the author found not a single "tourism" textbook, and as a consequence wrote *The Tourist Business*. Later this was followed by *International Travel and Tourism*, and, with others, *Tourism Economics*.

*The Hotel and Restaurant Business* has been an attempt in its six editions to present an overview of these two exciting and useful fields of endeavor.

### **Science course is essential**

Inclusion of at least one hard science in a hospitality course of study serves to show that life is not all accounting, finance, marketing, and merchandising. A course or two in food science with its emphasis on microbiology and food chemistry is tough for some hospitality students, but worthwhile.

The role of internships, on-the-job training, and work experience in the hospitality course of study is one of judgment and convenience. Is a particular course best learned in the classroom, or are the pressures and feelings acquired in working in a fast food restaurant, as part of a front desk operation, at Disney World, or in a travel office something that is best experienced and learned under fire?

Few industries have the potential for assimilating the different sub-cultures in the U.S. into the workforce and reducing cultural friction as does the hospitality business. Diversity training is nothing new, only now the facilitators who teach it get \$2,000 a day. This represents an on-going challenge for academics and hospitality managers. While the workforce of the hospitality field employs hundreds of thousands of Hispanics and blacks, relatively few of them attend degree programs in hospitality management, a fact that should raise concern.

The reasons why more Hispanics and blacks do not major in hospitality management may not be clear. One reason, no doubt, is that the forces for attending college for many minority groups are not there. In some cases university education, if not actively discouraged, is not a family aspiration. Family pressure for going to college may not exist.

### **Industry needs minorities**

The income difference between rich and poor is widening in this country and is related to the gap between the educated and the less educated. Hospitality education can help here. The hospitality industry needs qualified minority managers. Scholarships and financial aid can be used to attract qualified students to hospitality management as a career choice. The Ray and Gertrude Marshall Fund recently established at the United States International University in San Diego is an example of what can be done.

Students in hospitality management programs, whatever their ethnic background, should be aware that the field is not for everyone. In the zeal for greater student numbers it is easy to overlook what it takes to succeed as a student and, later on, as a hospitality manager. If there is one trait that stands out for success, it is an inordinately high energy level, a capacity to maintain output over time. That same ability, of course, applies to many fields of work.

The hospitality business is one of the great entry-level industries where millions of people come to be trained and then go on to other jobs. Students should be told that it is not failure to want to change to other careers if their levels of aspiration, temperament, and energy do not fit hospitality as a career.

A handful of people are equipped emotionally, intellectually, and temperamentally to become general managers of large hotels. Even so, hospitality businesses need a range of abilities and temperaments. A sales manager, for example, calls for a certain level of enthusiasm not required in an engineer or an accountant.

### **Financing patterns vary**

The big financial winners are almost always those people who are eager to use another's money to finance any venture, and to use as little of their own capital as possible. During the late 1930s, in the midst of the great depression, Ernest Henderson, president of Sheraton Hotels, borrowed money at 12 percent to buy hotels at fire sale prices and convinced some hotel owners to let him and his partner put as little as \$50,000 down on the purchase of a sizable facility. A British hotel chain, Trust Houses, was purchased by Charles Forte using only the capital of the chain being bought. Forte says that he put up none of his own money. He is now Lord Forte.

Leveraged buyouts of some hotel and restaurant chains have yielded the new owners many millions in profit. The key seems to be able to get a large financial house to structure and sell the deal in the stock market. It helps to remember though that Conrad Hilton almost lost his hotels in the 1930s when he was so strapped for cash that he had to borrow from one of his employees to pay his fare to visit his creditors. World War II saved Hilton and other hotel owners. Hilton went on to become "The Man Who Bought the Waldorf" by buying up the hotel's bonds at five cents on the dollar. The 1980s saw a flood of money borrowed mostly from savings and loan institutions and the result was that dozens of hotels and motels were lost by owners.

Calamity often favors the bold. Owners of Carnival Cruise Line in the 1970s were able to buy ships at bargain prices and create new markets for cruising by packaging the fly/cruise, promoting their ships to a lower income market segment, and capitalizing on casino gambling.



### **Consolidation efforts grow**

Carlson Travel showed how travel agencies, hotels, motels, and restaurants can find a profitable home under one banner. Consolidation proceeds apace. In 1997 Henry Silverman, CEO of Hotel Franchise Systems, brought together franchised hotels and motels, time share franchising, Avis rental cars, and two of the largest real estate companies, Century 21 and Coldwell Banker. More such consolidation of what seem to be discrete hospitality businesses can be anticipated.

Educators should examine both the pluses and minuses of the field. There is the responsibility to teach rudimentary microbiology as it affects food and food service. There is also the health effects of eating the all-American hamburger, emblematic of the good life. The excessive and delicious fat in the typical hamburger patty may not be as pernicious and destructive as nicotine in tobacco, but thousands of heart attacks and heart bypass operations can be traced to a love of hamburgers and the massive advertising by the hamburger chains. Ironically, Dave Thomas, CEO of Wendy's, may have changed his mind about the virtues of saturated fat after he experienced a multiple bypass for coronary disease.

Finally, and in summary, the author is glad to have been a part of the hospitality business, if for no other reason than it attracts a lot of very interesting, mostly cheerful, optimistic people, fun to be with and full of surprises. Today dozens of fine textbooks on hospitality management are available, thousands of capable students enrolled to learn from them and hundreds of qualified faculty on hand to teach.

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