

GENERAL MANAGER'S RESPONSIBILITIES AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE HOTEL ENTERPRISE

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Abstract: The hotel industry develops its activity in a specific context, rendered by the distinct aspects of the services in context with other sectors of the economy. Due to this fact there must exist a very good correlation between the development of managerial skills on one hand and assuming responsibility on other hand.

1.1. THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF A HOTEL GENERAL MANAGER¹

The general manager represents the only and the most important human variable which influences the short-term profit of a hotel. If you aspire to such a position you have to know the ways your job influences directly the hotel owners, the community, and the employees and, of course, the customers.

GMs of a hotel wear “more hats” in order to complete their tasks. It is impossible to identify a single most important role; the responsibilities this position involves vary according to a series of factors, such as: **shareholders structure, location and property type**. In some hotels, the GM can be extremely customer-oriented, spending an important period of time with them. In other hotels, the GM can look after the managerial team, taking care mainly of the other managers in order to improve the hotel services. Disregarding the specific aspects of each hotel and the GM's preferences, almost every position of this type is a combination of the next representative tasks [D.K. Hayes, J.D. Ninemeyer]:

- The relationship with the investors;
- Brand affiliation
- The relationship with the community;
- Developing the executive board;
- Property management.

The role of the GM in relation with the investors includes the overall communication between the GM and the owners. The hotel estate can display various forms, e.g. the hotel can be the property of the GM, but usually the GM is employed by the hotel owners or by a management company assigned by the owners (sometimes the management company can hold parts or even the entire hotel).

Those who hold a share or invest in the hotel will trust the GM to influence in a positive way the hotel position on the market, its physical state, and thus, the profitability. When the hotel needs extra investments (e.g. more personnel or to increase the publicity expenses), the information is usually sent by the GM to the owners). The owners will be willing to invest if

¹ “General Manager” – traditional title to identify a person who is responsible for adopting a final decision concerning the specific hotel procedures and policies. One can also understand the leader of the hotel managerial team. (n.a.)

they are convinced that there is a positive economic sense of the action; persuading the owners depends on the GM's skills and insight. The GM will have to present the investors a financial analysis and to develop good writing and verbal skills.

Concerning the possibility of brand affiliation we must say that many well-known hotels are operating through a franchise system. Some examples can be found among the hotels presented in the first chapter (Clarion, Best Western, Hawthorn, Holiday Inn, Ramada, Hilton). When the manager has to administrate a franchised hotel estate a great part of his work must be involved in administrating the brand. He will have to undertake the surveillance of the operational standards established by the franchiser to accomplish the framing in the contract clauses, to communicate efficiently with the franchiser about the marketing and sales programs, and to use the activities and programs given by the franchiser and which can improve its profitable operation.

In many communities, a hotel is considered more than a simple business to deliver services. In fact, the hotels in certain areas impose (collectively) to a great extent the way the area is seen by the outward community. For example, the hotels in the French section in New Orleans trigger the entire surroundings of the area. The local management and the community leaders often ask the GM of the local hotels when trying to acquire new business, to extend the tourism opportunities or to give an input related to the local business community needs. All these tasks are very important because the local hotel industry health depends on the local economy health, seen as a whole. Extra local community efforts which often involve GM include charity events, fund raising organized by the hotel. The required skills for high performance in relation with the community are related to the manager's personality, good social skills and good public speaking and introducing skills.

Although GMs are leaders within their community we must not overlook the fact that their leadership skills must crop up especially within the hotel. Large estates hold much more departments than the small ones, but for both types of estate the GM is responsible for giving direction to the various department managers.

Table 1.1.

Functional area	Responsible for...
Human resources manager	Personnel needs
Controller	Accountancy
Front-office manager	Services for the customers
Floor manager	Cleaning the estate
Food and beverage manager	Producing and serving food and beverage
Security manager	Security for employees and customers
Marketing and sales manager	Promoting the hotel
Chief engineer	Managing the hotel facilities

When becoming a GM of a hotel you will have to get to know the tasks every department has to carry out. Experience in the various departments of the hotel is quite required. More than this a skillful GM is interested in professional development of the managers under his command (we plead here for every top manager to accept the possibility of facing any moment another manager with similar skills or even better. But this is difficult to accept in reality because of the extremely different causes – perception of the importance of the position, authorial behavior, and others' disdain).

If a survey were randomly be enforced on the street for people to say what is the GM of a hotel doing, the most often mentioned would be that of estate management. A GM has not got all the technical skills to run directly every department of the hotel; he has to be able to lead the entire estate as a whole.

Hotel estate management objectives can be extremely different; they can be related to profit, level of effective services or any other objective established by the GM or by the owners. Traditionally, those who have studied hotel management have described the management process as being composed of the next distinct functions:

- Planning: establishing the objectives;
- Organization: maximizing the resources;
- Direction: offering leadership;
- Control – assessment: measuring and assessing results.

Planning the process means designing objectives, developing plans, strategies and tactics to accomplish the above. GM starts planning after establishing the philosophical and operational direction of the hotel. He also helps the other department managers when planning their department activities.

Here are several questions you can take into account when planning:

- Why is improving the service needed?
- What service is delivered to the guest?
- What technological or physical facilities must be added to the service?
- What departments will be responsible for the new service?
- Will the new service be free of charge or will it require a certain tariff?
- Which are the marketing implications for delivering the services?
- How will the hotel assess the volume of sales or the gained reputation comparing to the service costs?

Management organization refers to putting in order and developing resources in such a way to attain the most effectively the goals. Organization skills are among the most important for the GM. For most of the hotel GM there is approximately the same quantity of available resources the former manager used to have, but the same the future manager will have. A skillful management of the human, financial and gear resources will influence the hotel profit. Certain GM can develop mighty visions and plans for their hotels, but the lack of organization skills make them fail when putting into action their plans. Other GM have talent when organizing resources so that, they turn the actions into a success which leads to reaching and even surpassing the goals. Organization comes always in a logical order after planning. The hotel GM plans and develops the goals and then organizes the resources to meet those goals. The next step in the managerial process involves directing those who must reach the goals.

This concept is related to the GM's characteristics which are linked to recruiting, motivation and leadership. Certain experts in management (with whom we agree) use terms such as "coaching" and "leading" disregarding "directing". Coaching and leading involve learning and encouraging skills, which will trigger a successful impact over the top personnel actions and attitudes.

In many hotels, the GM is the leader or the coach for the entire personnel. Beginning with the GM clothes and continuing with the way he thanks the guests, the entire staff looks at the GM when he establishes personal standards or when serving standards for the entire estate.

1.2. DEVELOPING SKILLS

The instruction and the experience required to become a hotel GM varies, depending on the estate dimension and complexity. More experience, instruction and skills are required to run a resort hotel with 2000 rooms than a limited service hotel with 80 rooms. In both cases the two managers will discover that the instruction needed for such positions is a combination between formal education, on-the-job instruction and ever-lasting professional developing.

If you are interested in pursuing formal education which has traditionally helped preparing people for being a GM, then you have spotted down the right company. In the USA, for example, formal education in the hospitality field is accomplished in two-year or four-year programs and advanced instruction [D.K. Hayes, J.D. Ninemeyer]. Two-year programs can be spotted down in many colleges; classes take place in the evening or at the week-end. You can apply for relevant programs such as: "hotel administration", "hotel and restaurant management", "hospitality industry management", "hotel, restaurant and institution management", "food and beverage management", "tourism administration", "culinary skills". It is a good choice for those who want to end their formal education after having studied several years. Four-year programs are more difficult to get than those of two years; almost every federal state has, one or more, highly appraised institutes which offer a four-year diploma in hotel and restaurant management. For certain people an advanced instruction program becomes more attractive, for example a MBA in hospitality management, admittance to such programs being highly competitive.

On-the-job instruction imposes constant preoccupation for continue updating and continue instruction of the GM. In the USA this type of instruction has centered on two main directions, in the last years:

- Advanced technology impact;
- Ever-changing workforce impact.

If the company doesn't grant instruction you will have to undertake your own professional development. Fortunately, there are many available resources, including business and trade associations, typical industry publications (specialized publications). In almost any community, big enough to undergo the existence of a hotel you can join a local business association. The local Chamber of Commerce can be a critical part of your general efforts to preserve your skills updated without losing contact with your own community. As a hotel manager you will surely join many professional associations, e.g. AH&LA, American Hotel & Lodging Association, which serve their members needs concerning certification, education, social or legislative needs.

Specialized publications are also very important; some of them can be given for free to professionals. The most valuable can be excellent sources of information with the latest news or industry practices.

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