

EXPERTS' CORNER



Robert C. James CCM, CCE, CHE



WORKFORCE

What are some ways clubs can compete for entry-level employees in today's job market?

IN OCTOBER I had the pleasure of serving on a panel with Henry Wallmeyer and two other industry experts on the topic of “Workforce Challenges” for the Metropolitan Golf Association’s President’s Council fall conference. Although the attendees were primarily presidents and general managers from the New York metropolitan area, the concerns and challenges we discussed pertain to all areas of the country.

A steady decline in hospitality industry workers is posing significant challenges particularly for attracting entry level positions at seasonal private clubs throughout the nation. Unemployment in the U.S. is at historic lows while the hospitality industry, as a whole, is growing both nationally and internationally.

The hospitality industry has more jobs to fill than there are interested and available workers. It will all come down to survival of the fittest, and that will

necessitate some thoughtful strategic planning. CMAA’s 2017 Industry Study, *Recruiting Hourly Employees*, found that only 5 percent of clubs responding to the survey evaluate their hourly staffing needs three to five years out. A majority plan for annual needs but 21 percent leave this important managerial responsibility to simply a seasonal look ahead. Unfortunately, the crises that is looming will require a much more strategic forecast for those who expect to be fit enough to survive. The need for long-term workforce planning has arrived. The other 95 percent need to climb on board, fast!

A key takeaway from the conference was that clubs will need to compete aggressively to survive in what has become a global competition for entry-level employees. We have many tools at our disposal, but a one-size-fits-all template is not available. Each club must evaluate their individual short- and long-term needs and create their own sustainable plan.

Peter Petrina, founder of Petrina Group International, which sources J-1 visa students and H-2B visa seasonal employees for private clubs, cautioned the attendees that the U.S. regulatory cap on H-2Bs—along with growing global competition for seasonal employees—is limiting the growth of this source of entry-level employees. While expected to remain a vital staffing source for many clubs for the foreseeable future, these sources may no longer be the panacea they had once been.

Anne Catherine Nielson, SPHR, SHRM-SCP, director of human resources at Westchester Country Club in Rye, N.Y., provided insights into the trends of social media and online employment search engines as effective recruiting tools. But she emphasized that the ultimate success will be dependent upon the quality of your employee programs and advancement opportunities, which should be effectively represented on your website career page.

The club’s brand image is very important, not only its employment and benefits philosophies, but also its public image. Millennial and generation Z employees want to work for companies that reflect high standards, community involvement, diversity and, most importantly, a reputation for a positive workplace culture.

This is not a simple order, as it necessitates full buy-in from the members to club leadership and down to all management levels. Without a great workforce the club will never achieve its aspirational goals, but this is not a “chicken or the egg” scenario. The club must first maintain high standards for itself to then attract a quality workforce. **CD**

Robert C. James, CCM, CCE, CHE, is vice president, DENEHY Club Thinking Partners, a full-service executive search and management consulting firm serving the private club and boutique resort industries at more than 300 clubs and resorts on more than 700 projects. He can be reached at bob@denehyctp.com or 203-319-8228. Learn more at www.denehyctp.com.