

The Role of Women in Hospitality in Modern India

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Introduction

The hospitality industry has experienced exponential growth within the past decade and it is expected to continue beyond the year 2014. As a result, the industry overall faces a worldwide shortage of trained hospitality staff and job opportunities are continuing to increase. However, focus has not been given on the challenges that an Indian women faces in the hotel industry to become a manager in spite of having the managerial skills. There are certain factors that stand as a hurdle for the women to attain high level positions in the hotel sector. Few factors determined are gender issues, nature of job, work personal life balance, family issues, verbal and sexual harassment, work timings and trying to compete with men all the time. These factors work in such a manner that they form

a barricade which prevents women in Indian hospitality industry to forge ahead inspite of their immense capabilities.

About a decade ago, when people spoke about women in the hospitality industry, the general notion was that they either worked only as receptionists or as lady housekeeping supervisors. Ladies, in general entered this profession as the last resort. The hospitality industry was where women were scarce in those days. It was a common notion and prejudiced thought process of people against women which was whatever women do, they must do twice as well as the men to be thought of as half as good. Luckily this is not true in today's context where women have proved their mettle in various departments of the hospitality industry. A women's touch make whole lot of difference in projecting a good image of a hotel.

Women started entering the hotel industry 15 years ago and have never looked back. Nowadays you will find women in top positions in departments like sales and marketing, HR, corporate communications. Preferred job roles are changing from managerial to operational roles like in the kitchen, bar and spas.

The kitchen which happens to be the backbone of a hotel still is a male dominated area, inspite of many women passing out of catering institutions.

OBJECTIVES:

"To study the role of women in today's hospitality industry.

"To understand the factors that are responsible for a women's status and position in the service industry

"To shed light on the negative aspects that affect women and their professional progress in the service industry

Status of an Indian woman in the hotel industry

Inspite of the hotel industry having incorporated many aspects of modern technology, the type of services in hotels has not changed drastically from the last decade. These factors are hugely dependant on the human factor for service and what is required to run a successful venture. Reports suggest people carry an opinion that a woman's place in hotels is generally not a favored one. Women mostly carry out the most under estimated and lowest status work in hospitality.

They are into particular jobs and areas of operation or jobs regarded as low in skills and consequently low in status. Women in hotels tend to be the lowest paid jobs with limited or less obvious career paths. Large hotels, as an emotional connect recruit women for their emphatic ability to deal with people in a service related scenario. An additional negative aspect to women's work in hotels is that they are subject to high levels of sexual harassment from both guests and peers due to their low status and low educational levels (non supervisory level).

Factors affecting Indian women in the hotel industry

1)Politics at work place: Fair treatment in the workplace refers to how and why something untoward happens and managers tackling tricky situations .Fair practices at work from managers is expected so that the workforce functions well and productivity is enhanced .Women are particularly sensitive to these issues. A lack of truthful judgment from managers can lead to discontented workers. When employees aren't told why something happens, they are left to form their own assumptions, which can cause rumours that hurt the company's public and employee relations. A lack of good governance effectively destroys trust in the workplace. Women are often not equipped to deal with politics.

2) Work Culture and Environment:

If the work environment is not appealing, women find it difficult to adjust to it. A woman in the kitchen who has experience, education and knowledge and can forge ahead but usually run out of patience as they have to deal with work force with minimal level of education .Second on the list, is Safety at work place for women, as there is security twenty-four hours in the hotel industry. Women need not give in or get bullied or forced to do any work which is objectionable. If this is the case, a huge turnover of women staff is observed. The work environment has to be very hygienic and safe for women.

2)Career Planning : Hotels offer careers in management, events, restaurant , bar work in operational capacities , including finance, IT, human resources and marketing to women. Larger restaurant chains offer jobs for business/finance managers and operational staff. Contract catering involves providing professional food services which women can be involved as entrepreneurs. Tourism jobs provide women opportunities to work in holiday destinations and attractions. Local women population can be involved to enhance the tourism aspect by providing them work which can be sold to tourists as souvenirs e.g. handicrafts. Thus, there are plenty opportunities for

women in this sector but it's just that one needs to know what one actually wants and should be passionate enough to achieve her goals.

4) Having a Mentor:

To prove their abilities and talents, women need a backing or a mentor to trust them and back their decisions to be validated .The chances of them being successful also depend on such encouragement. Women need to increase their corporate contacts and be in equal power with men.

5) Adaptability:

Adaptability is the ability and willingness to move or change. The women state that the issues lay in climbing up the corporate ladder since it's a male dominated industry. Women are less adaptable compared to men. Single women may be open to transfers places but for married ones it's equally difficult as they have their family and children to look after. What is a priority is purely on one's decision and choice.

6) Work Timings:

To succeed a woman needs to put in her best. The long unpredictable hours of working tend to increase professional and personal stress. Due to this, there are high levels of turnover. Turnovers can be reduced by giving of realistic job expectations to the women who are offered the jobs. The work shifts and the unforgiving timings are the major concerns for

women working in hotel industry.

7) Work life balance: Women find it extremely difficult to balance their work and home front. Married women have to look after their family and even it is a problem for single women due to the stressful timings and the work pressure is tremendous. Jobs in hotels cause a number of issues leading to the high turnover in the industry. These industry challenges may also cause stress, burnout and health problems of the employees. Hotel employees and managers expressed concerns about the extended hours and the unpredictability which they believe contributed to physical and mental fatigue, marriage discords, and decreased social contact with family and friends. Hotel industry turnover may be reduced by trying to set the above points in place by addressing them as priority. Every hotel recruiting must give an open picture of what are its expectations and whether the candidate seeking a job is agreeing to it wholly.

Factors that can make a woman stand out in the hospitality industry

1) Attitude:

Positive attitude is an important attribute for any woman to reach up to the managerial level. Positive attitudes in the work leads women employees to have a better career even a balanced personal life. If one has a positive attitude towards her

job, a woman can keep co-workers and subordinates happy which leads to optimum productivity.

2) Pleasing Persona: Most women managers who have a happy, pleasing persona are successful as managers. They value employees and take keen interest in them which can tell their managerial style to take everyone along. Women managers having complementary values, habits, thinking abilities perform better and giving an edge to women to perform better than or equal to men. Women who believe from the beginning of their careers that they are a particular positive personality type usually end up being successful early in their careers as they tend to get cooperation from everyone who works with them.

3) Job Knowledge:

Women who have complete knowledge about their work tend take up any challenges and responsibility is assigned to them.

4) Managerial skills Women at senior positions like Housekeeping

Executive, Human Resource Manager, Learning and Development Manager or Duty Manager have plenty of skills to manage people. Women have the capability to reach the General Manager's position. By studying further and getting appropriate degrees for promotion is a way women compete with men for top positions get-

ting excellent remunerative, top level managerial jobs. Thus, women gain higher education so that they can reach up to the top level and top paying jobs.

5) Leadership qualities:

Leadership quality is an essential when it comes to directing and supervising of employees of lower level or entry level staff. Women are better at empathetic skills and can influence staff as well as guests by handling them better. Women tend to have better understanding of guest needs and tend to direct employees to service those needs delivering guest delight. Women tend to have better verbal skills and guests would less likely to insult women in case of a dispute so hotels often prefer to place women in areas of guest service.

6) Better Artistic sense and Detailing:

The women are preferred in Housekeeping department for this very reason. All hotels have beautiful interiors and a woman may be able to enhance that beauty by choosing color schemes or planning interiors in a every apt manner or be able to explain to the experts the vision she expects in a much better manner.

Negative aspects that effect the career growth of professional lives of women:

" There is discrimination against women: Women are often considered

as the weaker sex which is proven wrong time and again with hundreds of examples to quote. Women are quietly resilient and can be a tough match for any of their male contemporaries.

"India is largely a paternalistic society so attitudes of guests may be discriminatory.

"Discrimination exists due to the primarily physical nature of work.

"Women are employed more especially for lower positions.

"Women are employed more at visual areas making women susceptible to advances like at front office.

"Women are employed in areas where physical work is required. Many women do not prefer the kitchen areas.

" Industry prefers young and unmarried women which is hardly a qualification if a woman delivers her job well.

" Industry emphasis is more on physical appearance than intelligence in case of women which is an example of being sexist.

" Remuneration is not equal for both women and men employees in some cases.

" There has to be a fair performance appraisal which may take a dent if the woman is not considered for promotion just because she is of the fairer sex.

" Promotional opportunities may not be equal women employees as men

" Men and women may not get same retirement benefits.

" Women do not get same fringe benefits as men.

" Women are not secure at the work place and may be expected to roll out favors which may be sexual in nature and she may have to endure this till she finds courage to share it with someone who may or may not help her.

" Women don't feel secure at night shifts.

" Women face sexual harassment at workplace.

" Women have to manage long working hours, night shifts with child-care, family responsibilities which are a choice at first but may get taxing later.

" Women cannot handle managerial positions is a myth but still forms a whisper in boardrooms.

" Men feel not comfortable working under a woman head. Sad but believable.

" Women do not get help from men employees without undue resistance

" Customers create more problems for women employees.

" Unmarried women are preferred at entry level not in case for male counterparts.

" Women need to make extra efforts to prove or validate their worth than men.

" Management prefers men at managerial position as they see women's liabilities as a hindrance.

" Males dominate hotel industry which is undeniable but unfair to women who are as competent as men.

Conclusion

The hospitality industry is primarily an industry by the people for the people. The human element is what makes it work. The success of a hotel depends on the professional relationships guests have with employees whom they see as the representatives of the hotel they are comfortable with. The hotels management has realized that in order to keep their guest happy right employee must be hired. A closer look into the services provided in the hotel shows that the employees in the hotel needs to be caring, empathetic, and have a conscious study of level of human nature. Women are preferred more in guest's service areas of the hotel with the help of attributes like Tolerance, Communication Skills, and Artistic sense.

Women possess excellent interpersonal skills, decision making ability, leadership abilities, coordination. The coordination and style of leadership is appreciated, however women are found lacking in their decision making ability The aim here is to understand the gender bias that is experienced by women in the hotel industry. The factors of attitude, persona and job knowledge make women compe-

tent enough as men .Keeping in mind the tasks performed by women at home and workplace the hotels should identify and work out the possible solutions and policies that would encourage women to opt for the higher positions. Marital status of women plays a major role in their career advancement. It is easier for single women to reach the managerial position than the married ones, as they need to balance their family and work effectively. The hotel industry known for the work shifts and longer working hours, travelling in the night and work timings is the major hindrances faced by most of the women employees which takes a back seat when it comes to career growth. The hotels should implement flexible working hours and should provide transport facilities for safety reasons. Women should be given a choice to choose their work shifts in order to avoid work pressure and stress. In this male dominated Industry, the preferences are given mainly to men when it comes to work politics and adaptability. The hotel feels that men would be more suitable to deal with these issues in comparison to women. Thus, the hotel policies should be restructured to avoid gender bias and equal opportunities should be given to women without considering them inferior. Having a mentor as also is a major issue for women. Hotels involve late night social gatherings which is practically not possible for women. Hence, getting socially connected

becomes difficult. The hotels can think of introducing expert forum for exchanging ideas and trends within the flexible work hours to improvise the social connections. Leadership and managerial skills also play a major role when it comes to women getting promoted in the hotel industries as their skills and capabilities are compared to men. Since, hospitality industry is a male dominated sector, it is always advisable for men to be in the managerial level. But now, women also are getting in par with men and they know that they can be equal or even be better than men in handling responsibilities.
