RESERVE YOUR HOSPITALITY CAREER NOW

IT TAKES A DIVERSE WORKFORCE
TO MEET THE DIVERSE NEEDS OF HOTEL GUESTS

EVERY YEAR MILLIONS OF PEOPLE EXCHANGE THEIR DAILY WORK GRIND AND HUMDRUM OF HOME FOR A LITTLE REST AND RELAXATION SOMEWHERE ELSE. FORGET FOLLOWING OFFICE HOURS, THESE TRIPS ARE ABOUT SEEING FAMOUS SIGHTS, EXPERIENCING THE EXTRAORDINARY, OR DOING NOTHING AT ALL. ONE OF THE BEST PARTS OF BEING ON HOLIDAY IS THAT OTHERS TAKE CARE OF THE MUNDANE FOR US, LIKE MAKING THE BEDS, SETTING UP MEALS, AND ARRANGING SPECIAL REQUESTS. ISN'T IT LOVELY TO BE SPOILED?

ACCORDING TO THE AMERICAN HOTEL AND LODGING ASSOCIATION (AHILA), THERE ARE MORE THAN 4.8 MILLION GUESTROOMS ACROSS THE COUNTRY, AND AT AN AVERAGE 60% OCCUPANCY RATE, IT'S BIG BUSINESS – THE LODGING INDUSTRY TOOK IN MORE THAN $21 BILLION IN 2011. WHAT'S MORE, ANALYSTS EXPECT HOSPITALITY AS A WHOLE TO EXPERIENCE GROWTH OVER THE NEXT SEVERAL YEARS. THE U.S. BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS PROJECTS A 17% INCREASE IN EMPLOYMENT. INDEED, IT TAKES A STAFF OF MANY TO MEET ALL THE NEEDS OF VACATIONERS AND BUSINESS TRAVELERS DAY IN AND DAY OUT.

BY ANNE BAYE ERIICKSEN
Walt Disney was a man who knew how to bring his visions to life for the masses to enjoy. It was his vision for an amusement park where adults and children alike could indulge in playtime steepled in storytelling that set the standard for theme parks worldwide. First there was Disneyland, then in the early 1970s, came Walt Disney World Resort, which captivated visitors with its Magic Kingdom and the fantastical worlds of the Epcot Center. These two attractions have become the cornerstones for the resort in Lake Buena Vista, FL.

Nowadays, families also can tour Disney’s Hollywood Studios or compete at ESPN Wide World of Sports. No matter which parks you choose to explore, it falls to the resort’s 60,000 cast members to ensure all visitors leave feeling like they’ve had a magical experience. As Disney casting services recruiter, it’s Christina Honeycutt’s responsibility to find the individuals who can do just that. “I have the ability to make people’s dreams come true by providing job opportunities in various roles,” she comments.

Honeycutt joined the hospitality giant as a college student in need of a part-time position. “I was hired to work in the box office at ESPN Wide World of Sports. I was involved in competitive sports as a child, so the fact that I landed my first role at Disney’s sports complex was an added bonus,” she recalls.

That moment of opportunity turned into a 14-year career, so far. In fact, Honeycutt foresaw her long-term commitment to Walt Disney World Resort very early on. “Within my first few days, I realized I truly enjoyed the guest interaction,” she says.

She quickly moved out of the box office and served in several roles at the sports complex, including guest services, merchandise, food and beverage, and custodial. Honeycutt also gained some experience with event planning before being appointed recreation guest services manager. “For five years, I oversaw the daily operation of our lifeguards, marina operations, and children’s activities for multiple resorts,” she states.

This job proved to be the most physically challenging for Honeycutt, who has been a paraplegic since birth. She explains, “There were some physical tasks, such as jumping in a pool or diving off a boat, that I was unable to perform due to the limitations and obstacles because I use a wheelchair. In order to be an effective leader, I learned ways to adapt and proved I had the skills needed to lead the lifeguards through the steps required.”

Then last year, she transitioned into her current position. Honeycutt cites her career progression as evidence of the company’s commitment to staff development. “My abilities have always been able to shine beyond the metal confinement of my wheelchair,” she asserts.

She also applies her professional and personal knowledge to CastABLE (Cast Appreciation, Supporting, Teaching Ability, Better Living and Equality) as both a founding member and current vice president. “CastABLE is a diversity resource group that promotes respect, equality, and appreciation of people with disabilities through awareness, education, and inclusion,” she explains. “I know from personal experience Disney is committed to ensuring that both cast and guest experiences are tailored to meet the needs of each individual.”

For more information, please visit the following website: www.disneyworld.disney.go.com.

Marriott: Bridging The Career Divide

While vacationers may book guestrooms so they have a place to lay their heads after a day of sightseeing, lodging is only one aspect of the industry. Many hotels have the space, accommodations, and manpower to host and cater large events, such as conferences, business meetings, or weddings. As part of the banquet setup crew at the Bethesda North Marriott Conference Center in Bethesda, MD, Tim Acton has worked a great number of these get-togethers. “I love that I get to do something different every day,” he says.
Acton, who has a learning disability, is a graduate of the Marriott Foundation for People with Disabilities Bridges… from school to work program. In 1989, the family of J. Willard Marriott – the company’s founder – established the non-profit organization to assist individuals with disabilities to enter the workforce. One of its first endeavors was the creation of the Bridges program, which connects special education students leaving high school with businesses seeking employees. In its 24-year existence, Bridges has matched young adults ages 17 to 22 with employers in some of the country’s largest cities. “We provide our students opportunities to grow in multiple industries and careers,” says Shelby Hill, director for Bridges Washington, D.C. Metro Area.

Of course, there’s a percentage of participants, like Acton, who are interested in working in the hospitality industry. “I love to travel and stay in different hotels so I thought I would like to work at one,” he says.

“I would say 20 to 30% of our participants want to work in hospitality,” notes Hill. “However, most of our teenagers come from areas where they do not have the opportunity to travel and experience the hospitality industry.”

After 17 years holding a corporate position for Marriott International (www.marriott.com), Hill left to pursue other career possibilities, but changed her plans when offered the Bridges job. “It was an opportunity to stay with the Marriott organization in a position of helping people with career and job planning,” she explains.

Now instead of zoning in on providing hospitality for guests, she focuses on cultivating customer service skills in others and promoting their value to businesses. “One of the things we pride ourselves on is that ours is an employer-driven program. We value the relationship we have with our employers and businesses in order for them to feel comfortable and supportive of the hiring and retention of people with disabilities,” she says. “Not only do we help find students jobs, but we help them stay in the jobs for a long period of time.”

For the past six and a half years, Acton has employed the skills he learned at Bridges as has Vernon Ford. A fitness center attendant, Ford started as a part-time temporary employee. A year later, Marriott officially hired him part-time to work in the fitness center on its corporate campus, also in Bethesda. Last year he upgraded his status to full-time.

Ford’s primary duty is to maintain the clean towel sup-

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ply at the facility, including washing and folding them using industrial machines. However, he regularly comes in contact with members, and that’s where his people skills shine. “You must be nice to people, listen to others, and make sure you follow through with customers,” he offers. “Just be respectful, friendly, and nice to people.”

Ford continues to rely on his appointed employer representative to aid him when necessary, such as advice on gaining more responsibilities on the job. He also receives assistance in his studies for an associate’s degree, which will be another marker of success for him.

“I’ve had many, many instances of students who have struggled, whether it is socioeconomic backgrounds or barriers in their disabilities, but they overcome it to secure job offers,” comments Hill. “That is the most rewarding experience I could have.”

**Hershey Entertainment and Resort - A Sweet Opportunity**

Mention the name Hershey to anyone outside of Pennsylvania, and their minds most likely conjure up images of sweet chocolate bars and foil-wrapped kisses. Mention the name to anyone in that state or neighboring areas, and they probably also think of the dozen roller coasters at Hersheypark, the hundreds of animals at ZOOGarden North American Wildlife Park, or the luxurious indulgences offered in The Spa at The Hotel Hershey. Each property, along with the Hershey Lodge and
Hershey Highmeadow Campground, falls within the realm of the Hershey Entertainment and Resort business (www.hersheypa.com), a separate entity from the candy manufacturer.

“Our employees work across business units...including operations at the park, hotel, or lodge as well as support services in human resources, marketing, finance, and IT,” says Shelley Mastrella, director of talent acquisition and workforce inclusion for the Hershey, PA-based company.

During her 12-year tenure at Hershey Entertainment, Mastrella has seen how a diverse workforce elevates customer service, especially when your customer base consists of a wide variety of people, ethnicities, and cultures. Not only do the park, spa, and lodgings attract visitors from its primary market of the surrounding seven states, but the Hershey name also draws people from allover.

“Diversity in the workplace is something to me that not only is the right thing, but it is the smart thing,” she explains. “Our demographics are changing and we need different perspectives, so that when people are visiting us, we reflect that market base.”

A couple years back, Mastrella spearheaded an initiative to redefine the corporate culture by placing more emphasis on acceptance of abilities. She currently serves as chair of the Workforce Inclusion Committee. “Our primary focus is to recommend action and guidance to create an inclusive environment for Hershey Entertainment as it relates to our employee lifecycle – recruiting, training, promotional opportunities, and how we are retaining people,” she explains.

Among the committee’s objectives is to further promote the Hershey key values—ownership, anticipate, delight, and inspire – and how they pertain to engaging various groups, including people with disabilities. “To us, it’s about what you can do. We focus on what people are capable of doing so we created a committee for welcoming differently abled people to the workplace. It is a passion of mine that individuals who are differently abled get a sense of what we do and how we will evolve to ensure we provide them with a welcoming environment,” says Mastrella.

Although that group is just gaining its momentum and ironing out details, Mastrella already reports a positive response from throughout the company. “We introduced one of our employees who is hearing impaired to the business leadership network. It was a chance for her to talk with our team and raise awareness,” she says.

For more than 55 years, Hyatt Hotels Corporation, headquartered in Chicago, IL, has maintained a stellar reputation in both hotel management and as an employer. Its business success can be counted by its nearly 500 properties around the globe. As an employer, Hyatt (www.hyatt.com) has received numerous accolades most recently the 2012 Gallup Great Workplace Award and named as a Top 50 Employer by this magazine. “At Hyatt, the satisfaction and well-being of our associates is fundamental to the success of our business because they are the ones who provide hospitality to our guests each day.” says Robb Webb, Chief Human Resources Officer, in a press release.

George Messera knew very well how much his wife enjoyed working as an accountant for the company, so when he had a chance to join its ranks, too, he couldn’t pass it up. “I love Hyatt as a company. It has good benefits, such as 12 free hotel rooms a year. I like that I get to see different Hyatts and experience how they do things at different hotels,” he comments.

Messera had already worked in the hospitality industry for 20 years as a chef, cooking in hotels, privately owned restaurants, and country clubs. A few years ago, though, his multiple sclerosis – he was diagnosed in 1999 – progressed to
a stage that prohibited him from working in the kitchen. “I started falling,” he explains. “I didn’t know what I would do for a career because I couldn’t stand or hold a knife anymore.”

Right around the same time, Messera’s wife learned about Hands On Educational Services, an organization that partners with the hotel corporation to train individuals in different hospitality jobs. She recommended he check it out, which Messera did. He was impressed with what it offered, so he signed up. At Hands On, he learned various new skills, including computer and organizational, that qualified him to become a PBX operator. Basically, PBX operators function as a conduit connecting various communications within a business. Soon after completing the program Messera was hired at the Hyatt Regency DFW in Dallas/Fort Worth, TX. “When I got the job, I felt like I didn’t have to worry anymore. I had a place to go to where I could work and talk to people,” he recalls.

Indeed, Messera was happy to return to the hospitality industry. “I enjoy talking to guests and people. It brought back what I liked about working as a chef, that I could deal with people on an everyday basis,” he says.

For the past three years, Messera has aided guests with a plethora of requests and needs, such as wakeup calls, airport transportation, and coordinating with housekeeping or engineering to deal with any room-related issues. Physically, the job is much less taxing than standing in a kitchen all day. “My MS affects my walking. I used a cane when I first started at Hyatt and now I use a walker. My general managers have helped me a lot to get me through my day. They made a spot for me at the front desk and I sign in instead of punching a time clock,” says Messera. “I look forward to going to work because everyone is so helpful.”

In fact, he so enjoys his environment and the company that he’s already aspiring to move onto other roles. “If my health gets better, I see myself as a front-desk manager. I want to keep striving.”

And that’s exactly Messera’s advice to others considering career possibilities in hotel management or the hospitality industry. “If you can handle it, then do it. Don’t let anyone stop you,” he concludes. C A D

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Defy The Stereotype

It’s a Girl’s Life. Lead it.

Girl Scouts.

All models used in this campaign are active Girl Scouts, www.girlscouts.org