

SA must address shortage of experienced African GMs in hotel industry

According to managing partner of HVS in Africa, Tim Smith, HVS Executive Search recently mapped the entire continent of Africa for general managers and it took them less than a week. “There are a staggeringly low amount of GMs on the continent and this is something that definitely needs to be addressed,” he says. South Africa isn't doing enough to ensure that the hospitality and hotel industry is attractive to people as a long-term and sustainable career, particularly for African GMs.



HVS launches executive matchmaking service for Africa's hotel industry

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Guy Stehlik, CEO and founder of BON Hotels and Director of BON Hotels International West Africa, speaking at a recent breakfast briefing hosted by global hotel consultancy, HVS, admits to making a lot of mistakes in the early days when it came to recruiting general managers for BON hotels.

There is no substitute for experience

“I was looking for young, dynamic, sexy upstarts – people who didn't necessarily have a huge amount of experience but had the right attitude,” he says. Although he says that still holds firm today, he realised that being a young hotel company and taking on young, inexperienced GMs was not a successful formula. “At one or two hotels, we nearly lost it all, especially with our leased properties where we put in inexperienced general managers. That was a lesson that I really learned the hard way,” he says.



Guy Stehlik

Stehlik says they've now changed tack. “I've gone out on record to say that we need the old-school general managers. And by old school, I'm not referring to age, but more of a mindset where the person will take the decision as the general manager to immerse themselves in all areas of the operation. Although these guys do come at a premium, we are now only looking to hire old school GMs because there is no substitute for experience,” he says.

Building new generations of employees

But they're also looking at building new generations of employees. BON Hotels invites schools to come and experience their hotels and they make as many internships available as possible. They work closely with the hotel schools to make sure the students get to come in and experience the industry during their holidays, as well as going out to schools and making sure they are at their career guidance sessions. "We go out to market the hospitality industry as a long-term dignified and respectable career, as it is in Europe," he said.

Stehlik says that there are many hotel chains that are more focused on chasing profits and growth of revenues and the numbers of portfolios as well as the number of properties in their portfolios. "This is fundamentally against what we believe in. For us we are always focused on a balance of great service and profitability," he says.

He is quick to point out that the success of the Bon Hotels Group is due to the people who work there. "You can have the best locations, the best systems and the best head office infrastructure in the world, but if you've got a crap general manager at your hotel, you're going to get wiped out. We believe that your GMs are everything and it's essential to recruit wisely," he adds.

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