WORKFORCE BREAKOUTS

OVERVIEW

The American workforce is undergoing significant upheaval with a record high of more than 9 million job openings, a stagnating labor force participation rate due to early retirements, the departure of many working mothers from the workforce and talent migration not only to different jobs but to different industries. Through two smaller group discussions, this breakout session explored the many layers impacting American workforce issues. Major themes arose and key takeaways on what was discussed are outlined below.

DIFFERENCES IN GENERATIONAL WORK STYLES

The challenges of the past year and a half have taken what many employers considered a ‘normal’ work environment and turned it on its head. While working from home was largely considered a perk to cash in one or two days a week by tenured employees, it is now the daily routine for workers across the nation. In addition to the shift in work-life balance, the nation’s continued racial unrest has put a renewed emphasis on the importance of culture and inclusion within organizations. These shifts, among others, have redefined what young employers expect, creating a gap between the traditional and the new, and generating the need to reevaluate value propositions for current and future talent.

Key Takeaways:

- Surveying employees regularly will help in keeping a pulse on the company culture and levels of contentedness. Changes can be made or solutions identified from this feedback.

- Consider the setup of your physical office space. If possible, creating a more cohesive and collaborative environment can be done by rethinking the traditional cubical layout and can provide employees an opportunity to take full advantage of being in-person.

- There is demand for working in environments rich in diversity and inclusion. Provide your employees with transparent opportunities to shape this culture and consider the long- and short-term benefits of investments you make in DEI initiatives.

- If the talent is there, consider the flexibility options you can offer, such as the hours or days of the work week. Be open and creative.

- After more than a year of what for many involved smaller staffs and heavier workloads, there is no denying the productivity that can be accomplished by working from home. Keep this in mind as you reinstate office policies and look to recruit new talent.
RETENTIONAL CHALLENGES AND INITIATIVES

As workers continue to reevaluate their careers after months of isolation, it is more important than ever to retain the travel industry’s talent pool—full of people with adaptability, interpersonal skills and a variety of experience. Hospitality workers who were laid off, or otherwise had their careers disrupted in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, are now being recruited by other industries for their array of soft skills. Changing the narrative around what a hospitality job entails—often viewed as having long hours, weekend work and low pay—and upping the ‘cool’ factor is essential to recruiting new talent, especially in the younger demographics.

Key Takeaways:

• Reevaluate salary structure in comparison to similar positions in other industries, as well as, in other parts of the country, can help to gauge where you stand in relation to competing companies—especially as the cost-of-living increases across the country.

• Collaborate with other associations and industry partners to highlight the benefits of working in this industry, its value, the opportunities to upward mobility and the immense impact travel makes locally, regionally and globally. Next steps could involve a nationwide campaign.

• Consider implementing incentives that encourage longevity and a sense of growth. Examples might include marketing exchange programs between local destinations, a series of perks based on longevity, bonuses for personal life milestones, etc.

• Research will be key in identifying what factors are attracting employees to other industries.

• Prospective employees value the work they do, the good they are giving back and sustainability. Look to build in more opportunities for “giving back” as an employee in your organization.

• Particularly in the hotel community, management is difficult to hire for now as potential workers can receive the same amount of pay to work from home in other industries or settings. Hourly workers on the other hand have been easier to hire.

BUILDING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS

‘Promotion Palooza’ was coined as the term to describe the desire of young professionals wanting to move up the ladder—and wanting to do so quickly. However, with few leadership positions to be had, the pyramid is tight at the top. However, it remains critical to build up talented workers and to find creative ways to help them grow within our organizations and the industry at-large. What ways can we, as leaders, push decision-making down further down the chain of command?

Key Takeaways:

• Create opportunities for lower-level employees to lead. An example might include developing task forces to ‘own’ and advise on certain issues within the organization. Consider substituting promotions for other leadership opportunities.

• Be intentional about succession planning. Understand where your employees want to be in their career and identify ways to help them get there. The ‘people are a commodity’ mindset needs to change. People are the success of the organization.

• Use networks to recommend people to other travel-related jobs, especially as much of the hospitality industry workforce is open to work. Always work to keep invested employees in the industry—even if it means they leave your organization.
FRONTLINE EMPLOYEES

FACING VISA CHALLENGES

The impact of COVID-19 on the hospitality and tourism workforce is tremendous. Not only was economic activity, in many cases, slowed to a near halt, but staff reductions, international travel restrictions, and visa processing constraints significantly reduced the number of temporary foreign workers that typically support travel businesses during the busy summer months. For these same reasons, many temporary foreign workers have yet to return. The current domestic leisure comeback, though positive, has only exacerbated the problems caused by a shortage of both domestic and temporary foreign workers. While this was a significant problem before the pandemic, the challenges are even greater today.

Key Takeaways:

• There is a need for expanding H-2B and J1 visa quotas. Advocating to separate these visas from immigration may be one viable tactic for the travel and tourism industry’s needs.

• U.S. Travel will continue to press for a higher cap on H-2B and J-1 visas, as well as press for faster visa processing for low-risk applicants. U.S. Travel is also working to rebuild visa processing capacity at embassies and consulates that closed due to COVID-19.

• There is a need to separate the H-2B and J1 visa issues from the more politically difficult challenges related to immigration reform.

IDENTIFYING OTHER TOP ISSUES AND SOLUTIONS

Several challenges were identified for the frontline workforce including lack of workers due to visa issues, university closures to international students, childcare needs, rising costs of living and state and city ordinances on rehiring previously laid off or furloughed employees.

Key Takeaways:

• There is a need for marketing the hospitality industry as a means for high quality of life, balance, positive impacts and valuable experiences.

• Challenges unique to frontline workers are being exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Mobility and commuting, exhaustion of current workforce and high levels of retirement continue to impact this sector.

• There is value in looking for talent in new places. Ideas for recruiting more creatively include seeking out military personnel leaving the service, having presence at high school and grade school career days,