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Recruiting and Talent Acquisition Strategies in the Hospitality Industry During the Great
Resignation

An Honors College Project Presented to

the Faculty of the Undergraduate

College of Business
Hart School of Hospitality, Sport and Rec Management

James Madison University

by Kristen E. Poggi

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Accepted by the faculty of the Hart School of Hospitality, Sport and Rec Management, James Madison University,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Honors College.

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PUBLIC PRESENTATION

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Abstract

The Great Resignation, which stemmed from the Covid-19 pandemic, has impacted many businesses within the United States. With the nation's quit rate reaching all-time highs, businesses are struggling to retain and attract new employees. This is especially seen within the hospitality industry. The industry has been struggling to reach sufficient staffing levels while people are excited to travel and utilize these hospitality businesses after the global pandemic. To learn more about this issue and to gain awareness, I have conducted a literature review of the current research about this topic. I have also conducted my own research by interviewing three hospitality recruiters in three different sectors. These include the hotel, restaurant, and country club sectors. The information gathered leads to a thorough understanding of recruiting and talent acquisition strategies in the hospitality industry during the Great Resignation.

Key words: The Great Resignation, hospitality industry, recruiting

Introduction

“The Great Resignation” is a relevant, ongoing phenomenon that has affected millions of people worldwide. Some have also coined this trend as the “Big Quit” referring to the mass of employees voluntarily leaving their jobs for several different reasons, most stemming from the 2020 global Covid-19 pandemic. With this dramatic and massive change comes the challenge of recruiting new employees to fill the roles that these masses have resigned from and have deemed “less desirable.” These roles are mostly within the scope of front-line positions, which includes industries such as retail, hospitality, education, and administrative support.

To put into perspective how much the Great Resignation has impacted the job market, according to a Job Opening and Turnover survey, at the beginning of 2022 there were almost 11 million job openings across the United States, which is a near-record high (United States Department of Labor, 2022). Additionally, at the end of 2021, the number of employees voluntarily resigning their jobs surpassed 4.5 million with most employees looking for better pay, more flexibility, and remote work (Minkoff, 2022).

The impacts of this mass voluntary quit have been seen everywhere throughout the United States. Many stores have had to change their business hours due to a lack of employees, which generates less income and impacts the economy. Many companies have seen a shift in morale, lower productivity, and an increased workload for remaining employees (Keough, 2022). One industry that's been impacted the most is the hospitality industry. The industry at its core is about people helping other people. With increased turnover and more employees quitting, it is difficult to maintain a high standard for service and quality. Recruiters in the industry are having difficulties finding employees to fill these roles.

In order to get the hospitality industry back to quality service and sufficient staffing levels, it is imperative that recruiters and hospitality companies understand why the Great Resignation is occurring, what employees are looking for, and how to change human resources and recruiting strategies to attain more employees. The research I am conducting about recruiting strategies during the Great Resignation in the hospitality industry will introduce the topic, explain what recruiters are currently implementing for attaining new employees, and how change can be implemented to better the future of the hospitality industry. In order to portray these ideas, there will be a literature review which demonstrates the current research and information about the Great Resignation and recruiting strategies. Following this, I will explain the methodologies for my qualitative research and provide the full interviews. Then, the findings will be discussed based on an analysis of the interviews conducted. Lastly, there will be a discussion and conclusion to bring together the research and information gathered to discuss the current state of recruiting strategies during the Great Resignation in the hospitality industry.

Literature Review

The Great Resignation and The Covid-19 Pandemic

The Great Resignation refers to the millions of workers who decided to quit their jobs during the Covid-19 pandemic. The term was coined by Texas A&M professor Anthony Klotz in May of 2021. The Great Resignation led to the nation's "quit rate" reaching a 20 year high in November 2021 (Parker, 2022). One of the driving forces for the Great Resignation was the Covid-19 pandemic, which started with a major lockdown in the United States in March 2020. During this time, many people, especially in customer facing roles and hospitality, were laid off and took the time to think about what really matters to them in their personal lives and in their careers. Following this lockdown, some people returned to their past jobs while others decided to quit the jobs they were currently employed in to find different opportunities that best fit their needs. A Pew Research Center survey sent out in 2022 found that "low pay, a lack of opportunities for advancement and feeling disrespected at work are the top reasons why Americans quit their jobs last year" (Parker, 2022).

Another way to view the Great Resignation is that before the pandemic, the U.S. resignation rate never surpassed 2.4% of the total workforce per month; however, in September of 2021 it reached 3% which was the largest spike recorded (Tessema, 2022). While the Covid-19 pandemic was a catalyst for the Great Resignation, it was not the only reason why people decided to quit their jobs. For most people, the pandemic allowed for them to reflect on their time spent working and their own values. The pandemic ended up being a natural end point for most people to pivot either what they were doing or where they were doing it as they were allowed time to reflect on their work-life balance, values, and overall treatment at work. To dive

deep into the Great Resignation, it's important look at its effects on the hospitality industry and recruiting within the industry.

The Staffing Challenges Facing the Hospitality Industry

One of the industries that was impacted greatly by the Covid-19 pandemic was the hospitality industry. When lockdown occurred in March 2020, almost all hospitality businesses had to close their doors and were not able to operate on a limited capacity until about two months later. During this time, they had to lay off most, if not all, of their hospitality guest facing positions. These layoffs were due to the virus not allowing for any kind of face-to-face interaction because of how fast it spread from one person to another and the severity of the illness with no vaccine available yet at the time. Due to employees experiencing a major change in the hospitality industry during a time that was very unknown, “892,000 accommodation and food-services workers quit their jobs in August (2021), according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, with the industry’s quit rate of 6.8 percent far exceeding the national average of 2.9 percent... another 6.6 percent of accommodation and food service workers quit in September” (Simon, 2021). These statistics demonstrate the true impact that the Covid-19 pandemic had on the staffing levels within the industry.

The age group that experienced the highest number of employees quitting were millennials, which are all the employees in the higher up managerial positions (Hotelogix, 2022). With this massive decline in front line hospitality workers, general managers were forced to fill in those roles along with their normal day-to-day responsibilities which had them working 60 or more hours per week. This led to a massive amount of burnout to those in management that had to step up, which in turn made many of them decide to leave the hospitality industry altogether.

“When it comes to how satisfied GMs are with their current position, the difference is stark. 19.5 percent of respondents in this year’s survey are somewhat unsatisfied or very unsatisfied, compared to 14 percent last year and only 5.5 percent in 2019. That means more GMs are unhappy this year, when guests are coming back and the industry is at least somewhat normal, than last year when they had to furlough or lay off nearly their entire staff and run properties virtually single-handedly in many instances” (Simon, 2021). This is also portrayed in the idea of work-life balance as according to the same survey, “38.5 percent are unsatisfied this year, compared to 27 percent in 2020 and 17.7 percent in 2019. Only 18 percent replied that they are very satisfied this year, the lowest number of the past three years” (Simon, 2021). By having more responsibilities fall on the general managers of these hospitality businesses, it leads to even more employee dissatisfaction and increases the chances of them quitting their job.

For many of the workers that were employed in hospitality, they decided to leave their front-facing guest positions because of how the pandemic shook their confidence as it demonstrated that there may not be long-term job security. For example, housekeeping staff have been seen transitioning out of hospitality to other sectors such as public-school districts or office buildings to have jobs with similar responsibilities, but they provide them with higher pay and more flexible schedules with weekends off (Liu-Lastres, 2023). Additionally, they saw that if there was another pandemic, they could be in the same situation again if they continued to work in the industry. In most cases, temporary lay-offs lead to people not returning to the industry as they took that time to seek other educational opportunities to advance themselves for the next step of their career transition.

This time also affected current hospitality management students’ mindset on going into the industry as it created hesitation to go into the field. As mentioned before with general

managers, other guest-facing roles are also seeing increased burnout as they must now cover more shifts and responsibilities. This then leads to reduced work performance, increased stress, and dissatisfaction. Losing these managers leads to a lack of leadership and a lack of efficient hiring managers. The industry needs to find a way to get out of this vicious cycle as, “even though the Great Resignation is partly responsible for the staffing problem in this industry, failure to satisfy the workforce’s changing needs appears to be a core determinant” (Liu-Lastres, 2023). These hospitality employers need to demonstrate empathy, re-evaluate pay and benefits, and expand their employee assistance programs to assist with child care or eldercare by allowing for more flexible schedules (Liu-Lastres, 2023).

Additionally, it is important for employers to customize retention strategies according to age groups as younger employees have different values than older employees. For example, “for younger Gen Z employees, recruitment and retention strategies can highlight training, career growth and after-work social events. In contrast, for mid-career employees, the focus may turn to stability, work-family balance and continuous education” (Liu-Lastres, 2023). In order to move forward and recruit, it is important to keep current employees satisfied. To do this, employers need to promote a healthy relationship between employees and management, place more emphasis on performance growth and goals, and invest in employees and teach them new skill sets. By first focusing on retention, current employees will become more satisfied, and word will get out about the company which will ultimately help with recruiting new employees.

Recruiting Amid the Great Resignation

When recruiting new employees during the Great Resignation, many businesses found that they had to shift and change a lot of employee perks. Now, companies are focusing on

competitive compensation, more personalized work plans, and paid time off that can allow for flexibility that employees are finding they desperately need. By finding out what their current employees want from the company, businesses can use their findings to help not only retain their current employees but also recruit new ones. “Employers need to recognize that it takes significantly longer to recruit someone than it does for them to give their two-week notice and depart. The solution, then, is to immediately bolster retention while ramping up recruiting” (Breitling, 2021). A 2022 report by Lever, a talent acquisition suite, finds that “while 64 % of employees are happy in their current roles and 59% plan to remain with their companies for more than a year, 13% said that they also want more opportunities for internal mobility, 20% want flexible work arrangements, 8% want upskilling, and 45% want competitive compensation” (Lever, 2022). Additionally, they saw that 61% of employees, more than three in five, said that they would search for a new role if their company did not allow for role changes and 67% would leave their organization altogether if they did not allow internal mobility. By looking at these numbers, companies can see what their employees ultimately want at the end of the day from their jobs, and that if they won’t get it, they are likely to leave.

While recruiting, it is important to understand what the next upcoming generation, Gen Z, is seeking for their jobs. Lever found that “for Gen Z, highlighting a sense of purpose in the role is critical, as 42% would rather be at a company that gives them a sense of purpose than one that pays more, while 49% of Millennials and 56% of Gen Xs would rather work for a company that pays more than gives them a sense of purpose” (Lever, 2022). Understanding what each generation wants will give better insight for recruiters to find out how they can best market and sell their companies and positions to candidates. With this understanding comes emotional intelligence. Many employers are looking at and focusing too much on issues like money and

perks versus looking at the emotions that drive employees leaving the company. When looking at different emotions, managers can find out a better way to communicate with their current employees and their future candidates that they are recruiting. When employees are burnt out, they are feeling and expressing to their managers that they are exhausted, stressed, overwhelmed, and frustrated. If they are wanting a better work-life balance, then they will feel grateful, empowered, and optimistic. Additionally, if they are looking to align their values, they are feeling disappointed, disconnected, bored, and indifferent (Barley, 2022). By understanding these emotions and what they map to, companies can then change and help those employees to stay and ultimately recruit more.

Wharton professor and author Adam Grant said that “The Great Resignation isn’t a mad dash away from the office, it’s the culmination of a long march toward freedom. Flexibility is more than choosing the place where you work, it’s having the freedom to decide your purpose, your people, and your priorities” (Barley, 2022). From this, companies can facilitate retention interviews to ask employees how they are doing, what would allow them to stay, and what they might dislike about the company at the moment. Overall, it is evident that the future of successful recruiting lies in the ability for a company to retain its current employees efficiently and successfully.

The Great Resignation and the Covid-19 pandemic have allowed for employees to push back at their companies or leave them if they are not providing what they want. Most times, this is better pay, flexible schedule, and better benefits. Other times it’s about the company demonstrating emotional intelligence and wanting to improve their current employees. The hospitality industry has seen a major decrease in staffing levels during this time due to many

factors. In order for the industry to get back to regular staffing levels, it needs to make some changes to demonstrate that they are evolving and will put the employee first.

Methodology

To dive deeper into the recruiting strategies that recruiters in the hospitality industry are using to combat the Great Resignation, I was able to ask a few recruiters directly. The best way to gather first hand experiences for recruiting strategies during the Great Resignation was to interview professionals that deal with this phenomenon in the industry every day. To gain as much insight as possible, it was evident that the interviews should include a perspective from each of the three main sectors of the hospitality industry. These include country clubs, restaurants, and hotels. Although they are all in the hospitality industry, these sectors are different and provide a more holistic perspective when analyzed together. All three sectors were impacted differently by the Covid-19 pandemic as hotels were completely shut down, restaurants could offer take out, and country clubs were able to operate within their community/social bubble. With these different impacts comes different issues with gathering supplies, staffing, and restrictions. By taking a look at each of these sectors and how they have each reacted to the pandemic, it allows for a more thorough understanding and increased knowledge overall.

These interviews of hospitality recruiters from the three sectors were conducted from deductive research of the literature review and contain qualitative data. The interviews include Meagan Tosh from Great American Restaurants, Brian Armstrong from McMahon Careers in the club industry, and Sarah D'Angelo from Marriott International. These three recruiters were chosen to be interviewed due to their intensive industry knowledge and their involvement in recruiting in their sector. To get in communication with them, I was able to obtain their contact information from professors. After receiving their contact information, I was able to email them and ask to set up separate interview times for approximately thirty minutes each via telephone. During the telephone interviews, I was able to take notes and record so that I was able to go back

and fully extract the information needed from these interviews. The whole process of communicating with each recruiter, facilitating each interview, and analysis took place over a two-month time frame. I asked each recruiter the same five questions to create consistency. The questions asked are as followed:

1. How do you believe the Great Resignation impacted the hospitality industry as a whole? How has it impacted your specific sector of the hospitality industry?
2. Have recruiting tactics and strategies changed because of the Great Resignation? What did they consist of before? What did they consist of after?
3. Do you believe that the shift in recruiting strategies have been effective after the Great Resignation?
4. What has the retention of employees throughout the pandemic and post-pandemic in the Great Resignation looked like in your sector?
5. What specific impacts do you see happening in the next few years and later due to the Great Resignation in the hospitality industry?

After the recruiters answered the five questions based on their own experiences within their respective sectors, I was able to analyze their responses. I first made sure that all of my notes and the conversations were fully updated and written out after going back through the recordings. After this, I went through all of the interviews to find the similar underlying themes of the recruiters' answers, which can be found in the findings section of this paper. I then went through the interviews again to find the differences between their responses and their specific sectors of the industry. The limitations to this research are that interviews could not be conducted in person and the sample size was limited. Despite this, the interviews provide important first-hand insight from these professionals in the field to answer what hospitality companies are doing

to recruit employees during the Great Resignation because of the experience that they have with the current candidates and employees. Additionally, from having first-hand experience, they can give advice and accurate knowledge on how they see the Great Resignation and the Covid-19 pandemic further shaping the hospitality industry in the future.

Interviews

The Club Sector

The first interview conducted was with Brian Armstrong. Brian has numerous years of experience in club management within multiple clubs. He has overseen changing and updating clubs to make them better and more efficient. He has been with eight different clubs and switched over to recruiting for the club sector of the industry for five years. He is now a recruiter with McMahon careers, which helps businesses find and hire the best professionals for open club positions. Brian chose recruiting to get out of operations due to the lack of a work-life balance that club operations provided. He found it to be a natural progression from the club industry. The following are his responses to the interview questions.

How do you believe the Great Resignation impacted the hospitality industry as a whole?

How has it impacted your specific sector of the hospitality industry?

Brian believes that there is going to be huge sociological research in the future looking back at the pandemic. Historically, country club entry positions used to be filled with young kids looking for any kind of work. Now, he sees those positions being filled with immigrants. Working within the club industry, the hours are tough, the pay is low, and servers are a transitional role. Brian believes that tech companies have stepped in to create a more unique and specialized work environment as people now have the ability to turn their work on and off when they want to, with Uber as an example. Additionally, the flexibility of other positions with the same pay hurt the hospitality industry. Brian sees the future of clubs and the hospitality industry being technology, apps, algorithms, and databases. He believes that in the future, employees

could be able to pick up shifts at different times, with different salaries. If needed, businesses could increase salaries based on time and need.

Have recruiting tactics and strategies changed because of the Great Resignation? What did they consist of before? What did they consist of after?

Before the pandemic, there were multiple candidates for each position, managers were able to hire slow and fire fast. There was a slow process with a relatively high number of qualified candidates. On a scale of 10, they would hire someone with a score of 6 or 7. Now, if they hire someone on a scale of 10, they rank 3 or higher. Additionally, it is now standard to hire someone that does not have club experience whereas that was the exception before. The hiring process is a lot faster now with more rolling admissions as they don't want to wait as candidates are snatched up faster. The expectation now is that the hiring manager reaches out to them within 48 hours. The process has become quick and the candidates have become more unskilled.

Do you believe that the shift in recruiting strategies have been effective after the Great Resignation?

Right now, Brian believes that there is not enough supply, and he doesn't think the shift in recruiting strategies have been effective. He sees it as forcing people who are unskilled to fail. He believes that the biggest thing will be training in the future as the experience level is not there. They can hire for personality and train the skills, as candidates want organized and formal training.

What has the retention of employees throughout the pandemic and post-pandemic in the Great Resignation looked like in your sector?

A huge challenge in clubs is that members want to see the same face every time they come in. The issue is that it is harder to retain employees in the member facing jobs. Society is

changing and clubs are not as they need a regimented process to train people and then let them leave. They need to be incentivized to stay but need to be respected that they may leave as clubs don't recognize that. They ultimately need to reconcile between the expectations and what the reality is of the situation now.

What specific impacts do you see happening in the next few years and later due to the Great Resignation in the hospitality industry?

Brian sees clubs as being 5-7 years behind in the trends because competition does not kill them as much as other sectors of the hospitality industry. He believes that clubs do not change because they do not have to. However, expectations have changed as prices change. Clubs need to build more but don't have enough staff to do so. They have to reconcile expectations but need to embrace the gig economy and work it into their current system. Technology needs to take off within clubs to change for the better. For example, they can do training ahead of time on the employee's phone. Brian states, "why aren't we being more technologically advanced to the generation who can handle it as they can be more efficient with time." Ultimately, clubs need to evolve. Kitchens are starting to change as they are keeping it simpler with smaller menus and specials. Additionally, he thinks the future of culinary clubs will be the food that comes in bags, with it being pre-made in another location. Clubs can make it consistent with high quality food and a low skilled employee if it is pre-made. The real product is cooked in a more efficient way with less staff as it is more automated. Ultimately, the club is not beholden to the one grill person that knows all the quirks of appliances and in the end creates a more consistent product in an efficient manner both financially and staffing wise.

The Restaurant Sector

The second interview I conducted was with Meagan Tosh. Meagan is the Associate Director of Talent Development for Great American Restaurants, which owns and operates fifteen different high volume, upscale restaurants and two artisan bakeries in the Washington, DC area. Meagan has a hospitality degree from the University of Delaware and started in the industry in operations. She first worked as a Manager in Training at Hillstone Restaurant Group and tried many different sectors of the industry. She ended up working front of house at Hillstone Restaurant Group. Afterwards, she moved to work at the Kennedy center, where she ran a fine dining restaurant on the rooftop. In 2001, She started working for Great American Restaurants where she was a manager in Arlington, Virginia. She moved through many different roles moving from an operator to college recruiting, then industry recruiting to training for front of house, and finally manager training and development. She currently occasionally works training for opening restaurants for managers entering the company as an outside hire. She also does ongoing development programs for managers, and college recruiting for Great American Restaurants. She finds it easy to recruit because she loves the company and the operations position. She also loves to find out who would be a great fit for the positions in the company. It is also very satisfying to find the right position for the right person and she loves to learn along the way. The following are her responses to the interview questions.

How do you believe the Great Resignation impacted the hospitality industry as a whole?

How has it impacted your specific sector of the hospitality industry?

In 2020, in the beginning and middle of the pandemic, Great American Restaurants was able to keep all of their salary managers. They were able to give full salaries the whole time and they kept all benefits for their managers. In late 2020 to early 2021, they had about 6 high

performing female managers leave and go to work for Amazon or other places. This took several high performing people out of the mix of managers for the company. Meagan noticed that Amazon was able to offer what Great American Restaurants couldn't, which was guaranteed specific shifts, doubled pay, and a different lifestyle. She believes that they traded being treated well by an owner and having a work family for the benefits of a larger company. She also learned that people's time off is very important and became a more prevalent need for employees during the pandemic. Great American Restaurants was very committed to having a quality of life for their employees. In the past, people were committed to a fulfilling job that they wanted, over family time and time off. This notion has now changed with the pandemic. Turnover is higher this year than in the past and they also have more internal hires than in the past. They are looking more at internal recruiting for growth and development of their employees. Great American Restaurants is keeping college recruiting; however, college students are looking for more different things than before. She believes that they need to adjust a little bit by potentially changing benefits and diversify opportunities. It's difficult because restaurants can't have remote jobs. However, they can offer human connection, and Meagan believes people will want to come back when they realize that human connection in work and life is important.

Have recruiting tactics and strategies changed because of the Great Resignation? What did they consist of before? What did they consist of after?

More companies are looking outside of the country to look for staff temporarily, such as J1s. They also need to figure out how to balance administrative work, with potential work from home as specific hours could be on the floor, while other hours could be done from home for managers. They also need to be committed to being staffed and providing a quality work environment that they have. They could maybe offer different paths for careers, allowing

employees options to only pick up certain shifts for the week and forgo any benefits so that there would be ways to have a tiered approach to get more coverage during the meal periods that they need. On the other hand, someone who wants to be a managing partner is required to do x, y, and z to get there. If they don't find a way to appreciate the operator and find a way to give them the flexibility that is offered to the corporate people to do their work from home, then the industry will be in a bad spot.

Do you believe that the shift in recruiting strategies have been effective after the Great Resignation?

Prior to 2020, Great American restaurants didn't use Indeed or other job platforms for employees. Now, they are using these platforms to reach more people. They believe that it is important to be able to stick to their values and also be able to recruit. Meagan believes that it is important to be honest when recruiting and to be sure that you don't promise something you can't guarantee. Transparency in recruiting is imperative. Great American Restaurants are busier than ever but it is difficult to find the staff to do the job. It would be beneficial to find automation in the future with servers. The volume of takeout is a lot more than before which is difficult to manage with the existing customers without proper staffing. Overall, the importance of giving quality of food and service hasn't changed but the vehicle to do so has.

What has the retention of employees throughout the pandemic and post-pandemic in the Great Resignation looked like in your sector?

On March 16, 2020, Great American Restaurants had to lay off all hourly employees, which was a tough decision to do because they knew those people needed the money for their families. In June, in that same year, they offered all the people they laid off their jobs back. During those few months, they offered family meals for free to those laid off, and had managers

stay in touch with them. They also started a community kitchen food truck to feed food insecure communities. Staying in touch with laid off employees allowed for the turnover to lessen as it was a priority for them to let their employees know they cared. Meagan believes that ultimately the candidate has changed with generations and the pandemic. They are now using online for sourcing, automated systems for recruiting, and trying to do a virtual orientation. Overall, they are trying to adapt and change traditional human resources processes. For example, the application is now 5 questions versus 26 with more questions appearing in the interview. Meagan finds that retention is good, not as good as before but better than most places because of the human connections part of onboarding and training. She finds that staffing is hard but once they are on board, they take good care of them.

What specific impacts do you see happening in the next few years and later due to the Great Resignation in the hospitality industry?

Meagan sees the hospitality industry as getting better at making hiring decisions, with becoming more efficient and streamlining a lot of those processes. She sees it as not being transactional, but rather still efficient for onboarding. Meagan believes that finding other places to source would be beneficial as they may start going to high schools in addition to colleges. This will allow them to start recruiting earlier and keep a relationship with them as they go through college. Great American Restaurants can increase the number of internships that they offer to get people more work experience. She thinks there is a bright future and people still want to be in hospitality but the industry will need to adapt and change to offer more flexibility in scheduling as people want to have more choice as to when they work. The industry needs to experiment with things and see what people want. She believes that it is important to find the “why” for why

people want to work in hospitality or why they don't want to work in the industry and use that to adapt while still staying true to core values.

The Hotel Sector

The third and final interview that I conducted was with Sarah D'Angelo. Sarah is the Director of Talent Acquisition and University Recruitment for Marriott International. Marriott encompasses more than eight thousand properties in thirty different hotel brands in over one hundred forty countries and territories. Sarah has worked for Marriott for fifteen years and fell into hospitality when a friend suggested that she has the right personality and drive to be a recruiter in the hospitality industry. She did not know about the hospitality industry when she was in college, but she knew that she wanted to work in New York City. Sarah applied to Marriott after graduation and was selected to be a Human Resources Generalist for the Marriott Marquis in New York where she found her passion. She worked for nine years in Human Resources on property and started to work through the ranks first as a generalist, then to a manager, moving to a director. She has training, recruiting, and performance development experience. After being on property, Sarah switched to the recruiting side of Marriott at corporate headquarters in 2017. She was the Northeast recruiting manager, and then she was promoted to senior manager, and is now director of the department. Sarah chose a career in recruiting because she is very talkative, outgoing, and has a bubbly personality. She has a passion for talking to and helping people. Sarah found her niche in the recruiting part of Human Resources and realized that she has a passion to help people and that it allowed her to work for her passion. The following are her responses to the interview questions.

How do you believe the Great Resignation impacted the hospitality industry as a whole?

How has it impacted your specific sector of the hospitality industry?

When the pandemic started, it allowed for people to think about their values, families, and what's most important to them when everything shut down. Marriott hit 8% global occupancy in April 2020, which was the lowest ever and unheard of. People were scared of exposure, the possibility of losing their job involuntarily, and not knowing what was happening next. With the height of the pandemic, and people staying home, it allowed them to think about what they wanted which changed to people not wanting to have shift work or long hours anymore. Most people found it wasn't a fit for them anymore as they thought about their lives and their values. Sarah sees a large part of people quitting was because of their kids and how daycare was closed during the pandemic. Taking care of family became a top priority, and weaving that in with the hospitality industry is tough sometimes especially because there are very few remote jobs. During the pandemic, in person jobs were thought of as a risk to personal health and family situations.

Have recruiting tactics and strategies changed because of the Great Resignation? What did they consist of before? What did they consist of after?

From the college perspective, recruiting was very different in 2019 versus today. In 2019, students really wanted to work for Marriott as it was a large, well-known company. Marriott didn't have to work as hard to recruit because people knocked on their door for jobs. Now, students are more hesitant to take any job. Students are used to being remote for classes, choosing schedules, and to being more on a 9-to-5 schedule. Students now are not ready to commit or interview right away as they want to see what's out there before committing to a job. They want more time to figure out what's best for them. Students are starting to think about work-life balance and family life outside of work. As recruiters, they need to pivot how to reach

out to students and to adapt a more virtual strategy. So far, it sounds like students prefer to interview online and have more of a virtual hiring process.

Do you believe that the shift in recruiting strategies have been effective after the Great Resignation?

Recruiting strategies have been sort of effective after the Great Resignation. Recruiters are doing their best right now as they are still finding out more information about what students want. In some ways they have been able to pivot and in others they need to pivot again. They are still gathering information and then figuring out how to better it for next semester.

What has the retention of employees throughout the pandemic and post-pandemic in the Great Resignation looked like in your sector?

Retention has not been great through the pandemic. For those who stayed, Marriott made sure that the payoff was good as they made a lot of changes to the benefits and payment structure. All entry level managers are now bonus eligible, which was not the case in 2019. They tried to make a lot of changes for those who have stayed to show appreciation. Retention has been good so far but they lost a lot of employees and it is much harder to get people to come back after laying off so many people during the pandemic as occupancy was low in the hotels.

What specific impacts do you see happening in the next few years and later due to the Great Resignation in the hospitality industry?

The biggest impact is that business is back and booming. After the pandemic, they don't have the adequate staff back in the hotels. They are working on it but it is a struggle to get back to enough employees. The staff can feel overburdened and burnout can happen if there aren't enough employees for the amount of business they are getting. They need to pivot how to look at scheduling the associates and managers, potentially having 4, 10-hour workdays instead of the

typical 9-to-5. They are also offering part time options, and they need to continue to hone the benefits and perks so that people are able to get some relief even though staffing is not at the right levels right now.

Findings

When analyzing and understanding the interviews conducted on the Great Resignation and the hospitality industry, it is evident that there are three specific themes prevalent when examining the similarities between all three recruiters. These themes include the reasons as to why employees are leaving the hospitality industry, the current changes and human resources practices that are adapting, and the future of technology and automation. Through their interviews, all three recruiters talked about these specific themes and their thoughts on the Great Resignation.

Employees Leaving the Hospitality Industry

During their interviews, Brian, Meagan, and Sarah, all mentioned the reasons for why employees are leaving the hospitality industry, and what is making recruiting especially challenging during and after the pandemic. They all mentioned how there is now a change to how people think about their values, families, and what is most important to them. Before the pandemic, many people would take jobs that they believed were best for advancing their career, but were not necessarily looking at work-life balance. The pandemic allowed for people to examine their life and their way of living which in turn allowed for them to change what they valued most which became values, family, and work-life balance. With businesses closing during the height of the pandemic, many shift workers were not able to work as it was high risk. This allowed for them to rethink what types of jobs they wanted to have. There was a shift in people not wanting to have shift work or long hours anymore as it was not a stable schedule and they found it wasn't a fit for them. The hospitality industry has a lot of jobs that require long and hard

hours, while the pay is low. With people looking towards more remote positions, it left the hospitality industry struggling as there are very few remote jobs available. Many employees left the industry for guaranteed shifts and doubled pay, which a company like Amazon could provide.

In addition to this, lots of students during the pandemic were able to be remote for their classes, while also choosing their own schedules. As these students enter the workforce, they are going to want to have jobs that reflect the same as their classes, which was choosing their schedules and being remote. The hospitality industry is seeing this happen right now as students are more hesitant to take jobs. They want to see what else is out there and are starting to think more about a work-life balance. Businesses that are recruiting for students are trying to find out more about what they want so that they can continue to pivot and adapt to recruit this group of potential employees.

Lastly, it is very difficult to recruit new employees right now for the industry as staff can be overburdened and burnout can happen easily. The hospitality industry is busier than ever as people want to take more vacations or connect with others more after the pandemic, however with short staff this can lead to burnout for current employees and an even larger problem for the industry.

Current Changes and Adaptations to Human Resources Practices

The next theme that the recruiters mentioned throughout their interviews was the current changes and human resources practices that are adapting because of the Great Resignation. Many companies made a lot of changes to their current human resources practices during the pandemic in order to keep up with what employees wanted. For example, many companies made a lot of

changes to their benefits and payment structure to either entice employees to stay or to recruit new employees. Companies are finding that they need to hone in on their benefits and perks that employees are utilizing so that they can get some relief if they are feeling burnt out.

Companies are also experimenting with different benefits, perks, scheduling, hires, and more to find out what will work best and what people want in order to work for that company. For example, companies have started to rely more on J1 international hires for their peak seasons. They are also pivoting on how to schedule associates and managers by creating more options for them such as four days a week for ten-hour shifts. They also offer more part time options for positions that have been historically only full time. Additionally, they are open to offering different career paths to offer employees more options and personalization for their career growth in the company.

It is crucial for companies to find the same way to give hospitality workers the same flexibility that is offered to corporate employees in order to gain more employees overall. Since they deem the candidate has changed, due to generational reasons, recruiters emphasize the need to be flexible and to cater to the values of the new candidate. They need to adapt and offer more flexibility in scheduling to give employees more choice as to when they work. The hospitality industry is about providing exceptional experiences, and it is imperative that recruiters find out the “why” for why people want to work in hospitality or “why” they do not and use that information to adapt.

The Future of Technology and Automation

The third and last common theme between the recruiters was the future of technology and automation within the hospitality industry. This technology and automation can be used in

multiple different ways to create a better space for employees within the industry. One way that the recruiters described automation was to create more automated systems for both recruiting and traditional human resources processes such as orientation, training, and onboarding. By creating a more automated system within these processes, companies can become efficient in the way that they utilize their time and resources. It is also more efficient for the employee, which ultimately allows them to feel more satisfied as they gain more time back to themselves. Companies do have to figure out the right way to go about automating these systems as there is a fine line between efficiency and human connection which allows employees to feel as though they are a part of the company and valued.

Another aspect of technology that has changed the way that people now work is the gig economy. The gig economy is a labor market that is characterized by short contracted “gigs.” Uber is a great example of this economy. This gig economy has become more and more popular for people to work in as it creates more of a unique and specialized work environment. It's very difficult for the hospitality industry to compete with this economy as it allows for the ability to turn your work on and off based on your preferences. It also allows more flexibility with around the same amount of pay as the hospitality industry, which allows for hospitality industry workers to make the move to work in a gig economy space. The future of the hospitality industry, as Brian Armstrong talked about in his interview, is the gig economy. The industry needs to find some type of technology, app, algorithm, or database, to allow for employees to pick up different shifts at different times and the business can fluctuate their salaries based on the time and need of that person.

Additionally, automation is the future. If the industry creates more automated processes, such as pre-cooked packaged food being delivered to a restaurant that was prepared consistently

and in bulk off property, all that the employee would need to do would be to reheat the product. This allows for the industry to hire less skilled workers to create a larger pool of potential candidates for recruiters, be more efficient, and have a consistent, quality product. Along with this idea is the notion that as people less skilled enter the hospitality industry, it will become more imperative to train them. By creating a regimented training process, anyone will be able to perform hospitality jobs and it will broaden the pool of potential candidates for recruiters.

It is vital that the hospitality industry utilizes technology to set themselves apart from other employers. As Brian stated in his interview, employees can complete training ahead of time on their phone or complete their stand-up meeting on their phone with a quiz at the end, ensuring that they know what is going on in the business day. If they pass the quiz on the first time, they could be eligible to have a small increase in hourly pay for that shift, as an example. This ultimately allows for time to be used more efficiently and employees can complete what they need to based on their specific needs. The generation of employees that are entering the workforce can handle relying on technology more for work, therefore it is vital that the industry utilize it to their advantage.

Differences Within the Sectors

While there are many similarities between all three sectors of the industry, there are a few differences that are important to highlight in regards to staffing during the Great Resignation. The first is the amount of business that customers brought in during the pandemic. During the pandemic, both the restaurant and hotel sectors saw major declines in occupancy. In most cases, it was the lowest they had ever seen as people did not want to travel or eat in public for fear of contracting Covid-19. As travel became more popular after the pandemic and staffing levels

continued to be lower than normal, there was a decrease in guest satisfaction and quality as there were not enough staff to create sufficient customer service. This is contrasted with the club sector in the industry. The club sector during the pandemic saw a spike in members as the outdoor sports became more popular for people to participate in as it was safer to be outside. These sports include golf, tennis, pickleball, and more. Additionally, with the nature of the club industry, members felt safer being at the clubs as they knew the people that consistently were there and they were part of a social bubble. Recruiting is then impacted as word of mouth will spread fast and people will not want to work for a hotel or restaurant if they see staffing levels low. The implications of low-quality customer service are that most times this means angrier guests and not many employees want to deal with angry guests. On the other hand, it may make recruiting for the club sector easier than the others as people might gravitate toward that sector to remove themselves from the others and try something different within the hospitality industry.

The next difference is how the businesses were able to get their employees to come back and work for them after layoffs occurred during the height of the pandemic. During her interview, Sarah mentioned the difficulty that they experienced in recruiting back their employees that they laid off during the pandemic as they are a large company. On the other hand, Megan talked in her interview about how Great American Restaurants, a smaller hospitality company, was able to bring back a lot of their employees that they laid off. She attributes this to managers being able to stay in touch with these laid off employees as they were able to offer family meals for free. Overall, staying in touch with the employees that were laid off allowed for the turnover to lessen as it was a priority for the company and managers.

The last difference is in regard to trends and technology. Over the last few years, both the restaurant and hotel sectors of the industry have constantly changed in technology and trends in

order to stay ahead of their competition and to obtain the next best thing to attract customers. The club sector on the other hand is a few years behind in that regard as they do not have as much competition. They continue to build on their properties to offer more to their members, but are still facing staffing challenges to staff those new amenities. It is important to have the club industry embrace these trends and technological advances in order to attract new and better talent, and so that the talent they currently have does not get burnt out and ultimately create a larger problem for them.

The interviews with Brian Armstrong, Meagan Tosh, and Sarah D'Angelo were very insightful on how new candidates and current employees are responding to the Great Resignation. They were able to give insightful information on their specific sectors of the industry to give different perspectives and an overall full picture on how the industry stands with the Great Resignation. The recommendations that they gave for how to best change for the future gives the future generation more to think about as they enter the workforce.

Discussions and Conclusions

Evidence From the Existing Literature

Through the literature review, it is evident that the hospitality industry needs to evolve in order to see success when it comes to recruiting new employees after the pandemic and during the Great Resignation. With the hospitality industry seeing a decline in guest-facing employees, many existing employees, either in that position or higher up, were forced to overextend themselves to cover extra shifts or add more responsibility. Due to this, these workers were feeling very burnt out and often quit their jobs to find something that better suited their work-life balance. This ultimately created a vicious cycle of workers quitting their jobs and workers that stayed being overworked and burnt out.

Additionally, with the pandemic, the industry needs to change their current structure in terms of demonstrating more empathy, re-evaluating pay and benefits, and expanding their employee assistance programs. They have also found that they need to customize retention strategies according to age groups as younger employees have different values than older employees. This will allow for more retention and an easier time recruiting for more employees to bridge the gap for being understaffed. By ultimately focusing on retention, the company's current employees will become more satisfied and will help to recruit more employees as reputation will become more positive and word of mouth will spread. Lastly, when managers are talking to current employees, it is important to understand their emotions and what they mean. If managers catch on to employees' feelings of burnout or values not aligning, then they will be more likely to address the situation and fix it to retain the employee.

Evidence From the Interviews

When looking at the interviews that were conducted, all the recruiters mentioned very important facts and themes that they see first-hand in the industry and what they believe needs to be improved. They first mentioned how during the pandemic, workers thought about their values and what they wanted from working, which was often what the industry could not provide them. This includes hire pay, more regular schedules, flexible schedules, and more. They also found that companies that changed their current human resources practices to retain employees were more successful when recruiting. Like before, they were able to offer some type of flexible schedule, more pay, and better benefits. This not only attracted new hires, but allowed for more retention among current employees.

The recruiters also mentioned the future and importance of technology to the industry and recruiting. As automation and the gig economy becomes more popular, the hospitality industry will need to find a way to incorporate these into their day-to-day operations to stay relevant. These technological advances will allow them to stay competitive in the job market and recruit more employees overall who can create more consistent quality work with an automated process. Lastly, there were a few differences between the sectors when it came to advancing, the guests, and layoffs. It is crucial that the sector of the industry and the specific company in that sector decide what is best for the company overall. Some changes might be more beneficial than others for a company and it is best for that company to analyze the potential changes and solutions to see the ultimate impact that it will have on their own employees and business.

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