

THE SELECTION PROCESS FOR ENTRY-LEVEL FOODSERVICE MANAGERS

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ABSTRACT

According to the National Restaurant Association (2003), turnover rates for employees in the foodservice industries are more than 200% in several areas. One approach to understanding the short retention of entry-level management across the foodservice industry is to consider the interviewing techniques and desired attributes commonly used to hire managers and determine their effectiveness. This paper represents a qualitative longitudinal study among several major foodservice companies comparing interview responses to the selection process for entry-level foodservice managers in 1992 with answers to the same questions by the same companies in 2002.

INTRODUCTION

According to the National Restaurant Association (2003), turnover rates for employees in the foodservice industry are more than 200% in some areas (www.HospitalityTechnology.com). This rate is only slightly lower for foodservice managers. Retention of qualified management in the foodservice industry is becoming more and more critical as the workforce continues to shrink (Chomka, S., 2003). There are many factors influencing the retention of entry-level managers. One approach to understanding the short retention of entry-level management may be to consider the interviewing techniques and the desired personal attributes for applicants commonly used by the foodservice industry. Interviewing techniques refers to the process of screening potential management candidates to consider a candidate's ability to successfully fill a position within a given organization. There are many different attributes used in the interview process to aid in the selection of these candidates.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What are the determinants in the selection of entry-level foodservice managers among several major foodservice companies and how specifically have those desired requirements changed from 1992 to 2002?

Into what categories of the foodservice industry did the interviewed companies fall?

Among the categories of the foodservice industry, what specific items were key in the selection of entry-level foodservice managers?

What are the most effective sources for recruitment among foodservice companies?

What are the desired attributes for entry-level management candidates during the interview process?

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Initially

The study (Scales, 1992) focused on the hiring of entry-level foodservice managers and contained some time-honored, general principles for recruiting hospitality managers industry in general. In an earlier study, Dr. David Ley (1978), had developed correlates of management effectiveness using a structured observation approach. Since that time others have used the structured observation approach: Crandall, W., Emenheiser, D.A.; Parnell, J.A. & Jones, C.A. (1996); Pavesic, D.C. & Brymer, R.A. (1989); and have applied these same principles to examining the stress and pressures on young hospitality managers. These entry-level managers must operate in constantly changing environments, coping with events and situations that are most often turbulent and unpredictable. High turnover is the norm. Dr. Ley has in fact concluded across research over the past 15 years that the role of the hospitality manager is at any given time influenced by four situational variables:

1. The hotel, restaurant or foodservice organization itself.
2. The level of the managerial job within the particular organization.
3. The impact of individual personality and management style.

4. Job variations attributed to seasonality or temporary emergencies.

Currently

Literature in the form of recent articles seem to indicate that little has changed from the initial study of the selection process of new managers among foodservice companies in 1992. In a Wall Street Journal article by B. Wysocki (2001), his efforts at finding and creating a management team for his Golden Corral franchise in Kentucky is fraught with “undesirables.” Undesirable job characteristics including long hours, lower pay, and weekend work. It is essential to develop recruitment and interviewing strategies that will more closely match the successful entry-level manager to this field of work. In a 2001 study, Professors R. Ghiselli and J. LoLopa surveyed entry-level foodservice managers, graduates of Purdue University, in terms of the issues that were driving them to quit jobs, or to leave the industry, or both. There are indeed many quality of life issues involved for the entry-level foodservice manager. In yet another story in Nations Restaurant News (2000), Milford Prewitt presents study findings that show that it is the operators/owners of foodservice companies that are causing their own turnover problems with new managers. Quality of life issues surface again and again in the retention of entry-level foodservice managers. In yet another issue (Allen R.L., 2000), Robin Lee Allen addresses things that owners/management of foodservice companies can do to end turnover and thus alleviate the intense labor shortages among entry-level managers in the foodservice industry. Employee benefit initiatives and better marketing strategies that can make companies more attractive to the prospective entry-level manager candidates are outlined. Dr. Ley’s research that first identified these situational variables (1978), is still true today.

The literature research has been organized to portray the foodservice industry, the role of the foodservice manager and the information with regards to the selection processes for entry-level managers in the foodservice industry. Also investigated are the available recruitment resources used in the selection process of these foodservice managers.

METHODOLOGY

Personal Interview

Personal interviews have been conducted with those responsible for the hiring of entry-level foodservice managers using the same interviewer positions, ten years apart.

A comparison of the results of these interviews, a decade later, was made to determine if there are similarities between the work style preferences exhibited by successful entry-level foodservice management candidates in 1992 and the work style preferences that are most desirable to the corporate foodservice recruiters today.

In order to compare the personal characteristics of management candidates that are desirable to foodservice recruiters, as much information as possible has been gleaned from the interviews. The nature of these interviews is to research the selection process of foodservice managers among several well-known foodservice companies. From the questions posed, this study compares responses on several factors: who among these foodservice companies is currently responsible for interviewing management candidates, what selection methods are used in the hiring decision, what are the most effective resources used in recruiting foodservice managers, and most importantly what are the desired attributes in recruiting entry-level foodservice management candidates.

Gathering data for this research was key to accuracy. The research method selected for this process was personal structured interviews. Personal interviews allowed the researcher to obtain in-depth answers to the interview questions by probing. Probing refers to interviewers asking for clarification on expansion of answers to standardized questions (Bogdan and Biklin, 2003). Personal interviews were also employed, in order to provide the identity of the respondent and control all aspects of the sample (Bogdan and Biklin, 2003).

It was extremely important to control the distribution of the sample. All subjects had to be currently employed in the foodservice industry and all must have been in a position that required them to hire entry-level management in foodservices. The personal interview enabled the researcher to be aware of the subject’s identity and current position in order to provide accurate data throughout the interview process. The 1992 questions to the foodservice company professionals utilized a structured interview approach as well. This study replicates the approach, the questions, and the structured interviews.

Corporate Changes

As would be expected, there have been changes that have occurred among the fifteen companies interviewed after a decade. One of the companies in the original study no longer exists, two of the companies have been

consolidated into one company and one of the original companies would not respond for an interview.

Findings

During this study, the selection process was discussed in three separate entities. First, the recruiting stage, this is the process of attracting potential managers to an organization. Secondly, the interview process which consists of verbal communication between potential management candidates and the organization. All other tools and techniques used in the selection process have been considered to be selection systems or methods. This paper examines the tools and techniques used by foodservice recruiters in an attempt to establish what traits recruiters are looking for in selecting entry-level management candidates, and how these traits hold up over time. Recommendations from the original 1992 study suggested a replicate study across time to see how the findings of the original study would be different or change. Were the responses to interview questions among foodservice companies the same ten years later? Have the desired traits/attributes for entry-level managers in the foodservice industry changed in the last decade?

Question One

What are the selection process requirements for entry-level foodservice managers among several major foodservice companies? How specifically have the requirements changed from 1992-2002 (TABLE 1)?

Although the spectrum of responses was much larger in 1992, the top response cited as most important has remained the same. Relevant work experience is the single most important determinant for hiring entry-level foodservice managers. In 1992, education and job stability ranked two and three respectively in their level of importance to foodservice companies in the selection of entry-level foodservice managers. In 2002, matching corporate qualifications for the job and professionalism respectively, have taken the place of education in importance to recruiters. The second most important determinant is a red flag to hospitality higher education programs. The change in response from 1992 to 2002 gives cause for concern in this decade of information systems and technology management. A myriad of other items that did appear as selection methods in the 1992 study do not reoccur in 2002 (TABLE 1).

Question Two

Into what categories of the foodservice industry did the interviewed companies fall?

In 1992, four were hotel companies, five were restaurants, and six were contract foodservice or managed service companies. In 2002, four were hotels, three were restaurants and four were contract foodservice or managed service companies (TABLE 2).

Question Three

Among the categories of the foodservices industry, what items were key in the selection of entry-level foodservice managers?

Once again across all segments of the foodservice industry, work experience was the single most important item in the selection of entry-level foodservice managers (TABLE 3). What changed in 2002 over 1992 is that education in 1992 has been replaced in level of importance for the selection of entry-level foodservice managers with professionalism (TABLE 3). The third level of importance in the selection process of entry-level foodservice managers has changed from job stability in employment in 1992 to personality in 2002. It is only after these three items in the selection process have been identified that companies recognize the value of education. The value of education was fourth in 2002 as compared to second in 1992. Other items of importance for selection methods appear in TABLE 3.

Question Four

What are the most effective sources for recruitment among foodservice companies?

Most effective across all foodservice companies interviewed for the recruiting of entry-level managers is still the classified advertising section of newspapers. Second in effectiveness in 1992 was college and university recruiting. In 2002, the second most effective method of recruiting entry-level managers among these companies is promotions from within (TABLE 4).

Cited as the third most effective measure of recruitment in 2002 for entry-level foodservice managers are college and university recruiting and equally, referrals from other employees. The only other change since 1992 is the addition of online recruitment practices (TABLE 4).

Question Five

What are the desired attributes of entry-level management candidates during the interview process?

The most desired attributes for interviewees across all foodservice companies have remained the same over

the last decade. First in importance is still professionalism/ professional dress (TABLE 5). The second most important item during an interview is still honesty. In 2002, the third most important item for an entry-level candidate is to "be yourself" (TABLE 5).

RECOMMENDATIONS

The first recommendation for study is to develop a broad-spectrum quantitative questionnaire and solicit responses from corporate Human Resource Departments across the top 200 foodservice companies of the world.

The second most interesting area of study is to expand the current study from that of specifically the foodservice industry to other segments of the hospitality industry, i.e., hotels, casinos, leisure and recreation.

The conclusions arrived at in 1992, with the exception of education as a priority among entry-level foodservice manager recruitment have proven to still be true, a decade later. Little, if anything has changed in the selection process for entry-level foodservice managers or for continuing their retention within a company.

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TABLE 1
DETERMINANTS IN HIRING DECISIONS FOR FOODSERVICE MANAGERS

	Number of Responses	
	1992	2002
Work Experience (Relevant)	13	8
Education (Relevant)	6	1
Job Stability	3	1
Communication Skills	3	0
Honesty/Straight Forwardness	3	0
Matching Qualifications	3	3
Professionalism	2	3
Enthusiasm/Eagerness	2	1
Good References	2	1
Good Ideas	2	0
Realistic Views	2	1
Decision Making Ability	2	0
Good Supervisory Skills	2	0
Good Customer Relations Skills	1	1
Understanding the Expectations of the Job	1	0
Professional Appearance	1	0
Manners	1	0
Compensation Requirements	1	0
Highly Recommended	0	1
Personality	0	1
Flexibility	1	0
Positive Attitude	1	0
Work Ethic	1	0
Energetic	1	0
Interpersonal Skills	1	0
Technical Skills	1	0
Confidence	1	0
Committed to Industry	1	0
Personal Goals	1	0

TABLE 2
SECTORS - CATEGORIES OF FOODSERVICE COMPANIES

	1992	2002
Hotels	4	4
Restaurants	5	3
Foodservices	6	4

TABLE 3
DETERMINANTS IN HIRING DECISIONS FOR FOODSERVICE MANAGERS
CATEGORIZED BY SECTORS OF THE INDUSTRY

	Number of Responses							
	Total		Hotel		Restaurant		Foodservice	
	1992	2002	1992	2002	1992	2002	1992	2002
Work Experience (Relevant)	13	5	4	1	3	1	6	3
Education (Relevant)	6	1	0	0	3	1	3	0
Job Stability	3	1	2	1	0	0	1	0
Communication Skills	3	0	3	0	0	0	0	0
Honesty/Straight Forwardness	3	0	2	0	0	0	1	0
Matching Qualifications	3	1	1	0	1	0	1	1
Professionalism	2	3	1	1	0	2	1	0
Enthusiasm/Eagerness	2	1	2	1	0	0	0	0
Good References	2	0	1	0	0	1	1	0
Good Ideas	2	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
Realistic Views	2	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
Decision Making Ability	2	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
Good Supervisory Skills	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0
Good Customer Relations Skills	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0
Understanding the Expectations of the Job	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Professional Appearance	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Manners	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Compensation Requirements	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Flexibility	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Positive Attitude	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Personality	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	1
Work Ethic	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Energetic	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Interpersonal Skills	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Technical Skills	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Confidence	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Committed to Industry	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Personal Goals	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0

TABLE 4
THE BEST RECRUITING METHODS FOR ENTRY-LEVEL FOODSERVICE MANAGERS

Source	Number of Responses	
	1992	2002
Classified Ad	12	7
College and Universities	5	2
Referrals	3	2
“Headhunters”/Employment Agencies	3	0
Promotions from Within	3	5
Professional Organizations	1	0
Other Foodservice Organizations	1	1
Career Fairs	0	1
Online	0	1

TABLE 5
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POTENTIAL FOODSERVICE MANAGERS DURING THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

	Number of Responses	
	1992	2002
Professional/Appropriate Dress	8	7
Honesty	6	5
Knowledge of Yourself	4	1
Be Prepared	3	1
Knowledge of the Organization	3	1
Be Prompt/Punctual	3	0
Have Realistic Goals	3	0
Have a Well Prepared Resume'	3	0
Be Realistic Towards Position	3	0
Be Well Groomed	3	0
Be Professional	3	0
Show Enthusiasm	2	1
Make Eye Contact	2	0
Have Prepared Questions	2	0
Be Confident	2	0
Be Yourself	2	2
Have Good Communication Skills	2	0
Show Commitment to the Industry	1	0
Be Able to Communicate Personal Goals	1	0
Be Outgoing	1	0
Be Friendly	1	1
Have a Positive Attitude	1	0
Be Specific	0	1
Take Notes	1	0
Be at Ease	1	0
Think Questions Through	1	0
Sell Yourself	1	0
Be Willing to Speak	1	0