

Attracting youth to the hospitality sector (for the long run)

In the past, a career in the hospitality industry was guaranteed to offer a floodgate of opportunities streaming in one's direction, such as experiencing the local and international landscape and different hotels. This industry was possibly the hardest hit during the strict Covid-19 lockdowns in 2020, but the easing of restrictions has brought relief.



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As the sector slowly starts finding its feet, Kevin Burley, operations director at ANEW Hotels & Resorts, has encouraged more inclusion of youth as the industry offers tremendous growth potential. A bonus for working in hospitality is that you do not need to have a degree to become a manager, all you need is experience, initiative, and passion, a trait Burley is continually looking for.

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"Hospitality is an important industry for South Africa, and it allows you to travel, not only within the country but the world too. As an employee, you are creating memories and experiences for guests. Covid-19 has taught us that once you take away the international economy, it can have crippling effects on our domestic economy - Cape Town is a prime example," Burley says.

Training and development in the hospitality sector

The industry appeals to young people, aged between 20 and 35. Opportunities that exist include becoming a chef, waiter, barman, housekeeper, barista, and safari game ranger, to name a few. Despite the longer than usual hours, employees are afforded opportunities many other industries might not offer.

When Burley, originally from the United Kingdom, was 20 years old, he moved to Bermuda to pursue a career. He remained there for two years. Now he is part of one of South Africa's leading and growing hotel groups. "As a person who has travelled most of his life, South Africa is one of the most awesome destinations in the world. Where else can you have that extravagance of beautiful mountains and oceans such as the Indian and Atlantic oceans with white beaches," he says.

He believes empowering the youth to pursue a career in hospitality should start at school with a proper introduction and exposure to the infinite opportunities. Furthermore, Burley identifies issues within the sector. "Not enough is being done at the school level to promote hospitality as a career option. It goes back to understanding how much tourism means to the country. There is a bit of a gap, and it is something I plan to work on from an ANEW point of view by introducing a high school career day, etc. It is a tough industry, and you work long hours, but it is also a rewarding industry as you get to be part of visitors' celebrations. It also allows you to move around the country quite easily. There are a lot of positives about hospitality, but I don't believe that we are getting that message out to the youth," Burley adds.

Another issue that Burley highlighted is finding quality managers, which he says is not an easy task. In addition, he says a challenge many youngsters face is the lack of mentorship. "If you do not have a mentor in your family, you need to find one in your community or your field of work. It is about who you look up to and teach you the finer nuances for your career and personal success."

Creating opportunities for youth

The Covid-19 pandemic has not stopped the industry from growing, merely halted it in its steps. "If somebody does have the ability to interact with people on different levels, and have the confidence to talk to people, we can train them. This industry is not as complex as other industries, if you have a stunning personality and a bit of initiative then you can make it," he adds.

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