

Hotel Industry Is Getting Trashed, As Government, Labor And The Press Lambaste Our Reputation - By
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Hello, out there. Anyone home, on deck, at the switch, in charge? Perhaps you are not a reader of the Boston Globe, but they in the past month have taken some sharp shots at our Industry, rousing the public, and basically taking our business into the Public Forum.

The message from their editorial pages resonates with outrage and probably echoes, although not so stridently, what is happening throughout other major US cities. The Hotel Industry is under fire, and scrutiny shall not cease with a newly elected Democratic Congress.

And, your average reader of newspapers is probably nodding their head in agreement. Once that emotion becomes fueled, we, as an Industry, have little recourse. Any response is too late.

So, what have been the issues raised and thrown into that cauldron of Public Opinion? Last month (11/20/06) the Boston Globe took on wages, noting that Boston, as well as other cities and destinations, have added an enormous number of new properties, each finer than the other, outpacing the competition with higher levels of amenities and, of course, room prices. Why not share the wealth, they asked, instead of furthering an underclass. Los Angeles took it upon themselves to create a living wage, particularly for the LAX area hotels, now over \$11.00 with improved benefits. Labor contracts, which have recently been finalized, also reflect substantial increases. Fighting and scratching, we face some realities.

On December 11, 2006 the Boston Globe touched upon another topic: the low number of African Americans in the hotel workforce, where '...foreign-born workers are rapidly rising into the middle class.' Naturally, John Wilhelm, the President of UniteHERE, was an active voice, acknowledging that the decline '...might reflect perceptions among African Americans that the hotel industry offers 'dead end jobs'' This certainly gives one pause. Dead End - my goodness! Then, he offered a further assessment about hotel operators that they may be '...more interested in hiring workers who are less likely to know and assert their rights than people born in the United States'. More pause! Do we exploit people with a different language and culture? Take advantage - goodness gracious! The Editorial continued, speaking about the need for working groups to further determine the cause and some solutions, perhaps through racial goals and timetables.

And, while we are considering the make-up of our respective staffs, let's also remember that the Immigration issue has yet to be fully addressed by the US government.

We have spent a great deal of time crafting the Guest Experience and then trying our very best to deliver upon expectations. We know that Service is the differentiation, and our Staffs, the Ambassadors, are the people who establish that relationship which spells our success and value for the Guest. Yet, what challenges this tenuous proposition is absolutely critical to those Ambassadors - how they are paid, respected, developed and honored. The 'suits' do not make it happen.

Hoteliers are at a crossroads. Business has been good, growth phenomenal, profits hefty. However, your government, your elected representatives, your press and certainly your Labor Unions are 'nipping at your heels' with a strong message to take charge, chart a new course and become respected employers of choice rather than convenience. We have work to do. If we do not change, others will do it for us. The press loves a good story, and we sure are good fodder!

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