

### What is Your Contribution? Competency or Legacy?

Years ago a hospitality consultant told me his job was the easiest in the world. When the owners of a troubled property came to him for help, he said all he had to do was to find a competent general manager to turn the operation around. And certainly we all recognize the impact that competent management can make – better leadership, strong focus and initiative, improved service levels, and enhanced performance. Yet, as a hospitality manager, if your contribution to your owner(s) and customers/guests/members is merely competency, you are only doing part of the job.

A common failing in independent hospitality operations is what I call the “cult of competency,” though Jim Collins might term it, “good is the enemy of great.” Owners and customers are so thrilled to have competent management, especially if they’ve had a revolving door of weak managers, that they don’t expect or get a manager focused on “legacy” achievements – that is, an operation organized around well-defined and documented systems instead of force of personality and will.

Let me be clear. When an operation’s success is founded on individual competency, its success is built upon what should be considered “unacceptable risks.” What happens when the competent manager moves on to a more prestigious establishment, moves by geographical preference, retires, goes back to school, decides on a career change, becomes ill, or, heaven forbid, passes away?

When an operation without deeply ingrained organizational systems or “disciplines of success” at all levels of the operation loses its competent manager, it risks quite literally falling apart until a new competent general manager is found – and often this is not easily or quickly done.

The alternative to this all-too-familiar scenario of competency loss is to hire a general manager who is focused on long-term, legacy solutions. But what do we mean by legacy solutions? They are the deeply entrenched systems and management disciplines that result in consistently efficient and high-performing operations, whose longevity and success is not based on the individual, rather on organizational habit. Such habit includes:

- An operations plan made up of well-defined standards, policies, and procedures for HR, accounting, and all operating departments
- Implementation of consistent service-based leadership throughout the organization
- Coaching and professional development of subordinate managers
- Establishment and use of measurable accountabilities for all management positions
- A discipline of planning and review
- Thorough benchmarking of operations
- Continual process improvement
- A well-defined and executed customer/guest/member relationship management plan
- Fiscal disciplines, consistently applied
- Disciplined hiring
- Well-defined and continually reinforced organizational values
- Formal training programs for managers and all line positions

What then is the difference between a competent and legacy manager? A general manager's strong commitment to leave the operation poised for continued success when he or she departs.

Owners, club boards and executive search consultants put tremendous time and effort into finding competent managers for organizations and clients. I would argue that they go beyond competency and find those rare GMs who recognize the higher calling of providing legacy leadership.

One final point: Jim Collins, in his ground-breaking book *Good to Great*, found that every good to great company in his study had Level 5 Leaders. One of the key points about Level 5 Leaders was that they "set up their successors for even greater success in the next generation." The leaders of the comparison companies (the ones that did not achieve and maintain greatness) set up their successors for failure. While comparison leaders achieved some measure of success by virtue of competency and force of will, the companies they led were incapable of sustaining success long term. On the other hand, the Level 5 Leaders provided more than just competency; they were legacy leaders – and left a legacy of greatness!

*Ed Rehkopf, Hospitality Resources International*