

Driving hotel leadership at the local level

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Story Highlights

A properly formed and organized industry group can foster new business and career development for its members.

There remains a dearth of organization serving the interests of hospitality professionals at the local level.

Founding a successful hospitality association is easier than you might think.

Editor's note: This quarterly series of articles, written by members of the Atlanta Hospitality Alliance, explores leadership principles and philosophies within the hospitality industry.

Most readers are familiar with and involved in the leadership of their business organization, civic groups, religious groups and social groups. But, for both altruistic and selfish reasons, our efforts should extend beyond these areas and also focus on leadership within the hospitality industry at large.



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A properly formed and organized industry group can:

- 1) create additional business opportunities for its members through networking;
- 2) build a sense of professional community so members can establish common ground and start seeing their competitors as professional colleagues;
- 3) help members stay abreast of industry trends through educational programming and forums to share ideas;
- 4) improve personal and professional relationships between members;
- 5) give back to the hospitality community via philanthropic giving and create opportunities for students and younger professionals to participate in industry events; and
- 6) organize collective action to influence public policy matters on issues that most effect our industry.

While many professionals in our industry have been well-served by strong national and local industry groups such as the American Hotel & Lodging Association, other constituents have not been represented as strongly—especially at the local level.

Not only is there a dearth of such organizations, but those who have made the attempt often have failed. That's why any new group should focus on the following three core principles of success:

1. Member diversification: While we can exclude individuals based on a lack of professional credentials, there should be no exclusion of members based on business or competitive grounds. If the organization is to succeed, it must be diverse and include all members of the industry regardless of competitive history. (After all, you don't need an industry group if you want to keep marketing to the same people you already know.)

2. Member accessibility: There must be unrestricted access to membership information among the members. An industry group cannot be perceived as a marketing initiative of any one company or individual. No one will follow your lead if the majority of the benefits flow to a narrow group of individuals or members.

3. Clear mission and purpose: Focus on what is important. The first priority of board discussions must be about providing the best possible networking environment and educational programming for the members. If you provide exceptional member services, everything else will fall into place.

How to create a leadership organization

If you can attract a core group of professionals who agree on the above principles, the "how-to" steps of setting up a leadership group are pretty simple:

Organize a preliminary planning

meeting

Have a preliminary meeting among interested colleagues to define your focus and agree upon the organization's core principles. This meeting also should focus on creating a list of industry executives in the area that share similar professional interests or frequently do business together (or compete against each other). This can be done by reviewing the contact lists of core groups and reviewing registration lists for industry conferences or trade shows that regularly attract the demographic you seek.

Gather information.

Email those individuals and ask them to complete a short survey regarding their level of interest in the group and thoughts about the focus of the group.

Host a kickoff meeting.

Call an initial meeting to gauge the level of interest and discuss the core principles of the organization and ask for volunteers to serve on an advisory board. To help the group stay true to its diversity goals, the advisory board should be comprised of individuals with different skill sets within the industry at large.

Form a board.

Invite 12 to 15 diverse members of the demographic to participate in the advisory board and calendar an initial set of meetings to establish membership criteria, frequency of meetings and substance of meetings.

Get everybody involved.

Divide responsibilities among the board of advisors to:

- approach specific hotels to host or sponsor your events;
- discuss topics for future educational programs;
- discuss when to formalize membership; and
- discuss financial matters such as the amount of annual dues and sponsorship opportunities.

It's hard to deny we receive significant professional benefits from quality networking and industry educational forums. It's also hard to deny those opportunities can be rare at the local level. If you need more encouragement than your economic self-interest, consider the amount you have benefitted in your career from the mentorship, advice and friendship of influential people in our industry, and imagine the similar impact you could have on the lives of others in our industry.

It's time to step up. It's easy, it's important, and you will have fun doing it.

Daniel Weede is an attorney at Carlton Fields. He regularly represents institutional real estate lenders, investors, and developers in commercial lending, acquisitions/dispositions and development transactions, including mixed-use and joint venture projects. In addition, Mr. Weede has extensive experience in representing hotel brands, owners, developers, lenders, and managers in all aspects of hotel ownership, management and financing. He is the past president and founder of the Atlanta Hospitality Alliance.

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The Atlanta Hospitality Alliance ("AHA") was created in late 2009 by Dan Weede of Carlton Fields and Monty Levy of HREC Investment Advisors to provide a forum for Atlanta area hospitality executives with a transactional and development focus to network and collaborate on industry-specific matters. In 2010, the AHA became a members-only, nonprofit corporation. To date, it has approximately 100 dues-paying members, with the goal of not exceeding 200 members. The AHA holds quarterly meetings at Atlanta area hotels; each meeting comprises networking and educational components. For more information about the Atlanta Hospitality Alliance, please visit www.atlantahospitalityalliance.com.