

# Staying the Course of Service, by Kevin Robinson

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By [Kevin Robinson](#), COO and Managing Partner, Aparium Hotel Group

Maybe you've been there...you look at the clock and the minutes slowly tick by. Each day seems to be the same as the previous. You've fallen into a rut. Often associates feel the same way. It's vital - particularly in the hospitality industry - that managers engage teams to sustain their motivation and passion, both in their day-to-day roles as well as in the service they deliver to guests and customers. According to Gallup's State of the Global Workplace report, a mere 13 percent of employees worldwide are engaged at work, a sobering figure for all employers. With engagement at an all-time low, it's a particularly important time to motivate your workforce and the impact that it has on engagement.

The most significant asset that any business holds is its associates. Gallup describes three types of associates: engaged, not engaged, and actively disengaged. 'Engaged associates' work with passion and have a connection to their company. They are diligent and focused in their work ethic, and will outperform any neighboring hotel or competitor. 'Not engaged associates' are distant and essentially "checked out" on the job. They clock in and out, doing just enough to get through the day and watching the clock at all times. They get the job done, but far from exceed expectations. 'Actively disengaged associates' are the most dangerous to your company's culture. These associates use their energy to act out against the accomplishments of their engaged associates. Disengagement impacts more than just the morale at our hotels, it affects service levels, profitability, turnover, productivity and the overall guest experience.

So, what steps can a manager take to properly and successfully motivate their associates? Daniel Pink's book, Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us, highlights three essential elements of motivation: autonomy, mastery, and purpose. These drivers are not the typical "recognize and reward" approach for which most of us are familiar. Autonomy, mastery, and purpose work together to achieve high performance and operate as one to steer associates in the right direction and combat a complacent and disengaged state of mind.

- Associates want control of their job - give them the autonomy to make decisions. Do you allow your managers to lead, or do you take control and stand in their way?
- Associates want to improve their job performance. What opportunities have you put in place for associates to master a skill?
- Associates want to see the connection between their work and its impact - the purpose of their role.

## Autonomy

We all want the freedom to make pertinent decisions and not feel micromanaged, with eyes looking over our shoulders at all times. As a leader, do you allow your associates to go above and beyond for a guest without holding their hand each step of the way? Do you recognize when an associate makes a decision on their own without involving a supervisor? What programs are set up to foster creative and innovative ideas?

Focus on the strengths of the actively engaged - they are your biggest asset. If you're not sure where to start, hold a brainstorming session with a group of actively engaged associates. Find out why they chose to work at your hotel. Ask what elements of their position currently motivate them, and what they might find as helpful additions to sustain that motivation. Capitalize on their strengths and ask them to work on special projects and share their opinions on top priority projects and executive decisions.

### **Mastery**

Is there someone on your team that holds phenomenal skills, but might be underperforming - whether by frustration, or simply stuck in a rut? Perhaps an associate has mastered their job, but you have noticed a lack of going above and beyond. Provide them with autonomy and assign them as a department trainer. This can act as motivation and inspire them to do more. When they are asked to help others master a skill, they may be reinvigorated with the passion they previously held for their job. It can be difficult to identify, but look beyond the surface - identify the potential skills they may possess.

What activities do you offer to connect your brand to the associate experience? This is another way to break the monotony. Partner with your vendors, inviting them in to host workshops such as coffee and tea cuppings, craft brew tastings, or lessons from local artists - encourage all team members to participate. This helps to bridge the gap between the guest and associate experience, allowing your staff to be treated as if they were a visitor in their own hotel. These sessions will provide them enhanced skills to deliver educated service to future guests. They may even master a skill they didn't know they had, or develop a passion for an otherwise ignored area of interest.

### **Purpose**

It's key to start at the beginning and hire candidates that are truly passionate about their work. From Room Attendant to General Manager, all associates need to feel appreciated and understand the meaning and purpose behind their role and how it impacts the overall success of the hotel. Prior to joining your organization, ask them to describe the position for which they're interviewing. Are they just getting the job done, or do they see the bigger picture of creating an environment for guests to feel at home? Throughout the interview process, it's important to go beyond the skills outlined on their resume. They may have all the experience to perform the duties of the position, but be mindful of their attitude and outlook, as they are often indicators of an ability to overcome challenging obstacles.

Career development should also act as an area of focus in providing associates with a sense of purpose. Perhaps they aren't able to visualize career advancement, causing them to become discouraged and paralyzed in their position. Start the conversation. Where do they see themselves

within the future of the company? What can you do to provide exposure, experience, and continuing education? Set up time to discuss their career goals. Even if their career goals are not aligned with growth at your hotel, you can still make an impact by setting them up for success in the future. There's nothing more rewarding than helping someone grow. Create an individual development plan for high-potential associates. Provide books, articles, on-the-job learning experiences, opportunities for job shadowing to enrich their learning. Teach them a new skill, or pair them up with a colleague who can share a new learning opportunity. Motivation and excitement is infectious.

## **Reinforcement**

Reinforcement activities are effective tools in breaking up the day-to-day monotony and provide assurance to the member of your team that what they do makes a difference. Begin pre-shifts with a role play perhaps demonstrating ways to appease a difficult guest. As part of your next department meeting, brainstorm ways in which each employee can individualize the guest experience. While on the job, managers should provide positive feedback when an employee provides excellent service. Reinforce and recognize a job well done. A simple thank you to an associate that receives a positive guest comment can go a long way.

How can you bring autonomy, mastery, and purpose to life while reinforcing service training? The key is to provide your managers with the tools needed to engage and motivate each individual team member. A successful workplace begins at the top with leaders setting a standard with their own behavior, by which their teams can emulate and feel inspired. Walk the talk. Are you delivering the level of service that you expect of your team members? How much time have you spent speaking with your managers about their career development? Time invested towards developing the skills of your associates will pay off in their growth and ultimate managerial performance. Actively pursue change in the behavior of your disengaged associates. Don't allow them to undo the investment you've made in providing the proper foundation and skills necessary to lead a sustainably successful team.

It takes planning and a deliberate focus to really influence your associates. It is important for your managers to support your vision of engagement. In order to impact the guest experience, plan the touch points that you can truly influence. I have always seen the most success when the entire leadership team has an aligned vision when it comes to autonomy, mastery and purpose. During your next planning session, bring this up as a topic. I guarantee it will pay off in dividends. But it's not a short-term strategy, it's a long-term focus that takes time and careful attention to cultivate.

As mentioned in Gallup's Employee Engagement Assessment, teams in the top quartile of employee engagement outperformed bottom-quartile teams by 10 percent on customer ratings, 22 percent in profitability, and 21 percent in productivity. These numbers provide a significant impact on growth and success of your business. Turn a new cheek and treat associates as a friendly familiar face, instead of a number - take steps to maintain team engagement in a positive and energetic environment. Make the investment to motivate your associates and I guarantee a great return.

A Co-Founder and Chief Operating Officer of Aparium Hotel Group, Mr. Robinson Robinson spent decades in the corporate world and naturally appreciates and understands the structure of a mature organization. However, as he continued his work in the hospitality industry, he became frustrated with the sameness this created. Mr. Robinson was determined to build a worldwide structure that would ensure consistent levels of service through individual personality. It was clear that this thought process would easily compliment emerging destinations that are rich in history and culture but lack hotels that capitalize on those elements. Mr. Robinson has a hard time removing himself from the operations of a hotel and works directly with all staff as he wants to make sure Aparium's culture is not lost in translation. He oversees the operation of the company and those individuals in the corporate office responsible for the property level operations. Mr. Robinson brings entrepreneurial ideation and finesse to the idea of "Translocal Hospitality," immersing and interweaving the brand's independent hotels and onsite restaurants into each community. Mr. Robinson can be contacted at 312-275-1078 or [kevin@aparium.com](mailto:kevin@aparium.com) Please visit <http://www.aparium.com> for more information. [Extended Bio...](#)

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