

# Hyatt Hotels and Resorts: Culinary Training Program



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## The Company

There are 206 Hyatt Hotels and Resorts around the world, two of which are the focus of this report. The Grand Hyatt in Tampa Bay, Florida, where Mr. Bob Haber is Director of Human Resources, employs 440 people. Florida's Hyatt Regency Tampa, where Ms. Susan Paglino is Director of Human Resources, has 375 employees. These individuals were selected for interviews because they are well established as resource persons on matters of employment and disability within Hyatt Corporation nationally. John L. Ficca, Program Director for Hands On Educational Services, Inc., is the third contact whose perspective proved invaluable for this report.

## Best Practices

Mr. Haber, Ms. Paglino, and Mr. Ficca made it clear at the outset that their progress on disability related matters cannot be explained in terms of any discrete program or activity. Such activities are extensions of a corporate culture that embraces diversity and holds each employee in high regard. No one would question the importance of a customer orientation in the hotel industry. At Hyatt, employees are referred to as "internal guests," and are afforded the same dignity and respect as hotel or restaurant patrons. Beyond this, Hyatt has fully integrated disability into an aggressive commitment to diversity, evidence of which includes five key elements: commitment, accountability, training, measurement and communication.



It is important to Hyatt to enhance its image as an employer of choice, business partner and community ally to diverse groups. As one example of this, each Hyatt hotel provides volunteers through the company's FORCE program (Family of Responsible and Caring Employees). The program allows each management employee to spend two paid workdays each year volunteering



in the local community. Since its inception in 1990, employees have spent more than 700,000 hours teaching children and adults to read, helping people with disabilities to ride horseback, caring for physically and emotionally abused children, and volunteering in a variety of other ways.

No stranger to disability issues, Hyatt was among the first in the hospitality industry to openly embrace the public access provisions of ADA and the first in the industry to establish a timetable for barrier removal in Hyatt Hotels not just nationally, but worldwide. The guidelines were based on input from focus groups comprised of travelers with disabilities. This bold move was initially expensive

risky, and visionary. Yet it proved to be not only the right thing to do, but also it was the correct business strategy. Because American businesses could no longer discriminate through a contract, decisions regarding where to hold major conferences had to include accessibility considerations. Indeed, Hyatt's convention business benefited from its pro-ADA approach.

Even before ADA, Hyatt introduced a mandatory training program for all employees known as "Focus on Abilities." The training covers such topics as communications and language awareness, dealing with differences, etiquette, behavior, supervision and promotion. This corporate culture results in an enhanced level of comfort with

individuals with disabilities - both guests and employees. In 1995, *Careers and the disABLED* Magazine recognized Hyatt Hotels as "Employer of the Year." In 2001, three Florida Hyatt hotels were recognized as the "Large Employer of the Year Award" conferred by the Florida's Government Alliance for the Employment of Citizens with Disabilities. The public relations value is desirable but once again the business case is compelling. Within the hotel industry 85% of workers are service employees where there is a 50% turnover rate. These Hyatt Hotels enjoy a turnover rate in the area of 25%, which in turn results in considerable savings.

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## Unique Best Practices

In 1998, Hyatt Hotels Corporation began offering on-site, reality-based vocational disability training programs in Tampa and Orlando. Hyatt formed a partnership with Hands On Educational Services, directed by John Ficca. On the job training was funded through collaboration with the Florida Vocational Rehabilitation Services, Division of Blind Services, Division of Workers' Compensation and the Department of Veterans Affairs. Key characteristics of the program are as follows:

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- The Culinary Training Program is 100 hours over a two-week period. Enrollment is limited to four students per class, which begin every two weeks.
- Targeted for the training are individuals with disabilities who are at least 18 years old, drug free, ineligible for traditional training programs due to disability, lack of high school diploma, and/or not appropriate for supported employment.
- Trainees become temporary employees of Hyatt and receive a salary in addition to certificates of completion and a state food-handler's certificate, both of which have considerable value in the job market.
- Trainees are supervised and mentored by the best chefs in the hospitality industry. Both job skills and work adaptive skills are addressed. Uniforms, meals, transportation, and even lodging are provided as needed.

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- Students are rotated through kitchen areas of the Hyatt to learn about all types of food preparation and service. They also learn the language of the kitchen, necessary math skills, and information on safety and disease prevention. Students take five written tests designed for low readers, and their performance is evaluated daily by both Hyatt and Hands On staff. This ongoing evaluation and feedback allow for multiple exit points and the most appropriate permanent job placement for each student.
- Hyatt trains for the competition as well. Job placement assistance is provided within and outside of Hyatt. Many graduates go to work in restaurants or hotels that are direct competitors.
- Regarding advancement, nearly all Hyatt managers are working managers who began their careers in a service worker occupation: cook, server, chauffer, clerk, or housekeeper. The advancement potential of experienced chefs is exceptionally high in almost all communities across the country.

## Conclusion

Hyatt Hotels Corporation is an example of successful disability programming that is completely driven by its corporate culture and values. Its programs and activities are embedded in a mindset that seeks to develop a competent workforce that reflects its customer base while being an active corporate citizen. There exists a special emphasis on training in a valued occupation that is part of the primary labor market. There is also a level of influence by these hotels within the Hyatt system that potentially affects about 40,000 employees. Mr. Ficca, a coast-guard chef and a special educator by training, sizes up Hyatt in a recent personal communication:

*"... I am very excited about the close relationship between Hands On and Hyatt. Hyatt is a true business leader that is making a huge difference for people with disabilities in our community. Their involvement is sincere and for all the right reasons. We have taught each other so much - that's what good partnerships are all about - mutual respect, collaboration, and commitment to the cause."*

In 2002, John Ficca received the Small Business Leader of the Year Award from the Greater Tampa Chamber of Commerce.

