



Embracing Diversity

by Chris McBeath

There was a time when the concept of diversity referred largely to our multi-ethnic mosaic, and when Canada adopted the world's first official multiculturalism policy in 1971, the words embodied a vision for harmonious living between culturally disparate groups. But oh, how times have changed. Back then, there were some 25 visible minorities. Now, the country's most recent census identifies more than 200 visible minorities, and as a consequence, that multicultural concept has evolved far beyond the confines of simply being politically correct.

Labour shortages, a booming economy, and a competitive global environment have redefined diversity to encompass not only ethnic background and gender, but also age and sexual orientation as well as work and life experience. Once considered more of an altruistic notion, today's culture of inclusion has become a driving force of the very way we do business, and by its very nature, the hospitality industry is at the forefront of this evolution.

Since its inception in 1989, the Hospitality Industry Diversity Institute (HIDI) has championed the cause of inclusion as an organizational core value, and through education has done much to instill this quality in other businesses/business sectors.

Many chain hoteliers such as Fairmont, Delta, and Hilton have made concerted efforts to embrace diversity through employment practices, property ownership, vendor relations, advertising and marketing, community relations, and philanthropy. At Carlson's Radisson Hotels & Resorts, multicultural events are celebrated with educational displays, festive music, and authentic cuisine. The key message of these events is "How we value differences matters", and it's a philosophy that helps underscore Carlson's success in growing minority ownership business opportunities across the portfolio of Carlson brands.

Choice Hotels is also working to broaden the

demographics of its franchise agreements. In 2007, Choice welcomed 40 new franchisees into its system and out of more than 280 companies, was named one of the "Top 50 Franchises for Minorities" by the National Minority Franchising Initiative. "We had a phenomenal year in 2007, recruiting minority entrepreneurs and first-time hoteliers into the Choice Hotels system," said Brian Parker, Vice President, Emerging Markets and New Business Development. "Our desire and passion to educate novice hotel investors is second to none and our commitment to their individual success truly resonates." Educational franchise seminars geared to minority entrepreneurs, and a comprehensive website on the Choice hotel brands and investment opportunities are key components to their diversity programs.

Diverse Challenges

Diversity in the workplace is not without its challenges. John Halani, owner of the Tropicana and Robsonstrasse hotels in Vancouver, is also Chair of BC's Multicultural Advisory Council. "As the population mix changes and more immigrants settle here, finding operations staff who can speak adequate English is getting harder, particularly in housekeeping," he explains. "This raises issues as to how they interact with guest requests, their understanding of emergency procedures, and the hotel's team dynamics. Some don't even know how a phone system works."

Although multiculturalism is still largely an urban phenomenon, racism, discrimination, and cultural misconceptions are not. To help meet these challenges, the Advisory Council has recommended closer dialogue between the Ministry of Multiculturalism and the Ministries of Education, Small Business, Health, Tourism, and others. "The hotel industry has an employee base that represents a microcosm of our ethnic landscape, and because hotels also cater to an equally diverse ethnic guest, each with diverse expectations, our issues tend

WORKFORCE IDEAS AT WORK

•••Conrad N. Hilton College's Hospitality Industry Diversity Institute holds an annual Diversity Conference in cooperation with the AH&MA and Multicultural Foodservice & Hospitality Alliance.

•••InfoNex, in association with Human Resources and Northern Alberta Alliance on Race Relations (NAARR), recently presented a Workplace Diversity Conference in Calgary that addressed the rapid "de-homogenization" of the labour force. Similar forums are planned for the future.

•••Florida International University's School of Hospitality caters to a student body hailing from China, Russia, Canada, Taiwan, Jamaica, UK, and Australia. A sister campus also operates in Tainjian, China (near Beijing), funded by that municipal government.

•••The MGM Mirage regularly stages Diversity Expos - reverse trade shows aimed to expand the hotel's database of diverse-owned businesses. The company's employee training program, Diversity Champion, helps employees work with each other as well as guests.



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GUEST IDEAS AT WORK

•••Residence Inn by Marriott, Portland, provides an Asian breakfast featuring rice, miso soup, dried seaweed and seasons, served in Asian-inspired bowls with chopsticks, alongside traditional North American hot buffet breakfast.

•••Monte Carlo Hotel, Las Vegas, now offers the broom ceremony for African American weddings.

•••Some Country Inns & Suites/Park Plaza Hotels & Resorts offer in-room accessibility kits for guests with dwarfism and other physical limitations. Kits include a stepstool, a reaching tool, a bar to lower the clothes rack in closets and a device to retrofit the latch-hook lock on the door.

••• Ka'anapali Bay Hotel, Maui, and Sheraton Wild Horse Resort, Arizona, have Cultural Ambassadors who talk to guests on the indigenous qualities and cultural heritage of the surrounding landscape/environment.

•••Hotel Deluxe and Hotel Lucia, Portland, operate a "Spiritual Menu" whereby guests choose various books of faith for their rooms. These include:

- Bhagavad Gita: A New Translation
- Book of Mormon
- Four Noble Truths (Buddhist)
- KJV Bible
- The Koran
- New American Bible
- Tao Te Ching
- The Torah
- Books on Scientology

to rise to the top quickly," says Halani. "Hoteliers, particularly independent properties that don't have large corporate resources, need to share diversity issues on a regular basis because how we cater to, manage, and accommodate this issue is at the core of the hospitality sector." As a consequence, the Council has been instrumental in creating peer-to-peer forums on workplace diversity.

Worldly Wise

Just as the labour crunch is shifting staffing demographics, so has the ease and accessibility of travel created an increasingly worldly guest, with more sophisticated expectations. Customized experiences have replaced "one size fits all", and the competition to target these diverse market sectors to fill guestrooms isn't going to abate any time soon.

Regular business travelers have come to expect personalized options that cover everything from bedding and newspaper preferences to customized mini-bars. Multi-generational family travel is a growing trend. Short-stay getaway vacations by urban professionals continue to rise in popularity, and gays and lesbians have become a lucrative, sought-after market.

"Gays and lesbians spend more than \$50 billion on travel annually, but you need to 'show up' in the gay market in order to tap into it," says Thomas E. Roth, President of the Travel Alternative Group. "That's more than just letting the gay/lesbian market know that you're



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ready to do business. This community does its research. It will not do business with companies that discriminate against gays in hiring practices or do not provide equal benefits packages.”

Add to this a more ethnically-diverse guest, and you realize that a copy of the *Koran* should probably sit alongside the *Gideon's Bible*; desks should be outfitted with iPod docking stations; menus should include wheat-free/gluten-free items as well as small portion options for children and their grandparents; and guest relations personnel need to be multilingual. For example, at the Days Inn Kelowna, the property has become so popular with visitors from China and India that not only are signs in both Mandarin and English, but 50% of the staff are Punjabi-speaking - a particular asset when in comes to assisting guests in their native language.

As travel and technology continue to transform global dynamics, we must change our own paradigm. “Language is now a culture of inclusion,” notes Hermain Cain, President and CEO of Digital Restaurant Solutions. “Diversity is static; inclusion is dynamic. Diversity is a condition; inclusion is a process. Inclusion is a social and economic necessity.”



ENRICHING DIVERSITY

In 1950, 92% of Canada’s population growth was a product of the birthrate. Today, immigration has outpaced the natural birthrate and accounts for 53% of overall population growth.

Often dubbed “the global village in one country”, the face of Canada, is changing dramatically, particularly in the larger urban centres. According to the Ministry of Canadian Heritage, in 2006 one in six Canadians was a member of a visible minority.

Toronto, the largest city in Canada’s largest province, is the world’s most multicultural city, ahead of New York and London. Vancouver, with the fastest growing and most diverse immigrant population in Canada, is among the world’s most integrated cities.

And across the border, the US Bureau of Labour and Statistics estimates that currently 70% of new workforce entrants are women and minorities, and by 2010, one of every three Americans will be non-white.



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