



**Horwath HTL**

*Hotel, Tourism and Leisure*

INDUSTRY REPORT

**Leadership Practices  
to Support Your Team  
During COVID-19**

SEPTEMBER 2020



**Buddha said:**

***Do not dwell in the past  
Do not dream of the future,  
Concentrate the mind  
on the present moment.***

Staying in the present moment can be difficult for the hotelier (or any business executive). You probably just reviewed last week's performance reports and jumped right into your 30, 60, 90-day forecasts. It is how we operate, and it ensures our survival. That said, we also know that the most rewarding moments of the job are the in-the-moment connections that we make with our team members and our guests. With all of the uncertainty, fear, and division that consume our landscape, these moments are more fragile and sacred than ever and must be navigated with thoughtful, conscious leadership.

**Here are 5 present moment actions that you can take to have a significant impact on your guest experience and the morale of your team:**

- 1 Practice what you and your organization say you are going to do.** Your organization has probably sent out an email outlining all the safety measures to keep people safe while they are guests in your hotel. You have signs in the lobby, plexiglass over the desks, payment screens pushed back. Those elements make a guest feel safe. The moment one employee does them half-heartedly or doesn't ensure that other guests are complying, that trust is gone and might not be rebuilt. Brand expert and author, Marty Neumeier, says in *The Brand Gap* that, "A living brand is a collaborative performance, and every person in the company is an actor." Your front-line team member didn't write the script, but they will determine its success.
- 2 Your team members won't do it if they don't see you doing it, or if they don't understand why.** Author Simon Sinek stresses the importance of ensuring employees (heck, people) have a clear understanding of why they are doing something. Just telling them what to do is a great way to see it not, or begrudgingly being done.

“Wear a mask in guest areas and the break room” and “We all need to wear masks because we all have a commitment to show our guests, our employees, and you that we are making every effort to ensure your safety.” These statements sound different, and they will elicit different levels of compliance. Do not assume people know.

**3 Put on a good show.** This is one of Disney’s operational standards. A good show used to mean that housekeeping should be invisible, as if the property were always immaculate. Times are different. People are eager to see that surfaces are being cleaned regularly, by everyone, and if they can’t see it, they want evidence of it. Also, give your employees a script of what it sounds like to approach a guest who is not following the standards and let them role play with you. Rehearsals make for better performances.

**4 Define and provide space for when it is ok to loosen on requirements.** I bet the first thing you do when you get to your office is to take off your mask. Your housekeepers are no different. If you don’t find the time and place for them to do it safely, they will find it on their own, and it might not be where you want it to be. Author Stephen Covey says in *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* that “*The cause of almost all relationship difficulties is rooted in conflicting or ambiguous expectations around roles and goals.*” The more clearly you define your expectations, while still making room for your employee’s goals (finding a time to take a break from the mask), the more empowered your team is to meet expectations.

**5 Keep conducting your team meetings, one-on-ones, and lobby walks.** Stephen Covey also speaks extensively on the scope of influence. Your scope of influence will not extend outside of your office if you aren’t regularly checking in with your guests and team members. Circumstances and safety measures may dictate that you do this differently, but find creative ways to maintain connection, even at a six-foot or more distance. People are scared—for their health, for their job, or even their civil liberties. Multiple polls show that 41-50% of employees are afraid to be in the workplace. The practice of social distancing makes it all the more essential that we are connecting with our employees and our guests, and that we demonstrate our care for them in the present moment. They took risks to be there with you today, so make sure you are expressing your appreciation.

While we must give some of our attention to past performance and future projections—all we really have control over is what we are doing in the present moment. What we do today as conscious leaders will determine if our guests and employees will keep coming back.

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Scott Knepp has been a part of the Horwath HTL Atlanta team as a Management Analyst since May 2019. Prior to joining Horwath HTL, he after served in a wide array of leadership positions in the hospitality industry for over a decade. Scott has extensive experience creating service-centered cultures and strategy in a variety of environments—including hotels and resorts, country clubs, retreat centers, healthcare, and cruise lines. He holds a MS in Hospitality and Tourism Management from the Rosen College of Hospitality Management at the University of Central Florida and a BA in Theatre from Berry College. He has worked for Walt Disney World Resorts, Carnival Cruise Lines, Marriott, Kripalu Center for Yoga and Health, and the VCU Medical Center.

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