

Crossing Bridges from School to Work

Marriott Foundation's job-placement program has helped 20,000 young people over 25 years...



Garrett Jones, center, of Atlanta, Ga., was recognized in July as the inaugural recipient of the Stephen G. Marriott Youth Achievement Award during the Marriott Foundation's Bridges from School to Work annual gala in Washington, D.C. Jones was hired in 2012 at the Atlanta Northwest Marriott as a laundry attendant. Today he works in the kitchen where Executive Chef Jeff Caruso is mentoring and training him for a career in food service.

Despite the ballyhooed recovery in the U.S. economy, job growth remains stagnant. It is hard enough for a grownup to find employment these days, but it is even more difficult for teenagers and nearly impossible for teens with developmental disabilities.

The U.S. Department of Labor reported in November a teen unemployment rate of nearly 18 percent for those 16 to 19 years of age. A 2013 study by Northeastern University says a decade ago nearly half of the nation's teenagers had jobs compared to 26 percent today. It is "the lowest annual average employment rate in the history of our country in the post-World War II era," reads the report.

Faring even worse are young people in urban areas, low-income families or those who struggle with learning or intellectual disabilities, say experts.

Marriott International 25 years ago set out the change the equation by placing high school students with learning or intellectual disabilities in paying jobs at local employers. Its Bridges from School

to Work program has found jobs for nearly 20,000 youths with 4,000 employers in nine U.S. cities, including Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., Chicago and Atlanta.

Bridges is part of the Marriott Foundation for People With Disabilities, a non-profit organization with Richard E. Marriott as chairman. Tad Asbury is vice president and executive director of the foundation. He recently spoke to Asian Hospitality about the Bridges program, stressing the impact the nation's employers, hotels included, can have on a population of young workers who grow up to be the bulk of America's workforce.

"There is no other corporation in the world that has put 25 years of dedicated focus on a singular issue of employment for the disabled and youth," Asbury said. "Marriott understands its leadership role in the workforce and it has stepped forward with its belief that a lot of people can work in the hospitality business, especially people with disabilities."

World of work

Over the years, the program has expanded

"A job is the most important thing a young person can get in this life, and many of these young people will never get a job unless they have some help to do it."

Richard E. Marriott

beyond hotels and restaurants as grocery chains, banks, local governments and retailers have partnered with Bridges, whose associates weigh the skills and interests of young people and apply them to the needs of employers.

In the beginning, most of the Bridges students are unsure if they have what it takes to do the job. Take, for example, a teen who gets a job with grocer. "We often come across young people with disabilities who have a reluctance to count change," Asbury said. "So they may start in a stocking position or as a courtesy clerk doing bagging. Eventually, they work alongside someone at the cash register. And if they are interested, they will learn more and gain confidence for a greater role."

"One of the best places to learn is in the world of work. We have research that supports the idea that the earlier you are introduced to the competitive workplace you will learn things that you will not learn in a school setting. There's meaning to work. There's value in scooping ice cream. We make sure our youth are placed in an area where there is support."

Supporting role

Support is the operating word at Bridges, whose associates work with high schools, local employers and families to identify the students in need of support and place the young person in a meaningful job. Allen Brown, director of the Bridges offices in Atlanta and Washington, D.C., says because of their disabilities the young workers will probably not go on to higher education. The opportunities to learn and advance will happen on the job.

The associates focus on getting the students job ready through soft-skills training, help them land the job and then guide them through an upward

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Hotel tech struggles to keep up with guest expectations

IT Budget as a Percentage of Revenue

3.5% Luxury
4.3% Upscale
6.6% Midscale
3.5% Economy

4.9%
INDUSTRY
AVERAGE



TODAY'S TRAVELERS EXPECT hotels to deliver the technology they need to get work done, stay in touch with others and to provide entertainment. These rising guest expectations are leading hotels to funnel more dollars into their IT budgets. But hotel IT teams are struggling to transition from tech smarts to business savvy, reports Hotel Technology in a newly released study.

Hospitality Technology's 2015 Lodging Technology Study, authored by Abigail A. Lorden, group editor-in-chief of Hospitality Technology magazine and Mehmet Erdem, Ph.D., CHTP, president, iHITA and associate professor, at University of Las Vegas Hotel College, surveyed HT magazine subscribers and received 149 email responses over a five-week period. Respondents represent at total of 28,350 properties in the U.S., representing more than half of nation's lodging inventory.

The study's findings "suggest that — despite the increased focus on mobility and technology-enabled marketing solutions — neither business- nor marketing-savvy is a prized skill for IT leaders," writes Lorden and Erdem. "With robust investments planned for 2015, there's no better time for IT leaders to step out of support roles and position technology as a compass for identifying trends and shaping business objectives."

Here are some highlights from the study:

- Hotel technology investments are on

the rise, with an average IT budget that's 4.9 percent of total revenue, up from 2.6 percent one year ago.

- The number-one priority driving hotel technology spending will be to deploy customer-facing mobile solutions, chosen as a top pick by four out of 10 hotels in this study.

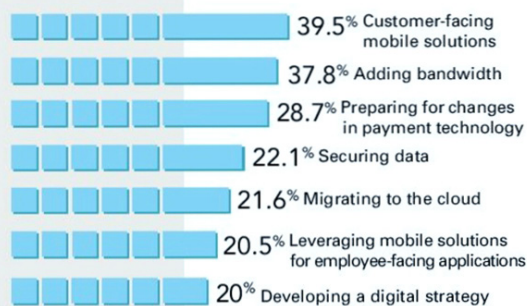
- Guestroom technology spending is on the rise in 2015, and will account

for 17 percent of all IT investments.

- Hotels say that their number-one technology challenge is meeting high guest expectations, which are rising at a pace that's increasingly difficult to meet.

- Most hotels — 68 percent — don't have a technology steering committee to aid in their IT decisions.

Hotels Reveal Top Tech Priorities in 2015



- Bandwidth in public spaces and point-of-sale systems will be heavy investment areas for hotels in 2015, with nearly half of those in this study planning to add/upgrade those technologies.

- Inside the guestroom, investments will focus on adding new or boosting existing wireless Internet access (45 percent of hotels), adding bandwidth (40 percent of hotels), and adding/improving HD content (36 percent). ■

NUMBERS

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Book now

Percentage growth in OTA hotel bookings at end of 2014, says PhoCusWright. OTAs' share of the online hotel market will increase to 48 percent, up from 46 percent in 2012.

\$110 billion

Forecasted level of CMBS to be issued in 2015, reports the Kroll Bond Rating Agency. This year will close out at 10 percent lower than expected, but 2015 could go even higher if commercial real estate markets continue the rebound and if interest rates remain low.

413,419

Rooms under contract in U.S. for November, reports STR. Tallied from 3,422 hotels under contract, a 17.3-percent

increase in the number of rooms compared with November 2013 and a 28 percent increase in rooms under construction.

9

Record-breaking percentage growth in international tourists in North America in the first 10 months of 2014, says the UNWTO. Last year, more than 110 million international tourists visited North America, a growth of nearly 3 percent over 2012.

450,000



Number of undocumented immigrants from India in the U.S., reports the Pew Research Center. ■

Look who's traveling ... and where



DOMESTIC TRAVELERS in the U.S. in 2014 spent the most time and money in California, Hawaii, New York, Florida, Nevada, Arizona, Washington, D.C., Alaska, Puerto Rico and Texas, reports the United States Tourism Operators Association in cooperation with a study by PriceWaterhouseCoopers. USTOA has 45 active tour-operating companies as members which represent more than 150 travel brands.

Whether traveling within the 50 states or venturing abroad, U.S. travelers seek unique experiences where they can immerse themselves in local culture. Nearly three fourths (71 percent) of USTOA membership provide travel and tour packages that offer art and culture, and family/multi-generational programs; with 64 percent offering culinary; and more than half (57 percent) providing adventure-focused packages. When asked to rank the programs based on sales, multi-generational/family, art and culture, and adventure rank consecutively the highest.

Who's traveling

About half of USTOA members' customer base is Baby Boomers at 50 years of age and older. The next largest age group was 36 to 50 years old, representing 26 percent of customers.

Two thirds (66 percent) of business booked was by U.S. residents traveling to international destinations, with 21 percent by U.S. residents traveling domestically.

Growth ahead

Member operators are confident about business in 2015: 95 percent anticipate a growth in sales in 2015. Of that majority, two thirds (62 percent) forecast "optimistic" to "boom year" growth with sales approaching 10 percent or more. A little less than a third (29 percent) remain cautiously optimistic that sales will increase 4-6 percent in 2015.

"While our members view the upcoming year optimistically, they recognize the potential threats that could impact this positive outlook," Terry Dale, president and CEO of USTOA. Three-fourths (74 percent) of members named natural disasters, followed by pandemics and other health crises (67 percent), as the leading concerns that could impact their growth prospects in the next three years. The next potential threat was strength of the U.S. dollar, followed by

global financial stability, terrorism and lastly, political instability.

Economic generator

USTOA tour operator members contributed \$12.5 billion to the U.S. tour operator industry in 2013, representing more than 7.6 million individual travelers.

The membership projects a healthy increase in sales in 2014 of 8.7 percent to \$13.5 billion, with a 4.7 percent increase in individual travelers, to nearly 8 million. ■



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“Michael Belmonte and Hospitality Solutions did a fantastic job...”

negotiating the termination fees I owed my franchise company.

While my confidentiality provision prohibits my mentioning the name of my brand or franchise company, I can tell you that I did owe over \$485,000 and they had a judgment against me. Michael Belmonte negotiated that down to \$70,000 for a **savings of \$415,000**. What's even more unbelievable is they did it all for a **flat fee**. I'm certainly glad I hired Hospitality Solutions.”

Kash Patel – Clemson, SC

FEATURE

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progression. They may even go so far as to buy appropriate clothing such as a shirt and tie or take the teen to get a haircut in advance of an interview. After the teen is hired, the support continues in a variety of forms. For example, an associate may drive the student to and from the job or remind her of the scheduled hours and make sure she wears a name badge or uniform. The associate also tracks the young employee's progress by continually following up with the student and the employer.

Asbury is quick to stress that while Bridges is a non-profit organization, it is not a charity program where employers can get cheap labor. "We will not put youth

into sub-minimum-wage jobs. Period. If it's a job they can do, then the employer must pay them a fair wage, even if the young person because of disability cannot work a 40-hour week."

Many employers get it. Bridges From School to Work has many "repeat customers" or employers who hire one Bridges student and then go on to hire more as they see evidence of the training and how Marriott successfully matches a student worker to a business's need. Many businesses also realize the unprecedented level of support the student receives from Bridges associates.

"Tough love"

Family also plays a big role in the students' success. Atlanta Bridges beneficiary

Rodrick Burdette says "tough love" from his grandmother and the Bridges program helped him land a housekeeping job at the Westin Peachtree Plaza hotel in Atlanta. Westin is a brand of Starwood Hotels & Resorts.

The 20-year-old Burdette received the Youth Achievement Award for the Atlanta Bridges program at an Oct. 28 reception held at the Atlanta Marriott Century Center hotel.

Richard Marriott was on hand to congratulate Burdette. Bridges staff members say the chairman attends every annual awards program in every city as well as other events related to the program.

Marriott said Burdette displayed initiative on the job at Westin, impressing colleagues when he fixed a hotel copier, for example. During his first 90 days on the job, Burdette was named employee of the month. "I simply did my best with the great opportunity that was given to me," said Burdette. "I love working at the Westin Peachtree Plaza. I am telling everyone tonight that I do plan on being promoted."

Top employer

Marriott presented awards to other Atlanta area Bridges program supporters, naming TJX Stores employer of the year for its hiring efforts. Doug Swank, regional trainer for the Southeast U.S. region of TJX Cos, parent of the TJ Maxx and Marshalls retail stores, said employing people with disabilities is important to make sure TJX represents the diversity of the community. "At TJX, we're always on the search for talent and Bridges supports that."

Placing people with disabilities in jobs and seeing them progress is the most gratifying result of the Bridges program, Richard Marriott said in an interview after the awards reception.

"A job is the most important thing a young person can get in this life, and many of these young people will never get a job unless they have some help to do it." He added the Bridges program is determined to recruit more companies as partners, adding that people with disabilities can perform many jobs.

"This is a huge labor pool, and in the hospitality industry and the retailing industry, we have a lot of jobs that are extremely well-suited for people with disabilities," Marriott said. "Everybody with a disability has an ability somewhere; our task is to find out where they can be successful and put them in that job."

Freelance writer Karen Jacobs contributed to this report ■



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