

HOTEL INDUSTRY WORKFORCE NEEDS STUDY

October 2023



SAN DIEGO COUNTY



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The hotel industry in San Diego County hosts approximately 23.8 million visitors each year and employs more than 27,000 employees from diverse backgrounds—representative of the region’s demographics.¹ Despite its importance in the local economy, the COVID-19 pandemic had a devastating impact on the industry’s workforce—the industry lost 12,400 jobs (38 percent) between 2019 and 2020.² As the hotel industry recovers, it is important to understand hiring practices, factors that impact recruitment and retention, and actions that the community colleges could take to support workforce development. To assess the industry’s workforce needs, the San Diego & Imperial Center of Excellence (COE) collaborated with the San Diego County Lodging Association and Mod Research Consulting to collect survey responses from 411 hotel industry employees in San Diego County. The objective of the survey was to 1) identify difficult-to-hire occupations; 2) understand the types of benefits that are important for employee retention; 3) assess the skills that are valued by workers in the industry; and 4) evaluate desired professional development and training opportunities.

Survey results suggest that wages in the top difficult-to-hire positions are increasing as a result of employers’ efforts to recruit and retain workers; however, wages in positions such as “Housekeeping, Public Space, and Laundry Workers” remain below the living wage. Therefore, this study recommends increasing wages for difficult-to-hire occupations and developing career pathways to strengthen the industry talent pipeline. Additionally, the majority of hotel industry workers agree that the industry supports “diversity, equity, and inclusion.” Therefore, this should be prioritized in hiring and business practices, and can serve as an important way to attract new talent. Employees and managers reported “comprehensive benefits,” “career advancement opportunities,” and “professional development” are key factors to retention. Employees and management also ranked “management and leaderships training” as the top form of training they were interested in, and the majority did not perceive any barriers to participating in professional development opportunities. These insights provide employers guidance on the types of benefits and experiences that could be effective for long-term retention of employees. Lastly, top skills valued by employees and management were: “customer service,” “multi-tasking,” and “time management.” Employers can use this information to understand the types of experiences that hotel industry workers are seeking in their roles, and also assist community colleges in understanding the types of skills that are important for students to develop in hospitality programs. Overall, this study aims to provide new perspectives about the local hotel industry workforce, and presents recommendations to encourage meaningful discussions and collaborations.

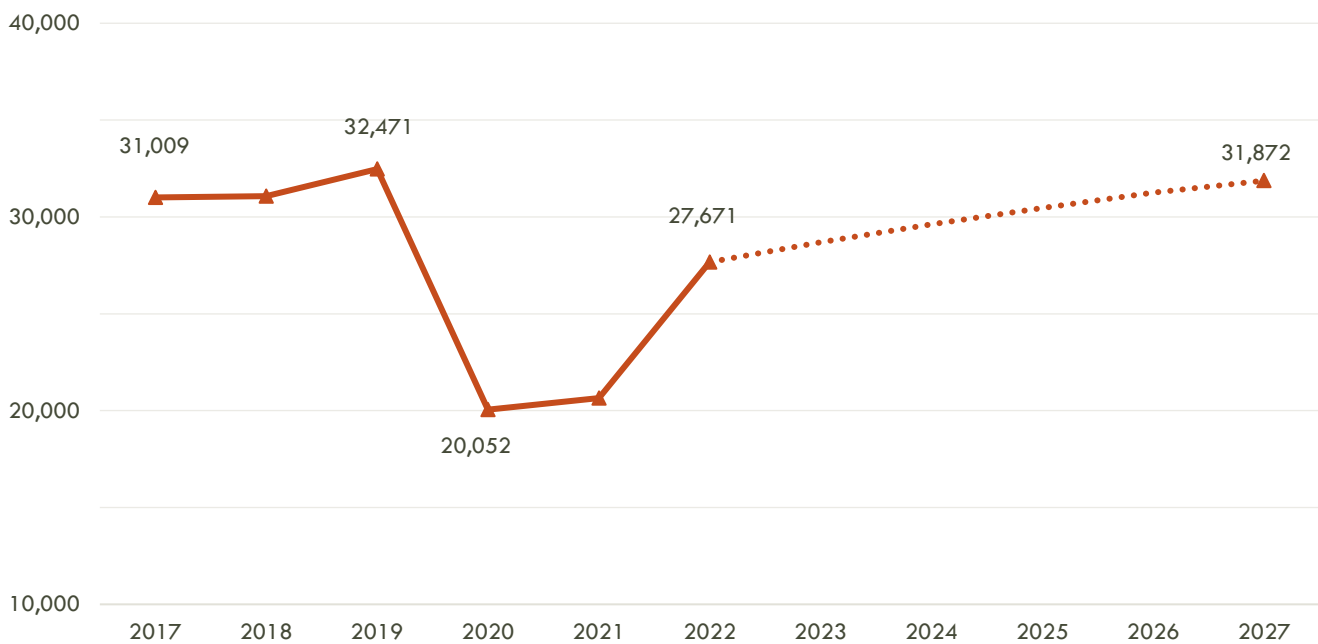
¹ “San Diego Tourism Facts,” San Diego Tourism Authority. [sandiego.org/-/media/files/pdfs/fast-facts-2022.pdf?la=en](https://www.sandiego.org/-/media/files/pdfs/fast-facts-2022.pdf?la=en).

² Industry data for North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) 721 Accommodations. Lightcast 2023.03; QCEW, Non-QCEW, Self-Employed.

INTRODUCTION

The hotel industry in San Diego County represents one of the largest markets in the country and plays an important role in the local economy.^{3,4} In 2021, 562 accommodations (e.g., hotels, motels, bed and breakfasts, casino hotel properties) hosted 23.8 million visitors, bringing in billions of dollars in revenue that supported thousands of local businesses and jobs.⁵ While travel restrictions and economic uncertainties from the COVID-19 pandemic had a devastating impact on the workforce⁶—the industry lost 12,400 jobs (38 percent) between 2019 and 2020—employment projections are promising as the estimated number of jobs are expected to grow by 15 percent between 2022 and 2027 (Exhibit 1). In addition to rebuilding its workforce, the hotel industry faces other challenges such as increased operational costs, supply chain disruptions, and changes in traveler expectations.⁷ As the industry changes and continues to recover, it is important to understand hiring practices, factors that impact employee recruitment and retention, and actions that local employers and the community colleges can consider to support workforce development.

Exhibit 1. Number of Jobs in the Hotel Industry in San Diego County, 2017-2027⁸



³ “A New Era for U.S. Hotels: 2023 State of the Hotel Industry Report,” The American Hotel & Lodging Association. ahla.com/sites/default/files/AHLA.SOTI_Report.2023.final_002.pdf.

⁴ “FY 2022 Annual Report,” San Diego Tourism Authority. sandiego.org/-/media/files/pdfs/sdta-annual-report-1.pdf?la=en.

⁵ “San Diego Tourism Facts,” San Diego Tourism Authority. sandiego.org/-/media/files/pdfs/fast-facts-2022.pdf?la=en.

⁶ “COVID-19 and Community College Instructional Responses,” Online Learning Consortium. eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1287109.

⁷ “A New Era for U.S. Hotels: 2023 State of the Hotel Industry Report,” The American Hotel & Lodging Association. ahla.com/sites/default/files/AHLA.SOTI_Report.2023.final_002.pdf.

⁸ Industry data for North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) code 721 Accommodations. Lightcast 2023.03; QCEW, Non-QCEW, Self-Employed.



To understand the workforce needs of employers and the experiences of workers in the hotel industry, the San Diego & Imperial Center of Excellence (COE), San Diego County Lodging Association, and Mod Research Consulting conducted a survey to:

- 1 Identify difficult-to-hire occupations in the hotel industry;
- 2 Understand the types of benefits that are important for employee retention;
- 3 Assess the skills that are valued by workers in the hotel industry; and
- 4 Determine desired professional development and training opportunities.

The research team consulted an industry advisory group to develop and distribute the survey instrument. For more details about the methodology, see Appendix B: Methodology. Consequently, this study summarizes the survey results and provides recommendations on how community colleges and regional stakeholders could collaborate to support both employees and employers in the hotel industry.

OVERVIEW OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

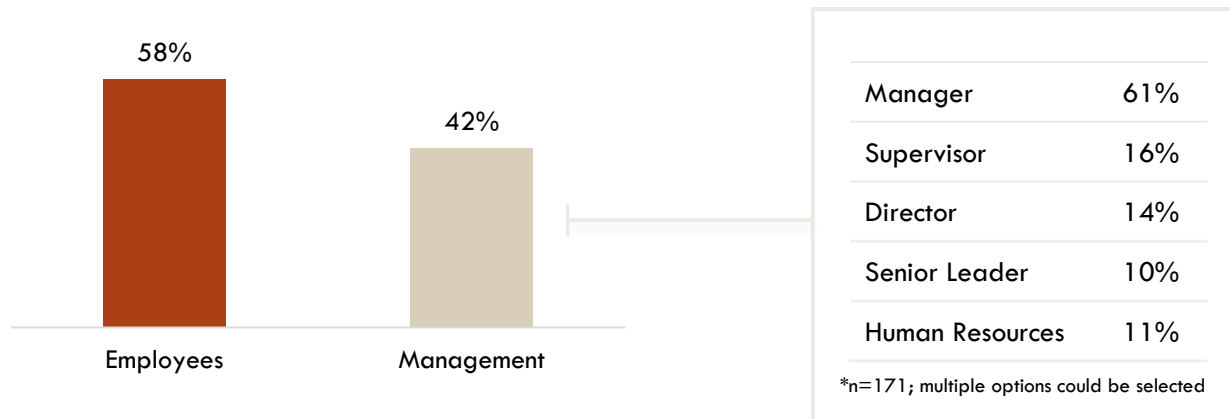
Between June and July 2023, a total of 411 survey respondents employed in the hotel industry participated in the survey. In terms of demographics, 53 percent of respondents identified as female, 21 percent were 45 years or older, and 29 percent identified as White/Caucasian (Exhibit 2). Exhibit 3 shows the distribution of employees (58 percent) and management (42 percent). Management included managers, supervisors, directors, senior leaders, or human resources (HR). The breakdown of demographics by employees and management can be found in Appendix A, Exhibit 23.

Exhibit 2. Demographic Profile of Survey Respondents

Gender	n=394	Race/Ethnicity	n=392
Female	53%	White/Caucasian	29%
Male	36%	Hispanic/Latinx	18%
Prefer not to answer	10%	East/Southeast Asian	8%
Age	n=392	Black/African American/South African	2%
18-24 years	8%	American Indian/Alaska Native	1%
25-34 years	13%	Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	1%
35-44 years	13%	Other	2%
45 years or older	21%	Prefer not to answer	44%
Prefer not to answer	45%	Caregiver to Adult/Child	n=393
Job Covered by Union	n=238	Yes, current caregiver	15%
Yes	1%	No, not a caregiver	31%
No/Not Sure	99%	Prefer not to answer	55%

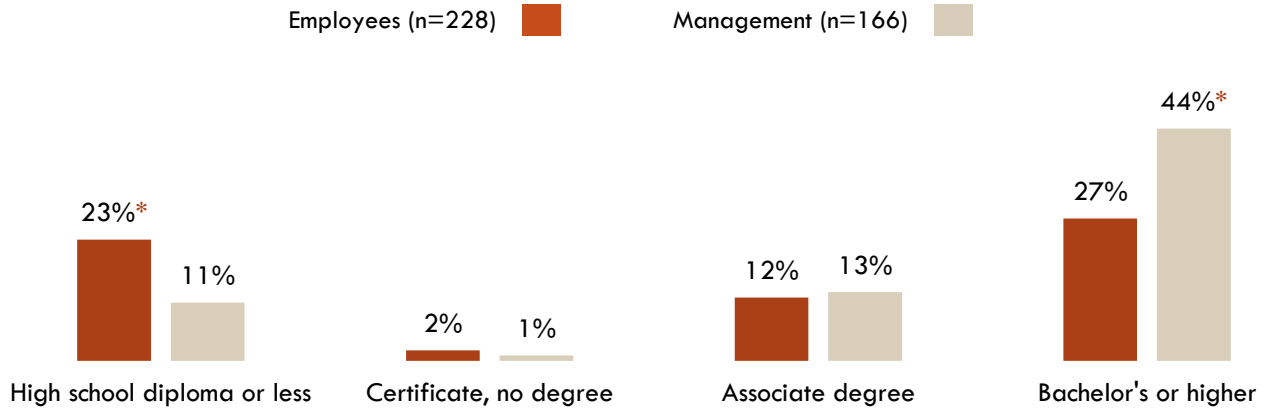
*May not total 100 percent due to rounding; multiple options could be selected for 'Race/Ethnicity'

Exhibit 3. Percentage of Employees and Management, n=411



As shown in Exhibit 4, a significantly greater proportion of those in management roles earned a bachelor’s degree or higher (44 percent) compared to employees (27 percent). Conversely, a significantly greater proportion of employees had an educational attainment of a high school diploma or less (23 percent) compared to management (11 percent). The survey also asked employees about their current or most recent job title in the industry, and the most represented job title was “Hotel, Motel, and Resorts Desk Clerk” (40 percent), followed by “Food Server or Banquet Helper” and “Sales and Catering Representative” (Exhibit 5).

Exhibit 4. Educational Attainment of Employees and Management



*p<.05, a significantly greater proportion selected option compared to comparison group

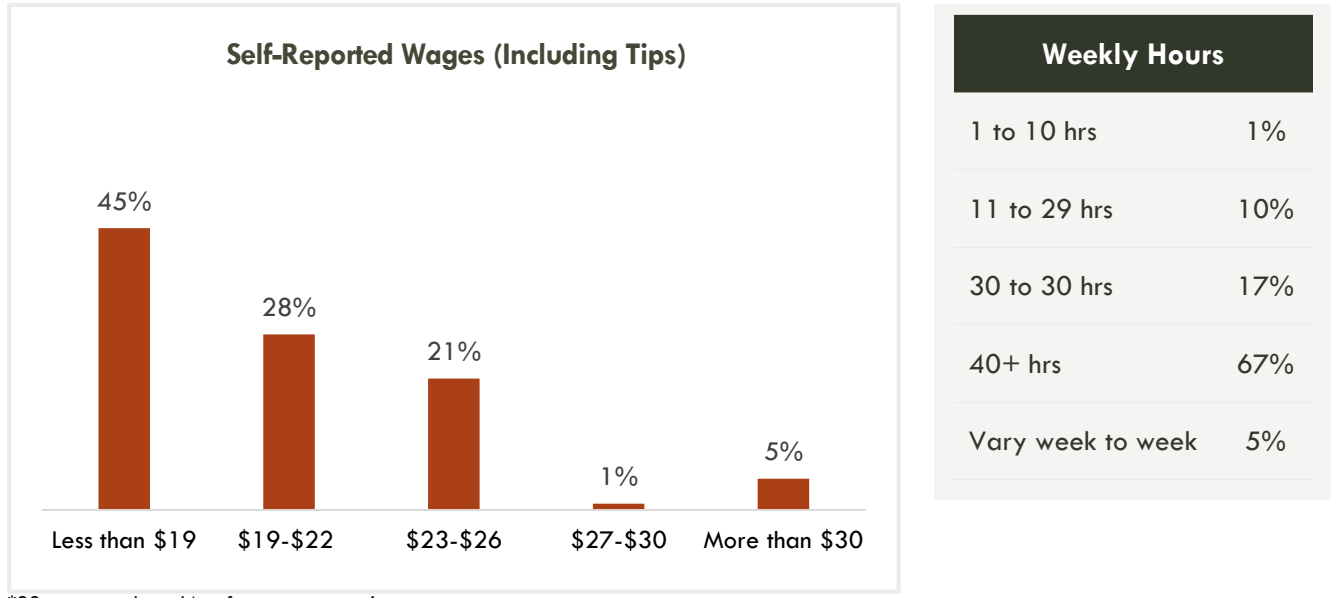
Exhibit 5. Employee Job Titles, n=238

Employees Job Title	Percentage
Hotel, Motel, and Resorts Desk Clerk	39%
Food Server or Banquet Helper	11%
Sales and Catering Representative	10%
Housekeeping, Public Space, and Laundry Worker	9%
Maintenance and Repair Worker	6%
Lodging and Operations Manager	5%
Groundskeeper	3%
Cook	2%
Steward (e.g., Dishwashing)	2%
Food and Beverage Supervisor	1%
Other	12%



Exhibit 6 shows employees' self-reported wages (including tips), which demonstrates that 45 percent of respondents earned less than \$19 per hour (or below the living wage of \$18.43 for a single adult in San Diego County),⁹ and most worked 40+ hours per week (67 percent).

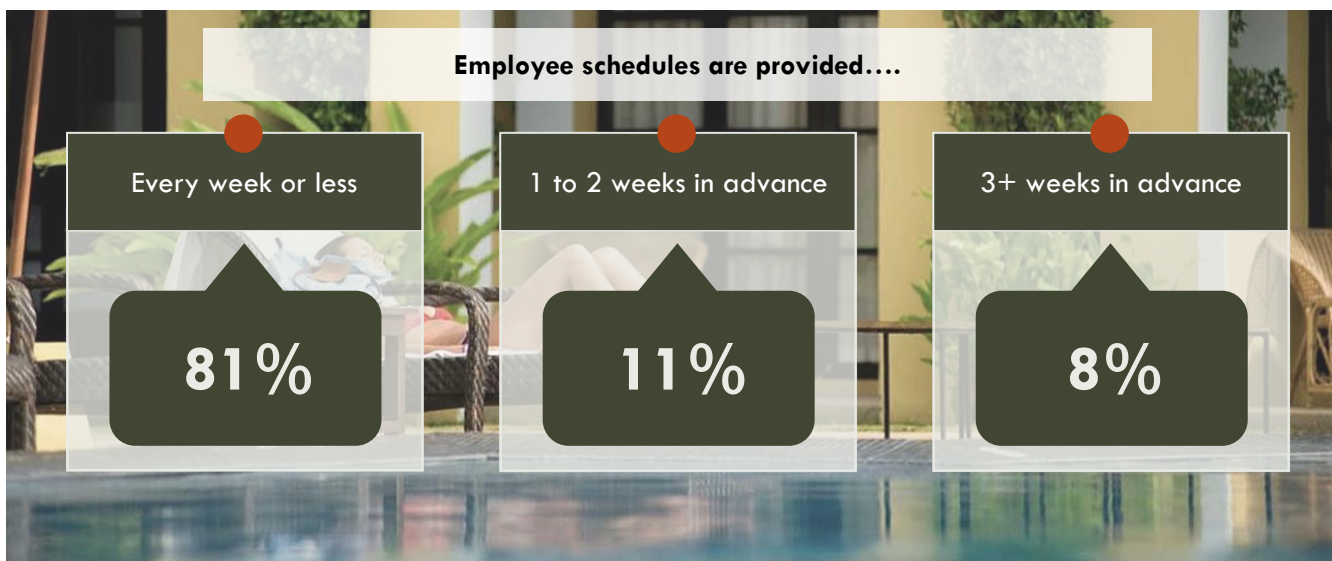
Exhibit 6. Employee Self-Reported Wages (Including Tips) and Typical Number of Weekly Hours, n=237



*32 percent selected 'prefer not to answer'

When asked about how far in advance they typically receive their schedules, 81 percent of employees reported “every week or less” (Exhibit 7). Similarly, 59 percent of survey respondents in management positions agreed that entry-level employees receive their schedules within that timeframe (Appendix A, Exhibit 25).

Exhibit 7. Scheduling for Employees in Non-Management Positions, n=235



⁹ The living wage for a single adult in San Diego County. “Family Needs Calculator (formerly the California Family Needs Calculator),” Insight: Center for Community Economic Development, last updated 2021. insightccd.org/family-needs-calculator.

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

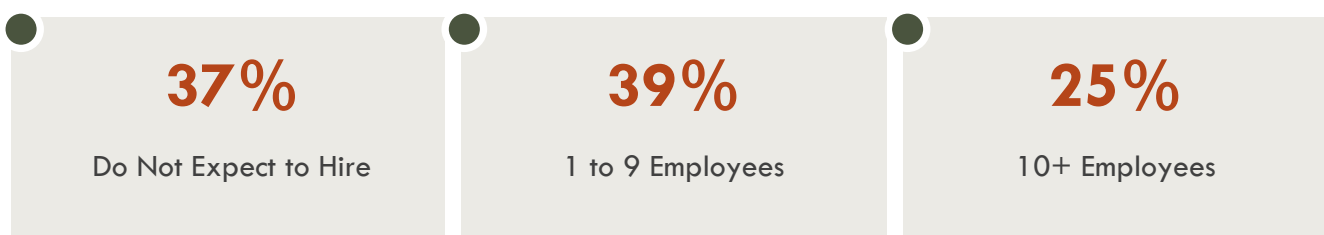
The survey asked employees in management roles about hiring and factors impacting recruitment and retention. First, the survey asked management respondents to identify the top five positions that their company had the most difficulty hiring for in the past 12 months. “Housekeeping, Public Space, and Laundry Worker,” “Cook,” and “Maintenance and Repair Worker” were the top three most difficult-to-hire positions (Exhibit 8). For all difficult-to-hire roles, 37 percent of management respondents reported that they did not expect to hire in the next 12 months, while 64 expected to hire at least one employee in the next 12 months (Exhibit 9).

Exhibit 8. Management-Ranked Job Titles That Are Difficult-to-Hire, n=171

Job Title	Ranked (Most Difficult to Least Difficult)
Housekeeping, Public Space, and Laundry Worker	1
Cook	2
Maintenance and Repair Worker	3
Steward (e.g., Dishwashing)	4
Hotel, Motel, and Resorts Desk Clerk	5
Food and Beverage Supervisor	6
Food Server or Banquet Helper	7
Lodging and Operations Manager	8
Groundskeeper	9
Sales and Catering Representative	10

*Up to five options could be selected; 23 percent selected 'not applicable/no difficult-to-hire positions

Exhibit 9. Management Hiring Projections for Difficult-to-Hire Positions in the Next 12 Months, n=171



To determine if there was a trend between difficult-to-hire positions and wages, the survey asked management to provide wages for each position. Management respondents indicated that six of the 10 difficult-to-hire occupations earned more than a living wage: “Cooks;” “Maintenance and Repair Workers;” “Stewards;” “Food and Beverage Supervisors;” “Lodging and Operations Managers;” and “Sales and Catering Representatives” (Exhibit 10). In comparison, traditional labor market information and online job postings suggest that eight of the 10 occupations earned less than the living wage at entry (Exhibit 11). Appendix A, Exhibit 30 summarizes employees’ self-reported wages by occupation.

Exhibit 10. Management-Reported Hourly Wages (Not Including Tips) for Difficult-to-Hire Positions¹⁰

Management-Reported Data					
Job Title	Less than \$19	\$19-\$22	\$23-\$26	+\$27	n
Housekeeping, Public Space, or Laundry Worker	54%	41%	4%	1%	69
Cook	19%	55%	21%	5%	42
Maintenance and Repair Worker	31%	44%	22%	3%	32
Steward (e.g., Dishwashing)	32%	65%	3%	0%	31
Hotel, Motel, and Resorts Desk Clerk	50%	43%	7%	0%	30
Food and Beverage Supervisor	13%	13%	58%	17%	24
Food Server/Banquet Helper	55%	30%	10%	5%	20
Lodging and Operations Manager*	25%	17%	33%	25%	12
Groundskeeper*	67%	33%	0%	0%	12
Sales and Catering Representative*	25%	25%	17%	33%	12

*Interpret with caution due to small sample size

Exhibit 11. Wages in Labor Market Information and Online Job Postings in San Diego County¹¹

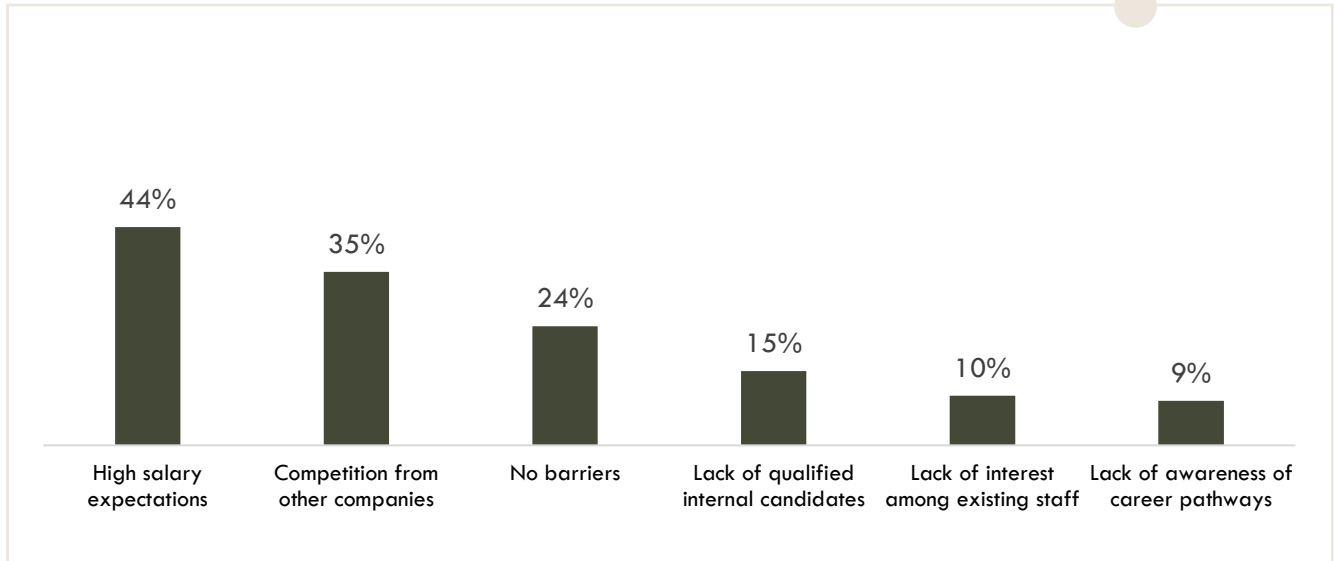
Labor Market Information				
Job Title	Related SOC Code	Entry-Level Wages	Unique Job Postings	Job Postings Median Salary
Housekeeping, Public Space, or Laundry Worker	37-2012	\$14.99	12,746	\$17.05
Cook	35-2014	\$17.28	13,922	\$17.54
Maintenance and Repair Worker	49-9071	\$18.08	21,200	\$21.11
Steward (e.g., Dishwashing)	35-9021	\$15.26	7,829	\$16.31
Hotel, Motel, and Resorts Desk Clerk	43-4081	\$15.14	9,309	\$16.06
Food Server/Banquet Helper	35-3041	\$15.28	964	\$14.95
Food and Beverage Supervisor	35-1012	\$17.11	11,647	\$17.54
Lodging and Operations Manager	11-9081	\$24.52	1,899	\$26.15
Groundskeeper	37-3011	\$16.24	3,947	\$17.54
Sales and Catering Representative	41-3091	\$22.96	4,615	\$22.46

¹⁰ Management only reported wages for occupations they selected as difficult-to-hire positions; therefore, not all managers viewed this question.

¹¹ Related Standard Occupational Codes (SOC) for difficult-to-hire jobs. Job Postings, 2020-2022. Lightcast 2023.03; QCEW, Non-QCEW, Self-Employed.

In addition to assessing difficult-to-hire positions, the survey also asked management to report any barriers when recruiting mid-level employees (e.g., managers or supervisors). The top barriers were “high salary expectations” (44 percent) and “competition from other companies” (35 percent), while 24 percent selected that there were “no barriers” to recruitment (Exhibit 12).

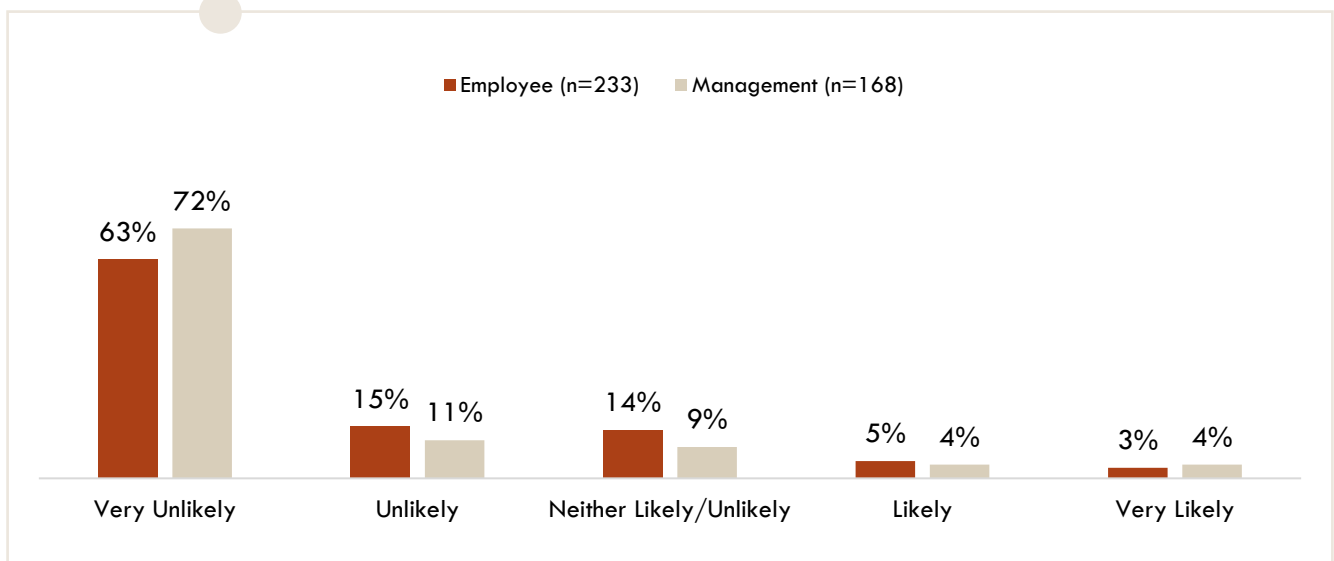
Exhibit 12. Management-Reported Barriers to Recruiting Mid-Level Employees, n=149



*Multiple options could be selected

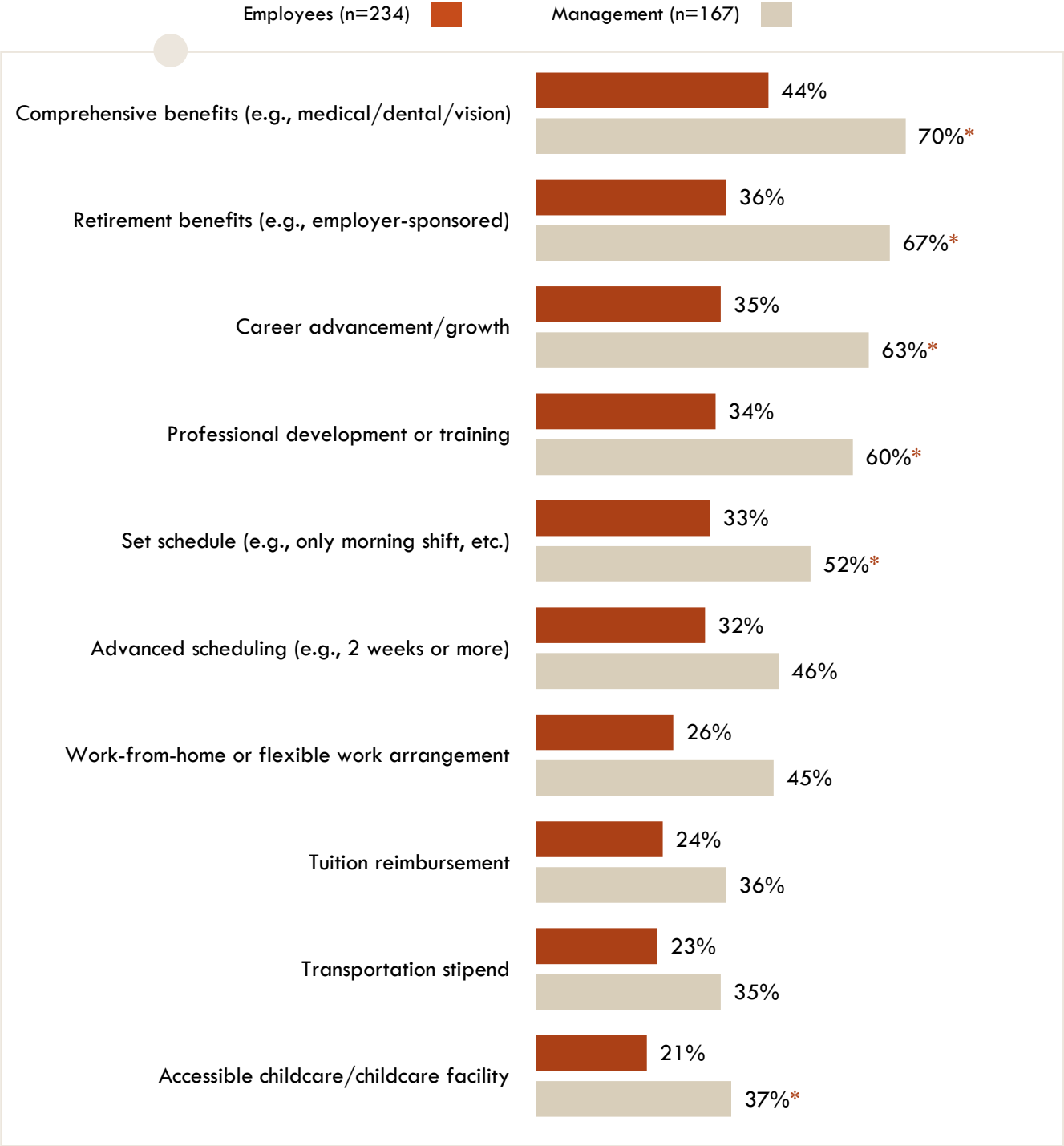
The survey asked about retention and the likelihood that employees and management would leave the hotel industry in the next 12 months. Results showed that short-term retention was high for both employees and management, and 78 percent of employees and 83 percent of management were “very unlikely” and “unlikely” to leave in the next 12 months. For those likely to leave, the top reasons mentioned were new career opportunities, low wages, or going back to school.

Exhibit 13. Likelihood to Stay in the Hotel Industry the Next 12 Months



In terms of factors that are important for retention, employees and management provided similar responses; however, a higher percentage of those in management roles perceived each benefit as important (Exhibit 14). The top factors contributing to employees' and management's retention in the hotel industry were "comprehensive benefits," "retirement benefits," and "career advancement/growth."

Exhibit 14. Percentage that Selected Benefit as Important to Stay in the Hotel Industry¹²



*p<.05, a significantly greater proportion of management selected option compared to employees

¹² Percentage that selected "fairly important" or "very important" to stay in the hotel industry



While comprehensive benefits (e.g., medical, dental, vision) and retirement benefits were the top two factors that contributed to employee and management retention, only 23 and 28 percent of management respondents, respectively, reported that their companies offered these benefits to both part-time and full-time employees; conversely, a majority indicated that these benefits are only offered to full-time workers (Exhibit 15). Approximately one third of management respondents indicated that their companies provided advanced scheduling or set scheduling to both full-time and part-time employees, but about the same percentages did not offer this benefit to any employees. More than two out of five management respondents reported that their companies do not offer employees transportation stipends, flexible work arrangements, tuition reimbursements, or accessible childcare.

Exhibit 15. Companies that Offer Benefit to Both FT/PT, FT Only, or Not Offered, n=170

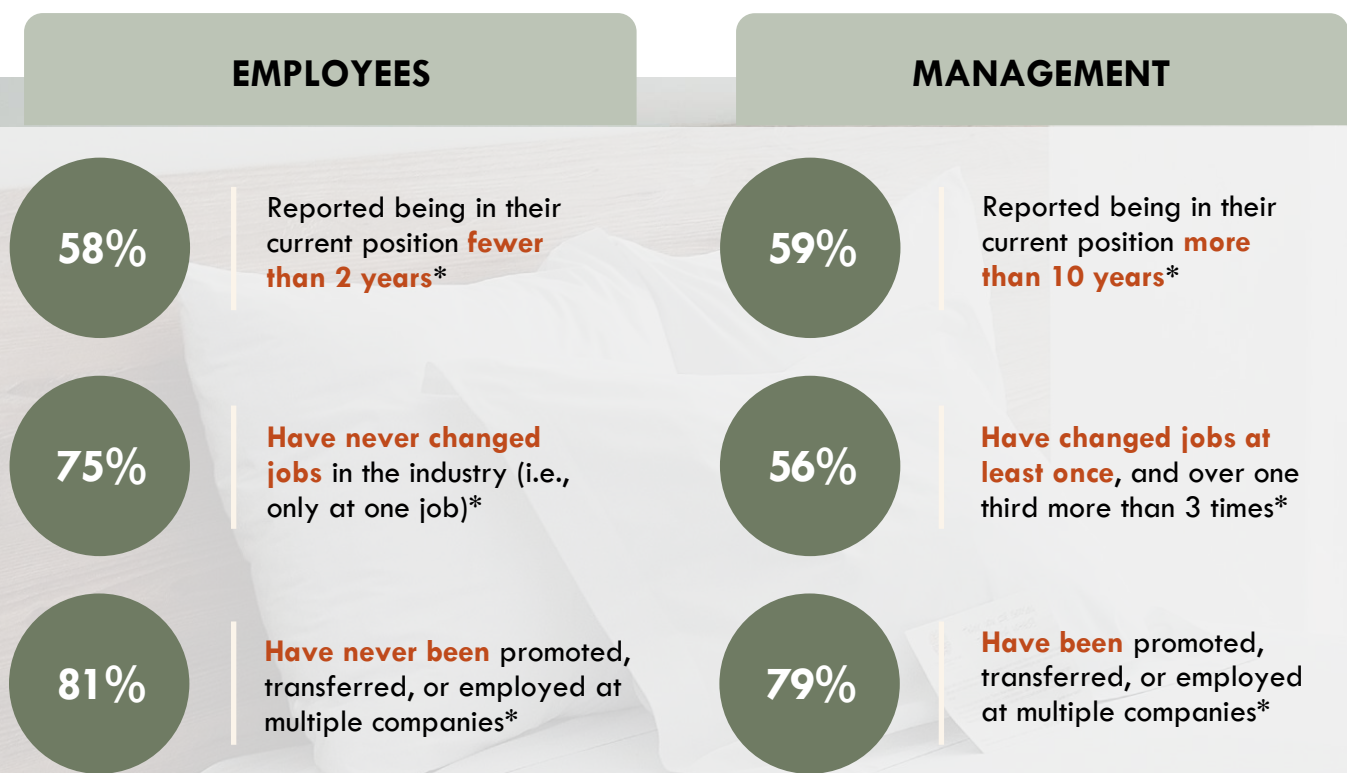
Benefit	Both FT/PT	FT Only	Not Offered
Professional development or training	39%	42%	19%
Advanced scheduling (e.g., 2 weeks or more)	34%	33%	33%
Set schedule (e.g., mornings only)	33%	35%	32%
Retirement benefits (e.g., employer-sponsored)	28%	53%	19%
Comprehensive benefits (e.g., medical, dental, vision)	23%	64%	14%
Transportation stipend	21%	28%	52%
Work-from-home/flexible work arrangement	19%	38%	44%
Tuition reimbursement	15%	37%	48%
Accessible childcare/childcare facility	14%	29%	58%

*May not total 100 percent due to rounding

EMPLOYEE AND MANAGEMENT EXPERIENCES

The survey revealed key differences between employee and management experiences, featured in Exhibit 16. For employees, more than half (58 percent) reported being in their current position fewer than two years, and never changed jobs while working in the industry (i.e., only employed at one job). Given their short tenure, 81 percent have also never been promoted, transferred, or employed at multiple companies within the industry. For management, on the other hand, 59 percent reported being in their current position more than 10 years, and 56 percent reported changing jobs more than once. Not surprisingly given their longer tenures, 79 percent had been promoted, transferred, or employed at multiple companies. For the full summary of these variables, please see Appendix A, Exhibit 26, Exhibit 27, and Exhibit 28.

Exhibit 16. Hotel Industry Employees and Management Experiences

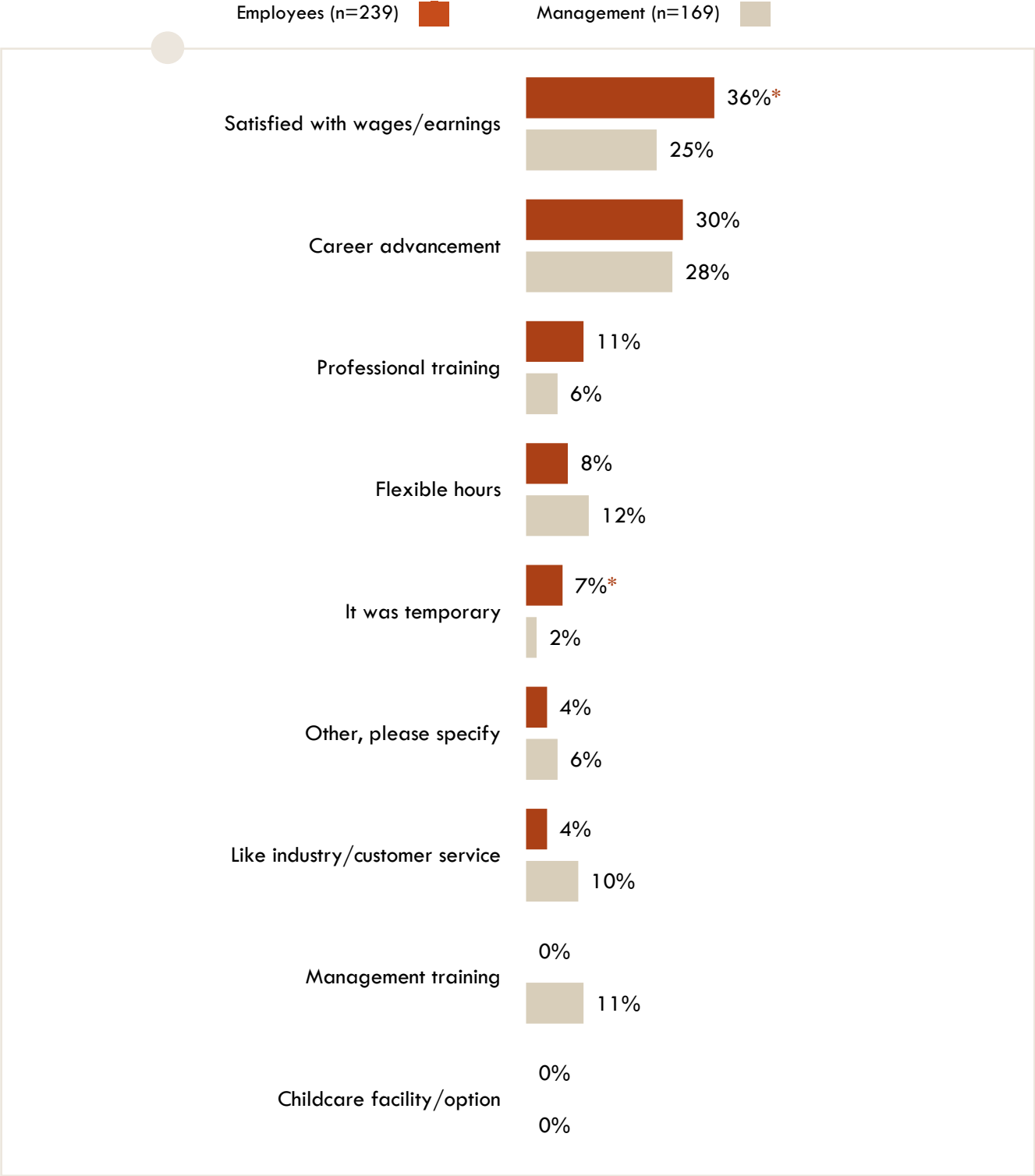


n=239, *p< .05, a significantly greater proportion compared to management

n=171, *p< .05, a significantly greater proportion compared to employees

The top two reasons employees and management decided to work in the hotel industry were “satisfied with wages/earnings,” and “career advancement” (Exhibit 17). Of note, a statistically significant greater proportion of employees selected “it was temporary” compared to management.

Exhibit 17. Primary Reason Employees and Management Decided to Work in the Hotel Industry



*p < .05, a significantly greater proportion selected reason compared to management

Regarding positive experiences working in the hotel industry, respondents in management roles reported significantly greater levels of agreement across all statements than employees (Exhibit 18; Mean comparisons, see Appendix A, Exhibit 32. The statements most endorsed by both employees and management were, “The industry values diversity, equity, and inclusion” and “I would recommend working in the industry to friends and family.”

Exhibit 18. Agreement with Statements Regarding Experiences in the Hotel Industry

Statements	% Strongly Agree/Agree	
	Employees (n=229)	Management (n=167)
The industry values diversity, equity, and inclusion	82%	86%*
I would recommend working in the industry to friends and family	77%	84%*
My work is meaningful, significant, and rewarding	76%	83%*
I am compensated fairly (pay and benefits)	75%	83%*
I receive meaningful recognition when I do a good job	75%	80%*
I receive training to do my job effectively	75%	83%*
My work makes a valuable difference in my community	73%	78%*
I have opportunities for career advancement	72%	81%*

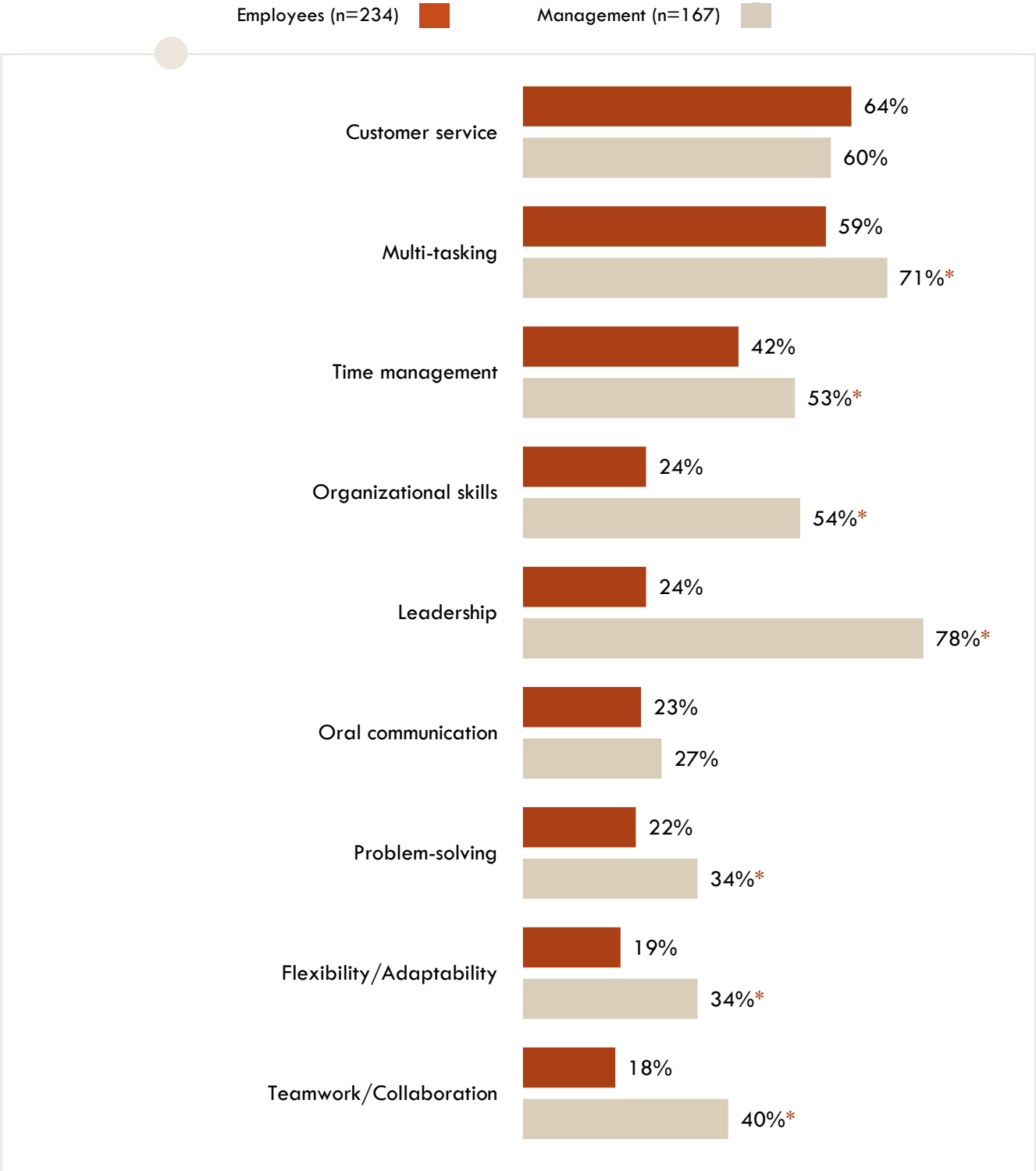
*p<.05, a significantly greater proportion selected 'strongly agree/agree' compared to employees



To determine valuable or transferable skills learned while working in the hotel industry, the survey provided survey respondents up to 15 different skills to choose from. Respondents in management roles selected an average of five skills, whereas employees selected an average of three skills. Overall, a greater percentage of management respondents endorsed each of the 15 skills than employees. Exhibit 19 shows the list of skills ranked by status.

The top skills valued by employees were “customer service,” “multi-tasking,” “time management,” “organizational skills,” and “leadership” (Exhibit 20). For managers, the top skills were similar but prioritized differently. Managers selected “leadership,” “multi-tasking,” “customer service,” “organizational skills,” and “time management.” Appendix B, Exhibit 33 features the full list.

Exhibit 20. Top Valued Skills That Employees and Management Learned in the Hotel Industry



*p<.05, a significantly greater proportion of management selected skill compared to employees; multiple options could be selected

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

To determine what type of continuing education or professional development training employees and management would be interested in, the survey asked respondents to rank topics, with 1 being the highest ranked or desired topic. Both employees and management were interested in similar opportunities, particularly “management and leadership training” and “business/entrepreneurship training.” In terms of differences, management prioritized “IT or technology” more than employees, while employees were more interested in “safety training” than management. When asked whether they experienced any barriers when offered professional development or training opportunities in their current roles, the majority of employees (83 percent) and management (78 percent) reported that they did not experience any barriers to participating in opportunities when offered by employers.

Exhibit 21. Ranked Professional Development or Training for Employees and Management

Employees (n=227)		Management (n=165)	
1	Management and leadership training	1	Management and leadership training
2	Business/Entrepreneurship training	2	Business/Entrepreneurship training
3	Sales and business development	3	IT or Technology
4	Marketing/Social media	4	Sales and business development
5	Accounting and finance	5	Marketing/Social media
6	IT or Technology	6	Accounting and finance
7	Public speaking or presentation skills	7	Public speaking or presentation skills
8	Foreign language classes	8	Foreign language classes
9	Safety training	9	Professional writing
10	Professional writing	10	Emergency preparedness
11	Emergency preparedness	11	Safety training

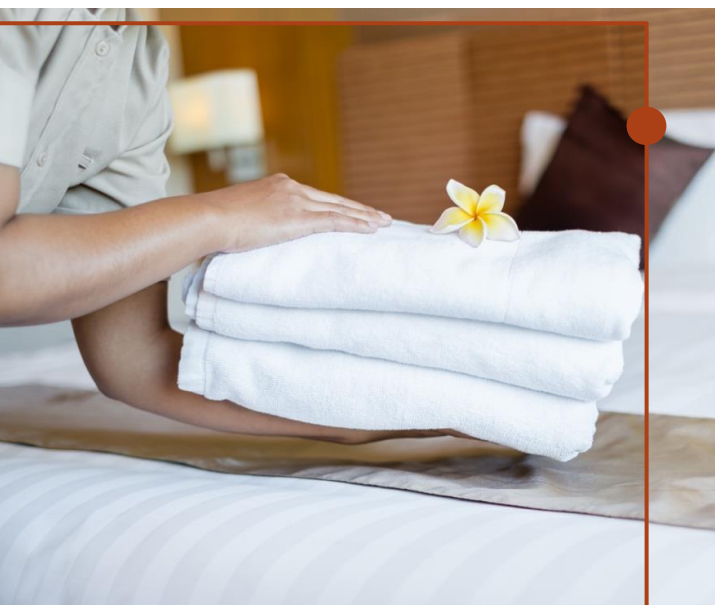
Exhibit 22. Perceived Barriers to Participating In Professional Development/Training, n=392

83%

Employees perceived “no barriers” to participating in professional development/training opportunities

78%

Managers perceived “no barriers” to participating in professional development/training opportunities



INSIGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The San Diego & Imperial COE conducted this study in collaboration with the San Diego County Lodging Association and Mod Research Consulting to understand employees' experiences in the hotel industry, and to support employers' workforce needs. This section summarizes insights from the survey findings and provides the following recommendations for the San Diego and Imperial Counties Community Colleges and employers in the hotel industry:

1. Continue to increase wages for difficult-to-hire positions that pay below the living wage and develop career pathways to strengthen the industry talent pipeline;
2. Utilize important benefits and experiences that employees value as recruitment and outreach tools;
3. Consider benefits and advanced scheduling for not just full-time employees, but also part-time employees to increase employee retention;
4. Provide professional learning opportunities that are important to the current workforce and foster the development of transferable skills valued by both employees and management.

Continue to increase wages for difficult-to-hire positions that pay below the living wage and develop career pathways to strengthen the industry talent pipeline.

According to publicly available labor market information (LMI) and survey responses, employment in the hotel industry will continue to increase in the upcoming years. However, according to LMI, only two of the 10 difficult-to-hire occupations examined in this study pay more the living wage of \$18.43 per hour for a single adult in San Diego County.¹³ Conversely, the majority of management survey respondents reported that six out of 10 occupations pay more than the living wage. The discrepancy between survey responses and secondary research suggests that employers are increasing wages for positions such as “Cooks;” “Maintenance and Repair Workers;” “Stewards;” and “Food & Beverage Supervisors,” and that publicly available wage data is not yet available for these recent industry trends. However, wages for the most difficult-to-hire position, “Housekeeping, Public Space, and Laundry Workers,” remain below the living wage. This is similar to a report by the American Hotel and Lodging Association, suggesting that 97 percent of the hotels surveyed were experiencing staffing shortages, and 58 percent ranked housekeeping as the most challenging in hiring.¹⁴ Not increasing wages for this position—and

¹³ “Family Needs Calculator (formerly the California Family Needs Calculator),” Insight: Center for Community Economic Development, last updated 2021, insightcced.org/family-needs-calculator.

¹⁴ “As 97% Of Surveyed Hotels Report Staffing Shortages, AHLA Foundation Expands Recruitment Campaign,” American Hotel & Lodging Association. ahla.com/news/97-surveyed-hotels-report-staffing-shortages-ahla-foundation-expands-recruitment-campaign.

any others that pay below a living wage—may exacerbate employee turnover as workers search for employment elsewhere to cover basic necessities and expenses.^{15, 16, 17}

Increasing wages is a viable short-term strategy for recruitment and retention, and 86 percent reported that they were “very unlikely/unlikely” to leave within the next 12 months. Increasing wages may be especially attractive for occupations with low barriers at entry (i.e., typical entry-level education of a high school diploma or less and do not require work experience). Notably, however, the majority of employee respondents had been in their positions fewer than two years (58 percent), and a significantly greater proportion selected because “it was temporary” as a primary reason they wanted to work in the industry compared to management. This suggests that these positions may be viewed as initial, short-term steps to financial stability, but may not be viewed as long-term opportunities for career advancement.

The San Diego & Imperial COE recommends that employers and community colleges develop formal career pathways as a long-term solution to address not only recruitment and retention challenges, but also uncertainty among workers. Career pathways provide a roadmap for employees to see career mobility in the industry. Compared to employees, management respondents were significantly more likely to agree with positive statements about working in the industry than employees, and many stayed in their positions long-term (59 percent had been in the industry more than 10 years). One of the important benefits to industry employees is “career advancement/growth,” yet nearly one-third of employees (28 percent) reported that they did not have opportunities to grow. Furthermore, most individuals in management roles had been promoted, transferred, or worked at different hotels in the industry (79 percent) while most employees had not (81 percent). These results suggest career advancement could be an important difference between employees and management that contribute to long-term retention. Ensuring social mobility for employees in one of the most popular industries will be necessary to ensure that workers view these positions as long-term opportunities.

Utilize important benefits and experiences that employees value as recruitment and outreach tools.

Four out of five respondents (employees and management) reported that “the industry values diversity, equity, and inclusion.” An analysis of labor market information shows that the industry is in fact diverse—76 percent of the industry in 2022 was represented by racial diversity, 50 percent was represented by women (no gender equity gap), while 51 percent were under 45 years old and 28

¹⁵ “The Economic Impact of Local Living Wages,” Economic Policy Institute. [epi.org/publication/bp170](https://www.epi.org/publication/bp170).

¹⁶ “A Living Wage Doesn’t Just Benefit Workers. It Benefits Businesses And Society, Too,” Fast Company. [fastcompany.com/90754333/a-living-wage-doesnt-just-benefit-workers-it-benefits-businesses-and-society-too](https://www.fastcompany.com/90754333/a-living-wage-doesnt-just-benefit-workers-it-benefits-businesses-and-society-too).

¹⁷ “\$15 An Hour Isn’t Enough: U.S. Workers Need A Living Wage,” Massachusetts Institute of Technology. livingwage.mit.edu/articles/85-15-an-hour-isn-t-enough-u-s-workers-need-a-living-wage.

percent over 55 years old.¹⁸ Diversity, equity, and inclusion is not only important to employees, but also to clients. According to a national survey by the American Hotel and Lodging Association, 71 percent of meeting and event professionals said that diversity, equity, and inclusion were important in selecting a hotel venue or supplier.¹⁹ Therefore, a workforce that represents diversity is key to both attracting hotel industry employees and business, and is an important consideration for those in management roles in charge of hiring.

The industry's diversity is a key strength and should be highlighted and prioritized when conducting outreach for positions. As an example, the American Hotel and Lodging Association launched the campaign "A Place to Stay" in English and Spanish to help hotels fill open jobs and raise awareness of the industry's career pathways, and included several digital strategies to expand the target of prospective employees.^{20, 21} The foundation has also launched a Workforce & Immigration Initiative, "Hospitality is Working," in an effort to address workforce shortages with bipartisan solutions to immigration.²² The colleges and local employers can use these examples and others to engage in meaningful collaborations to continue building a workforce that represents the diversity in San Diego County.

In addition to diversity, equity, and inclusion, the current study also found that 77 percent of employees would recommend working in the industry to friends and family, and 76 percent agreed with the statement, "my work is meaningful, significant, and rewarding." These figures are even higher among management respondents, as 84 percent would recommend working in the industry and 83 percent found their work meaningful and rewarding. The experiences of those in the industry are positive, and these are important metrics to highlight when conducting outreach.

Overall, the expressed satisfaction of workers in the industry illustrates the value that individuals place on those work experiences, and the community colleges can use this information to attract students to hospitality programs and careers. Community colleges and employers can also refer to existing efforts that support the hotel industry, including events like National Hotel Employee Day²³ and increasing hospitality apprenticeship programs²⁴ in an attempt to grow the industry's talent pipeline. Apprenticeships combine on-the-job learning with related classroom instruction that can increase students' skills and wages, and are an opportunity for local employers to attract talent and strengthen

¹⁸ Industry data for North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) code 721 Accommodations. Lightcast 2023.03; QCEW, Non-QCEW, Self-Employed.

¹⁹ "A New Era for U.S. Hotels: 2023 State of the Hotel Industry Report," The American Hotel & Lodging Association. ahla.com/sites/default/files/AHLA.SOTI_Report.2023.final_002.pdf

²⁰ "AHLA Foundation Expands Ad Campaign to Fill Hotel Jobs," Hotel Management. hotelmanagement.net/operate/ahla-foundation-aims-boost-hotel-laborahla.com/sites/default/files/AHLA.SOTI_Report.2023.final_002.pdf.

²¹ thehotelindustry.com.

²² workforceandimmigrationinitiative.com.

²³ ahla.com/news/ahla-establishes-sept-1-national-hotel-employee-day.

²⁴ ahlafoundation.org/apprenticeship.

retention.²⁵ Therefore, workforce/economic development agencies and the region's community colleges should partner with employers to create apprenticeship programs as a way for students to gain experience in the industry.

Consider benefits and advanced scheduling for not just full-time employees, but also part-time employees to increase employee retention and satisfaction.

When asked about the benefits that are important for them to stay in the industry, the top selected benefits for employees were: “comprehensive benefits,” “retirement benefits,” “career advancement/growth,” “professional development/training,” and “set schedules.” When asked whether companies offer these benefits to employees, most offer comprehensive benefits and retirement benefits to full-time employees only, if at all. Therefore, exploring how more employees can be offered these benefits would be an important consideration for long-term retention.

Another important factor for retention is advanced scheduling. When asked how often they receive their schedules, 81 percent of employees indicated that they receive their schedules “every week or less.” Additionally, 66 percent of management respondents reported that their companies do not offer advanced scheduling or only offer it to full-time employees. Identifying ways to improve scheduling could support quality of work-life balance for employees in the industry.²⁶ According to a recent report on industry trends, labor management technology with scheduling capabilities is a “must-have” technology that will improve efficiencies and ensure that sufficient staff are available to respond to varying customer volumes.²⁷ Labor shortages affect customer satisfaction and hotels' ability to meet guest expectations; therefore, it is important for employers to consider technologies that will attract and retain a workforce that can meet those demands as tourism continues to increase in San Diego County.²⁸

Provide professional learning opportunities that are important to the current workforce and foster the development of transferable skills that are valued by employees and management.

A study exploring ways to decrease employee turnover found that one of the most predictive factors of job satisfaction for employees in the hospitality industry are personal development opportunities.²⁹ To determine what support the community colleges can provide, the current survey asked respondents about the types of continuing education or professional development training they would be interested in. Employees and management had similar survey responses and expressed interest particularly in

²⁵ “Building Registered Apprenticeship Programs,” Department of Labor. doleta.gov/oa/employers/apprenticeship_toolkit.pdf.

²⁶ ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6843298

²⁷ “Hospitality in 2025: Automated, Intelligent... and More Personal,” Skift + Oracle Hospitality. oracle.com/a/ocom/docs/industries/hospitality/hospitality-industry-trends-for-2025.pdf.

²⁸ “Hospitality in 2025: Automated, Intelligent... and More Personal,” Skift + Oracle Hospitality. oracle.com/a/ocom/docs/industries/hospitality/hospitality-industry-trends-for-2025.pdf.

²⁹ “Factors Influencing Job Satisfaction in Hospitality Industry,” Heimerl, P., Haid, M., Benedikt, L., & Scholl-Grissmann, U. journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2158244020982998.

“management and leadership training” and “business/entrepreneurship training.” While four out of five survey respondents (employees and management) did not experience any barriers to participating in professional development opportunities in the past, 19 percent of management respondents said that their companies do not offer this benefit and 42 percent reported that this benefit is offered to full-time employees only. Employers should consider working with community colleges to provide training opportunities, particularly in “management and leadership” for all employees, and extend these offerings to those in part-time roles, if possible. A large percentage of employees are not receiving a benefit that is important to them, and addressing this gap could help improve job satisfaction.

When asked about skills they have learned from working in the industry, employees and management shared similar skills they value: “customer service,” “multi-tasking,” “time management,” “organizational skills,” and “leadership.” These soft skills developed by working in the hotel industry are also among the top employability skills in online job postings according to another San Diego & Imperial COE study.³⁰ These important skills are transferable to other roles, and the community colleges can use this information to identify compatible occupations and alternative career pathway opportunities for students in hospitality and tourism programs.³¹ Because these skills are particularly important to employers, community colleges should also help students articulate how they developed these skills in their programs when they apply for internships, employment, or other work-based learning opportunities.

Conclusion

The San Diego & Imperial COE commissioned this study to identify difficult-to-hire occupations in the hotel industry; understand the types of benefits that are important for employee retention; assess the skills that are valued by workers in the industry; and evaluate desired professional development and training opportunities. The San Diego & Imperial COE encourages the San Diego and Imperial Counties Community Colleges and hotel industry partners to use these findings for meaningful discussions and to develop private-public partnerships that support the industry’s workforce needs.

³⁰ “21st Century Employability Skills: A Labor Market Analysis of Soft Skills In San Diego County,” San Diego & Imperial COE. myworkforceconnection.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/21st-Century-Employability-Skills-Soft-Skills-Study_2020-04-14.pdf.

³¹ “Arts, Media, and Entertainment: Examining Labor Market Needs, Valued Skills, and Compatible Jobs,” San Diego & Imperial COE. coeccc.net/san-diego-imperial/2023/08/arts-media-and-entertainment-examining-labor-market-need-valued-skills-and-compatible-jobs.

APPENDIX A: DATA TABLES

Exhibit 23. Demographic Profile of Survey Respondents by Employees and Management

	Employees (n=228)	Management (n=166)		Employees (n=227)	Management (n=165)
Gender			Race/Ethnicity		
Female	58%*	48%	White/Caucasian	27%	30%
Male	33%	41%*	Hispanic/Latinx	18%	19%
Prefer not to answer	10%	11%	East/Southeast Asian	6%	6%
	Employees (n=226)	Management (n=166)	Black/African American/South African	3%	3%
Age			American Indian/Alaska Native	1%	1%
18-24 years	13%*	2%	Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	1%	2%
25-34 years	16%*	8%	Other	2%	1%
35-44 years	8%	19%	Prefer not to answer	45%	43%
45 years or older	16%	29%*		Employees (n=227)	Management (n=166)
Prefer not to answer	47%	42%	Caregiver to Adult/ Child		
<small>May not total 100 percent due to rounding *p<.05, Significantly greater proportion than comparison group</small>			Yes, current caregiver	11%	21%*
			No, not a caregiver	32%	29%
			Prefer not to answer	58%	51%

Exhibit 24. Current Department (Employees and Management)

Q. Which of the following best describes the department in which you work? (Select one)

Department	n=411
Front Office and Reception	29%
Administration	23%
Food and Beverage (Front of House)	9%
Marketing and Sales	8%
Housekeeping and Laundry	6%
Human Resources	5%
Maintenance, Engineering, and Landscaping	4%
Food and Beverage (Back of House)	2%
Accounting and Finance	2%
IT or Help Desk	1%
Loss Prevention or Security	1%
Other Department	10%

Exhibit 25. Advanced Scheduling for Entry-Level Positions (Management)

Q. In general, how far in advance are employees in entry-level positions (e.g., non-managers, non-supervisors) provided their schedules?

Frequency	n=167
Every week or less	59%
1 to 2 weeks	29%
3 to 4 weeks	1%
More than a month	4%
I'm not sure	8%

Exhibit 26. Tenure in the Hotel Industry (Employees and Management)

Q. How long have you been employed in the hotel industry?

Employment	Employees (n=240)	Management (n=171)
Less than 1 year	28%*	3%
1-2 years	30%*	12%
3-5 years	15%	12%
6-10 years	9%	14%
More than 10 years	18%	59%*

*p<.05, significantly greater proportion selected option than comparison group

Exhibit 27. Number of Times Changed Jobs in the Hotel Industry (Employees and Management)

Q. How often have you changed jobs while employed in the hotel industry (e.g. positions, changed hotel chains, etc.)? (Select one)

Employment	Employees (n=239)	Management (n=170)
I never changed jobs (i.e., only employed at one job)	75%*	44%
1-2 times	17%	21%
3-4 times	4%	16%*
5-10 times	4%	15%*
More than 10 times	0%	5%*

*p<.05, significantly greater proportion selected option than comparison group

Exhibit 28. Promote or Transferred in the Hotel Industry (Employees and Management)

Q. Have you ever experienced any of the following while working in the industry? (Select all that apply)

Employment	Employees (n=240)	Management (n=171)
Promoted within a department	13%	21%*
Transferred to a different department within the same company	4%	72%*
Employed at multiple companies within the industry	3%	22%*
Transferred to a different hotel but within the same hotel chain	2%	16%*
None of the above	81%*	21%

*p<.05, significantly greater proportion selected option than comparison group

Exhibit 29. Percentage that Selected Job Title as Difficult-to-Hire (Management)

Q. What are the TOP FIVE positions that your company had the most difficulty hiring for in the past 12 months?

Job Title	(n=171)
Housekeeping, Public Space, and Laundry Worker	47%
Cook	30%
Maintenance and Repair Worker	22%
Steward (e.g., Dishwashing)	21%
Hotel, Motel, and Resorts Desk Clerk	19%
Food Server or Banquet Helper	16%
Food and Beverage Supervisor	15%
Lodging and Operations Manager	9%
Other Occupation	9%
Groundskeeper	8%
Sales and Catering Representative	8%
No difficulty hiring/not applicable	23%

*Up to five options could be selected

Exhibit 30. Employee-Reported Wages by Job Title

Q. Approximately how much do you/did you earn per hour (including tips) in your most recent job in the hotel industry? Please round to the nearest dollar amount.

Job Title	Less than \$19	\$19-\$22	\$23-\$26	+\$27	n	Prefer Not to Answer n
Groundskeeper	67%	33%	0%	0%	12	1
Food server or banquet helper	55%	30%	10%	5%	20	2
Housekeeping, public space, and laundry worker	54%	41%	4%	1%	69	0
Hotel, motel, and resorts desk clerk	50%	43%	7%	0%	30	3
Steward (e.g., dishwashing)	32%	65%	3%	0%	31	28
Maintenance and repair worker	31%	44%	22%	3%	32	1
Lodging and operations manager	25%	17%	33%	25%	12	6
Sales and catering representative	25%	25%	17%	33%	12	6
Cook	19%	55%	21%	5%	42	6
Food and beverage supervisor	13%	13%	58%	17%	24	0

*'Prefer not to answer' was excluded from percentages reported; n reflects the sample size used in the calculation of percentages

Exhibit 31. Labor Market Information for Difficult-to-Hire Occupations, 2022-2027³²

SOC	Occupational Title	Annual Job Openings	Typical Entry-Level Education	Typical On-The-Job (OTJ) Training	Work Experience Required
35-3031	Waiters and Waitresses	5,940	No formal credential	Short-term	None
35-2014	Cooks, Restaurant	3,430	No formal credential	Moderate-term	Less than 5 years
37-2012	Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners	3,082	No formal credential	Short-term	None
35-1012	First-Line Supervisors of Food Preparation and Serving Workers	2,979	HS or equivalent	None	Less than 5 years
37-3011	Landscaping and Groundskeeping Workers	2,311	No formal credential	Short-term	None
49-9071	Maintenance and Repair Workers	1,802	HS or equivalent	Moderate-term	None
41-3091	Sales Representatives of Services	1,298	HS or equivalent	Moderate-term	None
35-9021	Dishwashers	1,208	No formal credential	Short-term	None
43-4081	Hotel, Motel, and Resort Desk Clerks	668	HS or equivalent	Short-term	None
11-9081	Lodging Managers	94	HS or equivalent	None	Less than 5 years

Exhibit 32. Statements Regarding Experiences in the Hotel Industry (Employees and Management)

Q. Please rate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding your most recent work experience in the hotel industry. (1 – Strongly Disagree to 5 – Strongly Agree)

Statements	Mean	
	Employees (n=229)	Managers (n=167)
The industry values diversity, equity, and inclusion	3.79	4.15*
I would recommend working in the industry to friends and family	3.94	4.18*
My work is meaningful, significant, and rewarding	3.90	4.13*
I am compensated fairly (pay and benefits)	3.85	4.11*
I receive meaningful recognition when I do a good job	3.86	4.07*
I receive training to do my job effectively	3.88	4.15*
My work makes a valuable difference in my community	3.86	4.04*
I have opportunities for career advancement	3.79	4.15*

*p<.05, significantly higher agreement compared to employees

³² Related Standard Occupational Codes (SOC) for difficult-to-hire job titles. Lightcast 2023.03; QCEW, Non-QCEW, Self-Employed.

Exhibit 33. Percentage That Valued Skill in the Hotel Industry (Employees and Management)

Q. What skills have you learned in the hotel industry that you find most valuable? (Select all that apply)

Skills	Employees (n=229)	Managers (n=167)
Customer service	64%	60%
Multi-tasking	59%	71%*
Time management	42%	53%*
Organizational skills	24%	54%*
Leadership	24%	78%*
Oral communication	23%	27%
Problem-solving	22%	34%*
Flexibility/Adaptability	19%	34%*
Teamwork/Collaboration	18%	40%*
Sales	13%	13%
Presentation skills	9%	19%*
Creativity	7%	17%*
Project management	4%	20%*
Cross-cultural skills (e.g., multilingual, multicultural knowledge)	4%	18%*
Written communication	3%	20%*

* $p < .05$, management significantly greater level of agreement compared to employees; multiple options could be selected

APPENDIX B: METHODOLOGY

In February 2023, an advisory group with regional stakeholders and representatives from various hotels across the region met to provide industry knowledge and expertise to guide the research project. The advisory group's primary role was to 1) highlight key issues facing the industry to refine the research questions that guided this research project; 2) provide feedback on occupations that would be analyzed; 3) review the survey and provide feedback; and 4) assist with recruitment and developing a target distribution list. Research questions that were discussed with the advisory group included:

- What high-wage, high-demand jobs do employers have difficulty filling?
- How are employers addressing the current labor shortage?
- What retention strategies have employers implemented?
- What career pathways exist for low-wage jobs?
- What “interventions” can be developed to support the industry’s workforce needs?
- What workplace conditions support employee retention and job satisfaction?
- What skills and abilities developed in the industry did employees find most valuable (e.g., transferable skills)?

The research team identified occupations within industry code NAICS 721 Accommodations based on staffing patterns, and asked the advisory group to provide feedback on these occupations. The occupations discussed and analyzed as part of this study are featured in Exhibit 5.

The research team developed a quantitative survey based on the research questions and discussions with the advisory group and programmed it in Qualtrics. The research team and advisory group reviewed the survey and provided feedback. The survey included skip logic and tailored questions based on whether respondents were a current or former employee, or in a management role. The research team launched the survey in June 2023 and recruited participants via phone and email distribution. The company Valoroo led phone recruitment efforts and advisory board members helped distribute the survey link among hotel industry partners and employees. Upon completion, respondents could opt to receive a \$5 Amazon gift card as a “thank you” for participating. Data collection lasted from June to July 2023 and a total of 614 respondents filled out surveys. The research team cleaned the data to ensure surveys were more than 25 percent complete and represented companies in the hotel industry (e.g., excluding real estate management), which resulted in a final sample size of 414 participants. Although the research team attempted to recruit former employees, few were reached (n=6); thus, they excluded them from the final analysis and focused on current hotel industry workers.

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IMPORTANT DISCLAIMERS

The San Diego & Imperial Center of Excellence (COE) encourages stakeholders to use this study as a resource for meaningful discussions about community college programs. For community colleges proposing new programs or modifying existing programs, please review the [Regional Program Recommendation Process](#) for details.

All representations included in this report have been produced from primary research and a review of publicly and/or privately available data and/or research reports. This study examines the most recent data available at the time of the analysis; however, data sets are updated regularly and may not be consistent with previous reports. Efforts have been made to qualify and validate the accuracy of the data and the report findings; however, neither the COE, COE host district, nor California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office are responsible for the applications or decisions made by individuals and/or organizations based on this study or its recommendations.