

# Supporting the Mental Fitness of Your Hotel Team

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*By Stanton D Jacobs, CHA, President of Hospitality Performance Systems, Inc.*



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**The mental fitness of the team** serving your hotel's guests is of vital importance as we start the slow road to recovery. As hotel owners and operators focus on restoring the financial performance of their hotels, special attention also needs to be given to the mental health and fitness of the team from several perspectives.

The team members that have been laid off for such an extended period of time, may face various levels of depression, lack confidence and low self-esteem. Conversely, those that the hotel retained under a reduced staffing model, now possibly feel overworked and unappreciated. Both scenarios create added stress and a general lack of trust with their employer in terms of job security. Do the hotel managers have the level of training and expertise to support their team members with these issues? Does the hotel offer the level of human resource support and benefits to assist team members attempting to cope with these challenges? This article will review these potential concerns in more depth and provide some suggested actions to help the hotel successfully address these concerns.



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**The first step for most hotels** would be to work with the Director of Human Resources or recruit support from above property management. Unfortunately, during our discussion with many hotel operators, this position was often laid off during early stages of the COVID pandemic. This is surprising when you consider that these hotels were attempting to operate during one of the most challenging times experienced in the past 100 years. Clearly, strong and effective direction from an experienced and well-trained Director of Human Resources is going to play a vital role as business begins to recover and the need to secure new staffing returns. This is also the time when every hotel should evaluate the overall benefits package offered to team members. Benefits such as providing a mental health hotline for advice and support are currently being overwhelmingly utilized by many businesses and hotels. \*\*

**For the team members laid off** over an extended period due to the COVID pandemic, many may be experiencing behavioral issues. Examples include obsessive-compulsive disorder, general anxiety, and chronic loneliness brought on by social isolation. Some have a general 'lack of meaning' in the value of themselves and their past job. They are also experiencing the stress of unemployment and the loss of income.\*\*

**For the team members who continued** to hold down the fort for the past 11 months, their level of stress has also gone up exponentially. They have had to cope with long periods of low occupancies and performing multiple crossover roles due to reduced staffing levels. The absence of group functions has forced team members from departments such as catering, banquets and kitchen, to remain home and out of work. For the limited team members that remained employed, their workload increased sharply as they operated under new, COVID-related health and cleanliness compliance protocols. And, as if that was not enough to deal with, hourly front desk and bell staff have been subjected to frustrated and impatient guests, who do not always appreciate or value the added health and safety procedures now in place.

\*\*For further examples visit <https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20201021-coronavirus-the-possible-long-term-mental-health-impacts>

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**Hotel leadership needs to acknowledge** the hard work and dedication of these special team members, who have compensated to cover work completed by recently furloughed friends and co-workers. There is an increased potential for a general sense of guilt in addition to resentment for the burden of the extra tasks they are now required to perform. Managers should be proactively assessing how their teams are *truly feeling* about the hotel right now. We suggest that caring actions such as bringing coffee and donuts in the morning to various departments, hosting appreciation luncheons, or surprising them with an ice cream social would do much to improve morale during this difficult time. Consider how these simple, low-cost actions communicate a strong show of appreciation to your team members. Launch departmental appreciation weeks recognizing the value each department brings to the hotel and the ROCK STAR team members that go above and beyond to service the guests. As for when to start implementing such activities....the answer is NOW!

**An excerpt from a recent presentation** by *Kimble L. Richardson, M.S., LMHC, LCSW, LMFT, LCAC, Manager, Business Development and Referrals, Community Health Network Behavioral Health*, included some other great suggestions. He recommended that all businesses create, what he referred to as “check-in groups”, which certainly seemed an appropriate term for the hospitality industry. This noted presenter recommended that businesses practice mutual support and intentional self-development. The check-in groups should meet twice a week for 30 minutes. Typically, such groups should include 3-5 team members with two facilitators that will address such issues as: current challenges, recent successes, things I’m doing for me, things I’m doing for others.

**In summary**, we reviewed that, as hotels start their road to recover from the extended timeframe of the COVID pandemic, owners and managers should assess the mental fitness of their workforces. Whether these workers have been laid off, or one of the few asked to multi-task jobs with limited staffing, it is safe to assume that they are experiencing various levels of depression, lack of confidence, low self-esteem, and even fears about their own job security.

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Showing appreciation, acknowledging above and beyond service and communicating the availability of a support network, will positively impact your team as they operate under these stressful conditions. Invest the time and energy in providing sound direction and support to aid these valued workers. These actions will build a foundation of trust and ownership that will benefit your hotel for many years to come.

## **About Hospitality Performance Systems, Inc. (HPS)**

*Hospitality Performance Systems (HPS) was created to provide operational and sales support to the hospitality industry globally. Founded in 2009 this enterprise takes advantage of its founder and President, Stanton D Jacobs, CHA, with over 30 years of proven success in the hospitality industry and strategic relationships globally, HPS is affiliated with a wide array of professionals specializing in their respective disciplines, enabling HPS to provide a wide range of services. <https://www.hps-strategic.com> <https://www.linkedin.com/in/stantonjacobs/>*