



# The Hospitality Mindset

## A New Blueprint for Culture and Performance for Any Industry



# Foreword

The secret to building a powerful workplace culture filled with high-performing teams is both an art and a science. Tackling the science has long been the focus of many HR practitioners who pore through datasets, spreadsheets and performance dashboards, work intently on benefits and programs for learning, growth and development that meet worker needs at scale and who strive to build talent and performance systems that attract and retain the very best.

Then there's the art of culture building – the very intentional, human work designed to shape the cultural experience. It varies from company to company and industry to industry. In hospitality – and for Hilton specifically – this work begins on the frontline with the hotel team members who welcome guests after long journeys, solve problems instinctively and anticipate needs before a word is spoken. These moments of humanity define a guest's experience, but they also reveal something deeper about how truly great workplaces function behind the scenes.

At Hilton, we are guided by Conrad Hilton's founding vision to fill the earth with the light and warmth of hospitality – and that vision, which is both timely and timeless, starts with our more than 500,000 team members across 100-plus countries. With more than a century in business, what we've learned with humility on the journey of building our culture is both simple and powerful: When people feel supported, stable and encouraged to grow, the return is undeniable. Team members gain confidence, purpose becomes increasingly clearer and guests experience the result, as brand loyalty grows and the business benefits follow.

When people are trusted and valued, their impact extends far beyond their individual roles. That belief is the foundation of Hilton's first-ever workplace culture report, "The Hospitality Mindset: A New Blueprint for Culture and Performance for Any Industry," which explores the forces impacting the working experience in 2026 and beyond. What the data and leadership insights make clear is that workplace culture is no longer a soft differentiator – it is a critical driver of performance, productivity and, most importantly, purpose at work.

As you read through the following pages, filled with insights from some of the most intuitive and adaptable people leaders out there – our hotel general managers – we hope you will find helpful, actionable ideas you can take and use in your own work, no matter your industry, and bring an increased sense of hospitality and happiness to your workplace. Our hope is always to learn from others and share our learnings, too, as the work of building thriving, engaged workplaces makes the world a better place for all, which is a shared ambition across companies and industries.

In a world of constant change and uncertainty, this report explores how organizations can remain resilient and people-first, because humanity – now more than ever – remains the most powerful driver of progress.

## **Laura Fuentes**

*Chief Human Resources Officer, Hilton*

# Introduction

In recent years, workers around the world have navigated unprecedented change. The working experience has become so complicated that a new dictionary of terms has been coined to describe it: quiet quitting, coffee badging, job hugging, rage applying...the list goes on. Across frontline and corporate roles alike, uncertainty and volatility have become factors in everyone's work lives.

As businesses strive to adapt and as work becomes more digital, fast-paced and, at times, isolating, one truth is emerging: **The modern workplace is increasingly missing something deeply human – hospitality.** At its core, hospitality is about taking care of others, and creating a happy, welcoming culture at work is no longer a “nice to have,” but an intentional choice and a powerful strategic business lever.

While leaders can't control the forces reshaping work, they can shape the daily experience of people – making work a place that is reliable, welcoming and connected. Hospitality is built in those everyday moments, where people feel trusted, supported, recognized and motivated to be a part of something larger than themselves. According to [Gallup](#), the payoff is real: Companies with strong organizational cultures saw an 85% net profit increase over five years. When workers feel valued and genuinely happy in their environment, performance follows.

Drawing on new workforce research and insights from Hilton, this report explores what workers are seeking most in 2026 and reinforces an important workplace truth: Culture is built through relationships, reinforced by shared experiences and active learning, supported by technology and powered by purpose. **By combining this research with lessons from Hilton's top-performing hotel leaders, this report uncovers practical, actionable ways anyone can champion hospitality in their work and build happier, more engaged, resilient and high-performing teams.**



## Part 1

### New Research Reveals Five Trends that Show What Workers Crave Most Right Now

Newly commissioned research from Ipsos and Morning Consult reveals what people at work need to feel connected and inspired – and how fostering a more hospitable workplace builds loyalty, drives retention and strengthens businesses. The research highlights the importance of purpose, recognition, the psychological benefits of connecting with each other and the growing impact of artificial intelligence, with insights that apply across industries and roles, from frontline to corporate.



## Part 2

### Hilton's General Manager “Think Tank” Reveals How to Empower Teams and Build a More Hospitable Environment at Work

The second section of the report centers on an internal Hilton study where researchers tapped into Hilton's best leadership “think tank” – the general managers of its top-performing hotels and the teams who power them. Hilton studied high-performing properties with top guest service scores to identify the cultural practices and leadership behaviors that drive exceptional performance. The initiative explores their insights through a learning framework of how top managers grow, **including learning from others; learning through community; learning from technology; learning from leaders; and finally, learning from what drives meaning**, and reveals “hospitality hacks” that any business can employ in the workplace to drive performance.



📍 Hilton London Metropole

# 1

---

# Mutual Mentorship

Modern teams thrive when learning flows in every direction. A mindset focused on mentorship is the new way forward – where everyone teaches, everyone learns and everyone grows.

In today's workplace, culture succeeds when it mirrors real life – human, reciprocal and constantly evolving. As work becomes more lateral, the most effective leaders are moving away from rigid, top-down models and toward experiences rooted in trust, connection and shared humanity.

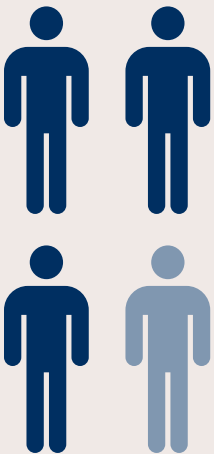
There's a good reason for this. According to new research conducted for Hilton, **workers overwhelmingly cite human-centered factors as the strongest drivers of productivity and satisfaction at work**, including positive workplace culture, work-life balance and feeling valued by one's manager.



**50% of workers say that they'd stay at a job where they feel valued, compared with 20% who cite cutting-edge technology as a primary reason to stay.<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Morning Consult

**According to these datasets, development and mentorship sit at the center of this equation.**



**Nearly three-quarters (74%) say having mentorship opportunities are important, and 77% report mentorship has an impact on their happiness at work.<sup>2</sup>**

Retention follows a similar pattern: **75% of workers say they are more likely to stay at organizations where leaders focus on developing them as individuals.<sup>3</sup>** Ultimately, when growth is personal, consistent and visible, people are more engaged, more fulfilled and more likely to stay.

<sup>2,3</sup>Ipsos

But the way growth happens is changing. Instead of a traditional, one-way model, forward-thinking workplaces are embracing a “**mutual mentorship mindset**” – one where learning flows in every direction at every level. Everyone teaches. Everyone learns. Everyone grows.

Growth doesn't move neatly up or down an org chart. “Development doesn't always come from promotions,” said Misoon Kong, general manager, Hilton Chicago. Instead, “it comes from trust and giving people opportunities before they're fully ready.” It also happens in everyday moments – through observation, collaboration and shared problem solving. Early-career workers bring fresh perspectives and digital fluency. More experienced colleagues offer wisdom, pattern recognition and people skills. Together, they create stronger, more resilient teams.

Hospitality has long practiced this mindset. In moments that matter most – during periods of change, peak demand or transition – hotel teams rely on highly adaptable, cross-trained task forces who step in, learn quickly and support one another. It's a powerful reminder that agility, empathy and shared learning simultaneously build both confidence and performance.

When leaders foster environments where learning is continuous and collective, people feel valued – and that feeling fuels engagement, loyalty and results.

**A mutual mentorship mindset isn't just a professional development strategy. It's a cultural advantage.**



## Hospitality Hack

## Activate the Task Force

The hospitality industry has a secret weapon it rolls out during critical moments such as high demand periods, special events or new hotel openings: The hotel task force. This is a group of experienced team members deployed on a temporary basis to provide operational support for short-term needs. They provide a level of agility as they are often cross-trained on a variety of roles.

In addition to stretching their skills, task forcing also exposes team members to cross-collaborations across different regions, brands and new teams. The task force is real-time mentorship on the move, as team members need to quickly get up to speed in new environments and situations. The movement not only solves short term needs but also supports longer-term team development across the company.

**The experience also generates new sparks of inspiration for team members.**

“Task force unlocks a lot of opportunity,” said Neil Sawyer, senior director, Hilton’s Recruiting Operations Center, who places more than 200 team members across task forces each year. Team members are hungry for stretch assignments, and joining a task force “creates space for you to do that.”

## Task Force-style Learning

Successfully developing mutually beneficial mentorship starts at the top. As a business leader, there are simple actions you can take to help inspire your team to evolve and strengthen its bonds through experiential learning together:

**Institute a practice of cross-training:**

Look for ways to take teams out of their comfort zones and learn from one another. It doesn’t have to be a formal process like a task force; instead, it can be something done for short-term sprints. Establish one day a month where teams shadow one another, or test out job-swapping. Are there reports or tasks that teams can exchange for a period of time? Can you create micro job swaps for a few days or weeks? This not only creates operational security, but also enables empathy as people walk in each other’s shoes.

**Escape your office:**

Top hotel leaders will tell you the most valuable time they spend is not in front of a computer checking email messages, but rather on the hotel floor being visible to guests and talking to team members. They intentionally plan to spend significant portions of their days walking the property, both to monitor what’s happening in real time but also as a way of mentoring in the moment, providing opportunities for real-time feedback as they spot it. As a manager or leader, the more you can walk alongside your team and ask questions as they’re learning, the more informed you’ll be on what’s happening. Intentionally set time in your schedule to walk your own version of the “floor” and view it as a non-negotiable investment into building your culture.

**Experiment with new mentorship models:**

Test out a new mentorship model where you pair workers of different perspectives, experiences or career stages together for a short mentoring sprint. Give it a beginning, middle and end, and come together at its conclusion to have everyone share what they learned.

**Try co-creating instead of delegating:**

Workers crave growth and relish learning opportunities. Proactively look for instances where more junior colleagues can co-create a project with you, asking questions along the way. And don’t hesitate to give someone a vote of support before they’re fully ready – those are often the best opportunities for growth.



📍 Hilton Frankfurt City Centre

# 2

## RTO:

# Return to Opportunity

In-person connection fuels trust, combats loneliness through belonging and strengthens teams and innovation.

## The biggest shift in work hasn't been location – it's been connection.

Across roles and generations, people are craving stability, visibility and connection – and many may be carrying a quiet sense of loneliness into their workdays. **That's why the most effective in-person work experiences are built around meaning.**

In-person environments build capability through shared experience, community and opportunity, not obligation. That comes through learning by watching, building trust through proximity and strengthening relationships through serendipitous in-person connections. Workers who know each other as people, not just as coworkers, empower a greater sense of flexibility and support.



When team members feel connected to one another, they naturally support one another. Strong relationships off the floor translate to better collaboration on the floor.

– General Manager Misoon Kong

## Community As Capital

Despite the headlines, people still see the office as a place that matters.



94% of respondents say returning to the office serves a purpose today<sup>4</sup>, viewing it less as a productivity engine and more as a hub for connection.



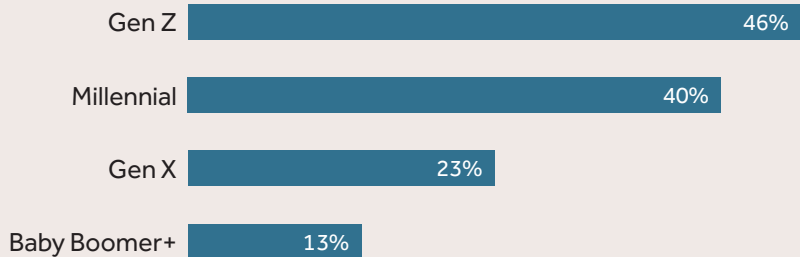
This is particularly true among younger workers, with **96% of Gen Z workers saying they see value in coming into the office.**<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4,5</sup>Morning Consult

And the stakes are high. Belonging isn't only a workplace issue but also a human one.

**Gen Z workers are twice as likely as Gen X to feel lonely at work, with loneliness affecting nearly 50% of early-career workers.**<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup>Ipsos



Isolation also rises with responsibility, as managers are significantly more likely to report feeling lonely than individual contributors.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup>Ipsos

## Hospitality Hack

## Heart of House

Hotels operate around the clock, making in-person presence essential – not only to meet guest expectations and drive business, but also to foster visibility, connection and community. Hotel teams form strong bonds in part due to the in-person shared experiences they have together. No matter the industry, bringing teams together in-person consistently and establishing systems of touchpoints can help build a family atmosphere that fosters trust.

**So how do they do that?** Hotel teams operate across multiple shifts to support continuous, around-the-clock operations. To be a top-performing team powered by trust, leaders need to focus on fostering a strong sense of connection where team members can get to know one another personally. They create a physical, thoughtfully designed space called “Heart of House,” where team members can gather, connect, learn and be together.

### **Chris Mueller, managing director of Hilton Orlando, leads a team of up to 1,100 people serving a 1,400-room hotel.**

One of his points of pride is the hotel’s “Heart of House.” He makes a point of walking potential customers through it to experience all of its elements, where there’s often music playing, comfortable surroundings and a top-notch cafeteria. “I want them to see and feel what our Heart of House offers,” Mueller said, “because they will experience the same sense of pride and purpose as the team members do.”

## Flexibility as Care

If community is what draws people together, flexibility is what allows them to stay. That’s where return-to-office strategies succeed or fail. It’s not about unlimited freedom, but rather about applying empathetic flexibility and recognizing people as whole individuals. Investing in this kind of flexibility pays significant dividends.

### **Flexibility is the single strongest manager behavior tied to retention:**



71% of workers say they would be more likely to stay if their manager offered flexibility for personal needs.<sup>8</sup>



65% would stay longer if expectations were adjusted during challenging times.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup>Morning Consult

Hospitality leaders understand the importance of pairing flexibility with compassion. They practice it every day by being present, curious and human – taking time to understand what people are carrying with them both at work and at home. Done well, flexibility is what turns connection into commitment.

# Connect as a Community

You don't need to be a hotel to create your own "Heart of House." There are many ways to build community both literally and figuratively that will empower your team to create real-life, human connections and strengthen their overall bonds. Some ways to go about it include:



## **Create consistent touchpoints with your team:**

Establish and consistently hold moments where team members can share what's working and what's not. This could take the form of formal office hours, or more casual monthly or quarterly meals. Many hotels do "Coffee with the General Manager," simple bi-weekly coffee sessions with the top leader (and no other line managers), where teams can openly discuss career interests and goals. This approach creates a personalized channel for upward feedback, helping leaders better understand team member experiences, identify themes, and respond appropriately while reinforcing a sense of accessibility, trust, and recognition.



## **Develop a system for follow-through:**

Be clear in what you can or can't do and when you will take action. Then deliver on that promise and make sure it is communicated. Chintan Dadhich, general manager, Conrad New York Downtown and Tempo by Hilton New York Times Square, hosts quarterly breakfasts where he cooks for team members and connects with them. He also commits to providing answers to questions within 48 hours – and then follows through.



## **Plan ongoing moments where team members get to know one another personally:**

This could be as simple as everyone commenting on a fun, non-work-related topic at the beginning of routine meetings, allowing people to show their personalities and interests.



## **Look for patterns in your people:**

Thom Caska, complex general manager, Casa Marina Key West, Curio Collection by Hilton & The Reach Key West, Curio Collection by Hilton in Florida, looks for patterns in where people sit in his daily meetings. If he sees somebody sitting farther away or who is more reserved than normal, he'll ask his leadership team to check in. "People find stability in their jobs," Caska said, so offering safe, supportive spaces to have both good and bad days provides a sense of security.



## **Embrace the power of shared storytelling:**

Hotels often share monthly newsletters that highlight team member stories, achievements and moments that matter. This strengthens communication, increases visibility and reinforces a sense of shared identity across a large workforce.



📍 Hilton U.S. Headquarters

# 3

## From AI Anxiety to AI Agency

When people are given tools, training and permission to learn out loud, AI becomes a source of confidence, growth and momentum – not fear.

## The real risk of AI isn't the technology – it's leaving people without confidence, clarity or permission to learn.

As AI rapidly reshapes how work gets done, the biggest risk isn't the technology itself, it's how people feel navigating it. Across roles and industries, workers understand AI will change their jobs, and many are carrying uncertainty and anxiety into that transition. What many lack is a clear path forward.

### The data makes this tension clear.



More than half of workers (52%) say they feel anxious about AI's impact on their job.<sup>9</sup>

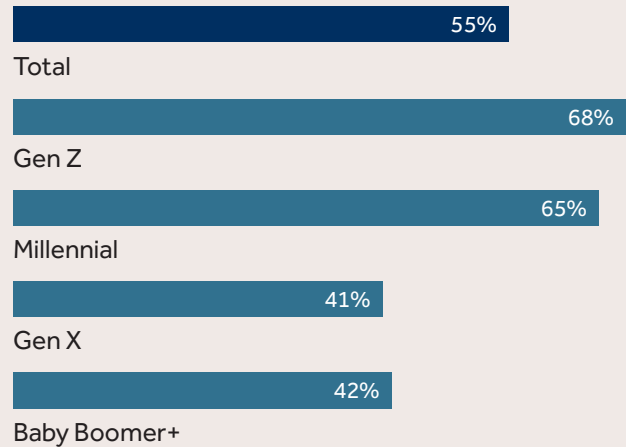


62% believe it will change how they work within the next three years.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup>Ipsos

Workers are actively looking to their employers for support, with 55% expecting their organization to provide AI skills, tools and subscriptions.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, 87% say on-the-job training is critical to their overall happiness at work.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10,11</sup>Ipsos



When that gap between anxiety and support goes unaddressed, it can quietly erode trust, confidence and psychological safety – even in strong cultures. When leaders take a human-centered approach to AI adoption, and shift from fear to fluency, technology becomes a catalyst for growth rather than a constraint.

## The Shift: Anxiety → Proficiency → Agency

This transition doesn't require everyone to become an AI expert. You don't have to be an AI agent to have agency. In reality, AI adoption – like any modern transformation – requires a hybrid approach, blending new tools with human judgement. **Success in AI transformation will be found by shifting from anxiety to curiosity, with humans not only in the loop, but firmly in the lead.**

Hospitality has been operating this way for more than a century. Hotels are said to be the “OG Hybrid Workplace” – blending frontline service with efficient tech-enabled operations. Hospitality leaders have learned how to bring people along through constant transformation and change. That same muscle matters now more than ever as workforces figure out how to approach AI. Some ways to go about that include:

### Build proficiency first

Provide access to tools, training and clear expectations for how AI should – and shouldn't – be used. Understanding reduces fear.

### Learn out loud

Normalize experimentation, exploration and shared learning, because when leaders model curiosity, it generates momentum at scale.

### Move from “brain fry” to “brain fuel”

As teams apply new behaviors in real work, capability compounds – and people begin to feel empowered rather than overwhelmed.

AI doesn't require organizations to become technology companies. It requires them to become better change leaders. The ability to adapt, recalibrate and keep people at the center is a strength any company can apply.



# Make AI Learning Intriguing, Not Frightening

AI adoption is a big task, one that's daunting when taking it on alone. Hotel leaders have long developed ways of helping teams manage through change and adapt to new tools throughout times of disruption. Those tried-and-true techniques to help non-technical teams adapt can be applied to the AI evolution as well.

Hotel leaders know how to break down complex processes into small, incremental and frequent steps, providing support and reminders along the way. Some techniques that can be applied to AI adaptation include:



## **Look for "bite-sized" ways of testing a new AI tool or feature together as a group:**

AI is a new world for everyone and no one is an expert yet. Learning – and sometimes failing without fear – provides a source of camaraderie and shows vulnerability as a leader.



## **Ask teams to find one AI element to teach during the briefing:**

This both helps the group learn together, and empowers an individual to show leadership and be viewed as an expert.



## **Create a learning forum:**

Designate an upcoming team meeting to a homegrown AI "hackathon." Ask teams to present their best AI workflow in three minutes or less, which can serve as an inspirational survey of how colleagues are working and provide learning moments together.



## **Recognize and celebrate experimentation:**

Challenge teams with goals of trying new workflows and consistently celebrate successes, both big and small.



## **Look for ongoing opportunities for emotional check-in points:**

Set aside a segment of an ongoing meeting series to check in on your AI learning journey to see how people are feeling. Are they enthusiastic? Frustrated? Inspired? Ask questions, and listen actively for both what's said and unsaid.

## **Complex General Manager Thom Caska recently had a great example of a new way to help team members engage with AI.**

The hotel was preparing to host an upcoming songwriter's festival, and a team member had a creative idea to replace traditional hotel uniforms with band T-shirts. They wanted to pitch the concept to the hotel's leadership team. In chatting with the team member, Caska suggested the team member leverage AI to support the idea. The team member received talking points he hadn't thought about before, and was more confident in making the pitch, which was ultimately successful. (Rock on!)



📍 Conrad Washington D.C.

# 4

## Chief Host Officer: The New Leadership Vibe

Presence, attention and genuine connection – not perks – are the forces that unlock performance and make people want to stay.

For years, organizations competed for talent with perks – free lunches, game rooms and surface-level amenities designed to generate buzz versus build connection. They were easy to offer, easy to replicate and often disconnected from how people actually experienced leadership day to day. Today’s workforce is looking for something beyond traditional perks: valued time and attention from managers. This presents workplace leaders with a new opportunity to build connections with their teams – one that can be found by entering “host mode,” where leaders, like good hosts, create an environment where others thrive.

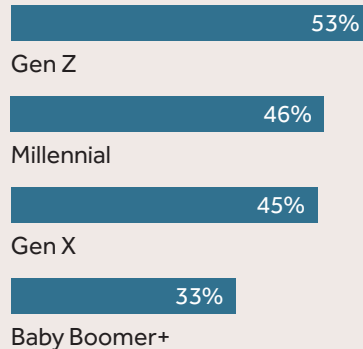
When workers are asked why they stay in their jobs, **job security may top the list (57%), but what follows are deeply human needs: feeling valued (50%), career growth (46%), flexibility (46%) and workplace relationships (~40%).**<sup>12</sup> These signals point to the same truth: People don’t just want perks. They want connection.

When people talk about what keeps them engaged and committed at work, they consistently point to feeling valued, supported and connected. **Ninety-two percent say having a good relationship with their manager is critical to their happiness.**<sup>13</sup> These aren’t soft signals – they’re drivers of retention and performance.

<sup>12</sup>Morning Consult

<sup>13</sup>Ipsos

When citing reasons to stay in a job (beyond salary), Gen Z is the only generation where **career growth ranks #1**, overtaking job stability.<sup>14</sup>



<sup>14</sup>Morning Consult

## How to Activate “Host Mode” as a Workplace Leader: See. Hear. Care.

This hunger for strong, empathetic leadership presents a major opportunity for workplace leaders today. Managers who take steps to create the kinds of environments and build the communities workers crave stand to differentiate their companies both now and into the future. The good news is most of these opportunities can be done for the investment of time, not dollars.

To be the kind of connected leader workers are seeking, invest in the new perks at work – showing workers they are seen, heard and cared for.



### I See You

Being visible matters. People want leaders who are present, attentive and engaged – not distant or distracted. Visibility isn’t about oversight; it’s about showing interest. When leaders take time to walk around, observe and notice what’s happening on their teams, people feel recognized and included.



### I Hear You

Listening isn’t optional – it’s a differentiator. Workers want the opportunity to speak openly about what’s working and what isn’t, and they want to know their input is valued. Leaders who ask questions, listen for patterns, and respond thoughtfully with a tight say-do ratio build trust faster than any program ever could.



### I Care About You

Find authentic ways to model care for teams. At the core of the hospitality business is this truth – when people feel cared for, they care for others. And it’s applicable to all.

**The new perks at work aren’t stocked in a breakroom – they’re practiced every day through seeing people, listening to them and showing genuine care.**

## Hospitality Hack

## Walk the Floor

Hotel leaders employ a practice called “walking the floor,” where they dedicate specific portions of their days being present on the floor to support teams, spot issues early and strengthen service in real time as a team player. It also enables an ongoing method of informal, in-the-moment mentorship.

Sometimes, it’s important to also bring the “floor” to you. Klaus Ziller, general manager, Hilton Sao Paulo Morumbi in Brazil, asks every single new team member to stop by his office on their first day for a get-to-know you conversation. He wants to personally meet everyone in the hotel, no matter their roles, learn a bit about their families and share the Hilton vision with them. This provides a consistent touchpoint for all and simultaneously starts a relationship along with a job.

The insight: When leaders spend time with teams on the floor, it shows they are all in it together. This builds trust, collaboration and enables a faster overall response to operational challenges.

**Managing Director Chris Mueller is a believer in the 80-20 rule, where 80% of managers’ time should be spent on the floor and the other 20% is office work.**

Twice a day, he also makes a point to ride the main hotel elevator, and tries to wait until it’s as full as possible to jump on. Why? “I can tell the pulse of my hotel by an elevator run,” Mueller said. He gets a feel for how his team is performing, how guests are feeling and the overall health of the hotel that day.

## The Art of Reading Human Cues

When people click as a team, work gets easier and results get better. That’s easy to say. As a manager, it’s much harder to do in reality.

The best-performing hotel teams have leaders with a high emotional quotient, who have learned how to read, assess and rapidly act on human cues. This is a skill that’s built into hospitality, where hotel workers are skilled in quickly assessing guest needs and solving problems in real time. That’s also a skill that serves managers well – and it can be learned, such as in the following ways:



### View investing time in people the same way you value investing money:

Even in times of budget constraints, there’s one resource we all have equally: time. As a leader, plan your investment of time with your team members the same way you would go about planning your budget – and actively listen. Look for ways to challenge them to think bigger.



### Don’t underestimate the power of the stop-and-chat:

Hotel general managers are constantly on the move, not only to check on the property, but also to assess how their people are doing. Connecting with teams requires both formal and informal touchpoints, and those quick stop-and-chats often provide incredible intelligence and pay long-ranging dividends.



### Look for opportunities to build trust:

Think of the best managers you’ve ever had, and trust is likely a key attribute that comes to mind. Actively seek ways to build trust one person at a time. “At its core, my role is to remove obstacles so my team can succeed,” said General Manager Misoon Kong. “When I can’t, I believe in being transparent – explaining the ‘why’ and moving forward together. Trust is built in those everyday moments of consistency.”



📍 Conrad Washington D.C.

# 5

# The Meaning Multiplier

When shared purpose reinforces a sense of belonging and individual autonomy, work becomes more fulfilling and performance follows.

Great work creates results – but it also creates something deeper. While people want to be productive in their jobs, they also want to know their work matters. Increasingly, workers are looking for a clear connection between what they do every day and the impact it has on others, on the organization and a connection to something bigger than themselves. Purpose is more than a “nice-to-have” – it’s a stabilizing force, especially in moments of pressure and change.

The data reflects this shift.



88% of workers say purpose influences their career decisions.<sup>15</sup>



85% of workers, when asked what influences their career decisions, said they’d prioritize opportunities that make a difference.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup>Ipsos

**But purpose alone isn’t power. It becomes transformative when people also feel trusted to act on it.**



## Anchoring in Purpose

Purpose gives work direction. It grounds people in why their role matters. A shared sense of “why” builds pride, steadies morale and helps people navigate demanding moments with resilience. That emotional ROI shows up in engagement, collaboration and sustained performance – especially in fast-paced environments.

**For Complex General Manager Thom Caska, he anchors in purpose by looking beyond what’s going wrong and instead focuses on expanding on what’s going right.**

He recently took on a new leadership role, moving from leading Hilton New York Times Square to two Hilton properties in Key West. In every job he’s gone into, he keeps a leadership philosophy in mind: It’s easy to walk into the ballroom and find the giant red wine stain on the floor. But what happens if instead, you go in and focus on the cleanest part of the carpet? What if you’re curious and want to inspect that, to discover how it’s so clean? Caska refers to it as “inspecting excellence.” By studying how something goes right, you can unlock how people ideate and solve problems.

## Building through Belonging

Purpose is rarely experienced alone. It’s reinforced through connection.



One-third of workers say building relationships defines a good day at work,<sup>16</sup> underscoring how much belonging shapes experience at work.

At the same time, growth remains essential with **83% saying advancement opportunities are critical to overall happiness.**<sup>17</sup> People want to feel connected and like they are moving forward together.

<sup>16,17</sup>Ipsos

Hospitality leaders understand this instinctively. Their natural tendency is to host – to welcome others, connect teams and create moments of recognition that make individuals feel seen and valued. Belonging gives purpose a place to live.

# Accelerating with Autonomy

Meaning multiplies when people are empowered to act. When people have clarity on what matters and the autonomy to move work forward, they feel a sense of momentum in their day.



In fact, for 52% of workers, a good day is defined by a sense of accomplishment, like what is achieved by checking off a to-do list.<sup>18</sup>

But progress alone isn't enough. **One-third say recognition from a manager defines a good day**,<sup>19</sup> underscoring that agency is reinforced when effort is noticed and valued. And when leaders listen and foster community, **workers are 77% more likely to stay in their place of employment**.<sup>20</sup> Ultimately, agency is about clarity, trust and reinforcement.

And that includes making sure your teams are empowered to make mistakes. They're going to happen. When they do, "Allow everyone to be human," said Katie Ward, general manager, Embassy Suites by Hilton Minneapolis Airport. "If we want to empower our team, that means allowing them to make mistakes, and then talking them through it and learning from it...if we make a mistake, let's look and see what we could have done a little bit better, and how do we do it better the next time?"

<sup>18,19,20</sup>psos

## Hospitality Hack

# Create Your Own Holiday

Humans all crave recognition, belonging and appreciation. Just as hotels create memorable moments for guests, creating an intentional moment for team members turns recognition into rituals that strengthen pride, reinforce culture and drive a sense of purpose at work.

One way to do that is to create your own workplace holiday. Hilton has a time-honored tradition called Team Member Appreciation Week. One week each year is set aside globally to celebrate team members both at hotels and in corporate office. Leaders bring it to life locally in different ways, including shared meals, moments of recognition and service celebrations, but it all focuses on showing appreciation for the purposeful work team members carry out every day.

Purpose can also be inspired through shared experiences. As part of onboarding at some hotels, each new team member is invited to spend a night to fully experience the guest journey firsthand. This immersive approach creates buy-in and allows them to understand the service they deliver from the guest's perspective. Hotel leaders have observed that this significantly increases early engagement, pride and a service mindset.

## At Hilton Orlando, Managing Director Chris Mueller has created a system called "GIMI" coins.

His leadership philosophy is anchored in four key tenets: Genuine, Innovation, Memorable, Inspirational. If his team accomplishes any or all of those things with each guest, the hotel will be successful. As team members collect coins, they may be occasionally recognized with small rewards, such as gift cards, as part of the hotel's recognition efforts. It's a simple, low-cost way to celebrate great service and strong teamwork and has become a valued part of the hotel's culture.

# How Leaders Can Put Purpose into Action

Workers are craving meaning on the job – they want to know their work makes a difference, to customers, to colleagues and to the success of the business. One way to drive that feeling is providing them with a sense of empowered autonomy. Some ways to do that include:



## Start with autonomy:

Inspiring leaders don't micromanage. They empower their teams to solve problems quickly and without seeking permission. This inspires trust and a sense of satisfaction.



## Employ the power of recognition early and often:

Use recognition to encourage more of the behavior. To help your team learn how to "find the yes," publicly communicate and celebrate examples when team members take control and solve a problem.



## Consistently communicate your shared purpose:

Work with your team to articulate your specific purpose, then communicate it often – in meetings, in one-on-ones and everywhere in-between. Use your purpose as a rallying cry, with frequent reminders of why you do what you do, and why it matters.



## Think small to go big:

For General Manager Misoon Kong, the biggest steps often arrive in the smallest packages. "Culture is built in small, consistent actions – not large initiatives. That includes being visible, engaging in real conversations and recognizing individuals in meaningful ways," Kong said. Simply put, "Small moments matter."



Beyond headlines about workplace challenges and the constantly shifting workplace environment, one truth endures: Workers are human. Across roles and career stages, they are looking for more than a paycheck – they want purpose, trust, autonomy, flexibility, recognition and the opportunity to grow.

Frontline environments prove this every day. In fast-moving, high-touch settings, leaders build culture through connection, reciprocal mentorship, consistent expectations and compassionate flexibility. They understand that soft skills are power skills, that as AI rises so must critical thinking and judgement and that training fuels both happiness and performance. They create workplaces where community becomes capital, where presence builds belonging and where human judgement remains the ultimate differentiator.

The lesson for leaders is clear: **Performance is powered by people.** Hotel general managers instinctively know how to tap into these wants and needs in a unique and in-the-moment way, offering valuable lessons that workplace leaders at any company can put into practice quickly and efficiently. Bringing hospitality into the workplace means leading with care, clarity and consistency – not as a gesture, but as a commitment. When done well, it doesn't just improve happiness at work; it drives lasting business success.

For more information, visit [stories.hilton.com/thehospitalitymindset](https://stories.hilton.com/thehospitalitymindset).



#### Methodology

The Workplace Culture Report combines (1) newly commissioned workforce research conducted with Ipsos and Morning Consult and (2) an internal Hilton study of high-performing hotel properties with top guest service scores. Hilton researchers conducted on-site assessments and interviews with hotel general managers and teams to identify cultural practices and leadership behaviors associated with exceptional performance.

#### Ipsos

These are the findings of a poll conducted by Ipsos on behalf of Hilton between October 31 – November 17, 2025. For this survey, a sample of 2,002 adults ages 18+ from the United States were interviewed online in English. To qualify for the survey, respondents have to be currently employed full-time or part-time, or have been employed in the past 24 months.

#### Morning Consult

These are the findings of a poll conducted by Morning Consult on behalf of Hilton. The survey was fielded March 23-25, 2026, among a national sample of 2,005 U.S. adults. The findings in this report focus on the 847 respondents who indicated they are currently employed.

