



Hotel Industry Movers & Shakers

Dave Waymire

General Manager • Hotel Fort Wayne, Fort Wayne, Indiana

“Leading in hospitality is about the people,” says Dave Waymire, General Manager of Hotel Fort Wayne in Indiana. “You can have the prettiest building or the best location on the planet. But at the end of the day, it’s your people that make the difference and you have to be doing everything you can to make them successful,” he adds.

A transient early career

While some stumble into hospitality after years of working in different fields, Dave has only ever worked in hotels. “I started at the age of 17, as the night clerk at the officer’s club in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where my dad was stationed in the 1970s,” he says.

From there Dave moved up through various hotel positions, including accounting, until 1981, when he became a GM at the age of 24 for a Holiday Inn in the American midwest. Soon after, he chose a more transient life, becoming the Area Manager for 15 different hotel properties, including Holiday Inns, Hiltons, independent hotels, and resorts all over the United States.

“Leading in hospitality is about the people”

But, during his time in Indiana, Dave developed a sense of home in the Fort Wayne area. Wanting to finally put down roots, he accepted an opportunity as the GM of the Hotel Fort Wayne at the end of 2014.

A hotel in transition

Dave arrived at the Hotel Fort Wayne, the largest property in the area, to a hotel in transition. “The management company had been let go, so I became the management company,” he says.

A clear immediate priority was the need to evaluate and adjust existing staff procedures. “We were doing a lot of extraneous things like

analyzing reports that nobody was really using in their day-to-day activities. I did a lot of work in the beginning to optimize my staff resources and re-focus the culture on taking care of guests,” Dave remembers.

As part of this effort, Dave realized he needed a better guest feedback analytics system. “The hotel was still using paper surveys when I started. We had no easy way to get specific action items based on what guests were saying about us,” he says. “This was a critical miss. You have to know what you’re doing right and what you’re doing wrong,” he adds.



“You’ve got to keep optimizing your resources”

Dave had previously discovered that a digital survey that integrated its analytics with online feedback and included a review collection feature was an essential part of a hotel’s technology stack. In his past experience as an area manager, hotels using Revinate Surveys™ were not only able to get specific action items from a holistic view of their solicited and online guest feedback, but they also moved up significantly on the TripAdvisor popularity index after enabling the review collection feature. “For example, I had a Hilton Garden Inn that moved up from #47 to #2 of 199 hotels in the area,” Dave says.

But, getting the analytics on feedback and the increase in online reviews with digital surveys

wasn’t the only piece of the puzzle. Dave was also committed to getting his staff involved in the process. “I started by encouraging employees to verbally ask guests to post on TripAdvisor. I also added an employee incentive program for staff members who were mentioned in online reviews,” he says. Working together, the hotel’s efforts paid off. Hotel Fort Wayne moved from #22 to #12 on TripAdvisor in less than 6 months.

Hospitality of the future

Moving forward, Dave says that automation and technology will be the key to success. “You’ve got to keep optimizing your resources, and the best way to do that will be to automate what you can, so you can focus your staff on the human touches that make the most impact. Guests are already highly dependent on the little computers in their hands, and they want information instantly. A lot of companies are testing check-in kiosks and mobile room keys - those things aren’t cheap. We have to identify where the

right investments are for the technology that will move the needle,” he opines. “Hotels have to keep up to stay competitive. You don’t want to be the guest’s last choice,” he adds.

While these things are still somewhat unknown, Dave has some advice for other hoteliers looking to keep their hotels moving at the pace their guests expect:

- 1. Stay current with today’s trends,** and make sure your staff does too. Hoteliers need to take a holistic approach to the management and practice of hospitality to accommodate the needs of the staff as well as the changing needs of guests. A well-served staff is better equipped to provide an excellent guest experience.
- 2. Keep a pulse on the competition.** New hotels are being built every day, making it even more difficult to rise to the top in an already competitive market.
- 3. Don’t count on brand loyalty.** Millennials aren’t especially brand loyal - they’re looking for experiences. Think about the kind of experiences you can offer at your hotel and in your geographical area that will set you apart.
- 4. Hotel 101 - it’s not going away.** At the end of the day, everyone expects clean rooms and good value. That will always be important.

Revinate Heroes is a series of articles profiling successful hoteliers who are moving the hospitality industry into the future.