



In 2010, the IAHI and IHG are inaugurating a new initiative, Celebrate Service, to symbolize the care and concern IHG and its owners have for their workforce overall, and to let their employees know that they are valued as individuals for their contributions. It is also a way to stand out among companies that have cut back on their commitment to their people.

Initially conceived by IAHI Chairman Mark Carrier and fellow owners such as Louis Woodcock of the UK, the concept was brought to the attention of IHG's leaders, who enthusiastically gave support and resources. The IAHI has worked closely with a team from IHG, led by Tracy Robbins, Executive Vice President of Global Human Relations, and Lynne Zappone, Senior Vice President, Global Learning and Americas Human Resources on the initiative.

"Being recognised for doing great work is motivating for all of us, and a genuine 'thank you' costs nothing," says Robbins. "We're going through tough times. Retaining the best people is crucial to making the most of the upturn when it arrives. Making sure the people who work in our hotels and offices feel valued helps motivate them to do their best work — and that has a positive effect on the guest experience."

Since late 2009, the Celebrate Service initiative has gathered momentum. A key element has been the formation of an IAHI/IHG working group of professionals from around the world to develop and implement Celebrate Service. The IAHI named Bill Otto of Marcus Hotels and Resorts to take the lead from the IAHI perspective.

"This is a symbolic step in a direction we're taking with IHG to be more engaged on the people side of the business," says Carrier. "We can't get to that highest level of performance without a long-term strategy of building a stronger service culture; that's a big goal, and this is an important step on that journey."

IHG CEO Andy Cosslett agrees. "Every day around the world, 350,000 people deliver fantastic experiences to our guests, helping us make Great Hotels Guests Love a reality. At all hours of the day and night, through good and tough times, they keep our guests happy and keep them coming back," he says. "Celebrate Service week is the first celebration of its kind in the industry and is our unique way of showing people how much we value them. We're proud to be working closely with the IAHI and our owners around the world to spend a week celebrating and thanking everyone who works in our hotels and offices for their outstanding efforts."

IAHI and IHG celebrate their workforce to show their employees how much they care.

Based upon a week-long series of system wide and property level events to celebrate the contributions of hotel level personnel, during the week of July 26, Celebrate Service will call to attention the work that team members do through their many acts of service, hospitality and graciousness. With more than 350,000 people engaged throughout the world in IHG affiliated hotels and corporate offices, this will be the industry's largest celebration of workers and their professionalism, and it will build in subsequent years to be a significant touchstone in the culture of the IHG/IAHI enterprise. In addition to honoring hotel staff, IHG is acknowledging the corporate staff as well, because if they're not serving a guest, they're serving someone who is.

Why Celebrate Service?

The week of celebration and recognition will be one step to build a sense of unity and purpose throughout the system in alignment with the tenets of IHG's Winning Ways and the mission of the IAHI through:

- Positive reinforcement of guest service and quality objectives;
- Creating unity and commitment to the IHG system;
- Boosting morale and positive sense of accomplishment in difficult economic times;
- Positively influencing the pride of workers and their sense of accomplishment and engagement in their hotels and the IHG system; and
- Developing goodwill amongst the workforce.



Show we care

There are multiple foundations to this initiative that spin off from these basic goals of the Celebrate Service initiative. The core philosophy is based on the idea that the success of any brand and hotel company is built on the quality of service and product delivery at the unit level. Front line team members, both management and hourly, produce the brand experience and largely determine the reputation and value of the enterprise on a long-term basis. Therefore, honest and caring recognition of team members is highly valuable and an important element in building commitment to the company, its hotels and its values. This results in better execution at the unit level and higher levels of engagement. Finally, alignment of the franchised and managed workforce is critical to system wide consistency and customer guest loyalty. Inconsistency in delivery of the brand experience undermines the value of the entire system.

An Owner's Take on Celebrating Service

In our business employees are key to our success, and over the past 12 months the teams have worked exceptionally hard to ensure our businesses are successful, with us just adding more and more pressure on them every day. As an owner I am committed to support Celebrate Service week because I can and will, personally, say thank you to our employees and show my appreciation and encourage our hotels to put some fun back into everyone's working life, something that has not been a huge focus for a few months. As an 'owner' I fully intend to be involved, I have already committed to make Celebrate Service come alive across our hotels in July. We are hosting family BBQs in every unit and have some fun activities planned already including a 'fastest omelette making challenge'. I have realised that the activities can be fun, easy to organise, economical and I am sure that our guests will pick up on the good feeling and the increased levels of motivation. I see it as a good time to remind all our management team how important our employees are and without them we don't have a great deal.

— Louis Woodcock, IAHI Owner, UK

Program Details

The full details of the program are being rapidly finalized through the working group. These details will be communicated in the coming weeks through a variety of methods. The overall intention, according to Carrier, is to develop a perennial, self-fulfilling program at the property level where owners and GMs are encouraged to thank employees. In June, a dedicated Web site will launch on Merlin, which will provide you with all the tools and ideas your hotel will need to celebrate. Planned are no-cost, low-cost and "wow" options, as well as a way to collaborate with fellow owners and General Managers on ideas to thank your employees. The team is also planning a place on the site to share stories of outstanding service at your hotel. On Wednesday, July 28, Celebrate Service will include "The World's Biggest Thank You," where owners are encouraged to visit their hotels personally and thank team members.

"This is a voluntary program, so we aren't prescribing anything specifically, but we want to generate on-property excitement," says Carrier. "Celebrate Service is going to be a long-running tradition that will help us enhance our service culture."

Making that imprint on the industry starts with doing it right on the initial run, which is why IAHI is strongly encouraging all our owners to participate — to show how much the IHG system as whole cares about its workforce.

How Can Owners Do Their Part?

As individuals, owners can get involved not only by participating, but also by being engaged in spreading the word — sitting down with their GMs, developing a plan of action, and setting aside time to spend and celebrate at their properties that week.

"Our people have experienced tough times; they need to know we support and care for them."

— Louis Woodcock

"Participating in the 'Biggest Thank You' lets your staff know how much their hard work means to your guests and to you," says Carrier. "Really, it's the owners' job to turn their hotels loose, so to speak, and have them participate, and to take a personal interest and role in doing that; in other words, be a catalyst and make sure your hotels follow through."

Another point, Carrier adds, is that provided the rough couple years for everyone in the hotel industry — from company CEOs to part-time housekeepers — giving thanks for hard work is simple, but extremely important. However, beyond that, this is not something that can stop once the bottom lines turn black again.

Carrier emphasizes that "this is something that will undoubtedly be part of the IHG culture going forward."

Feedback So Far

In terms of initial feedback, the fact that Andy Cosslett and the IHG team immediately agreed signaled the fact that this initiative not only was something that would further the service culture within the system at the property level, but also IAHI and IHG can hang their collective hats on this as they work together toward a more productive relationship.

Within the IAHI community itself, the concept has received unanimous support of the IAHI Board of Directors, as well as from individual Committee members and Ambassadors across the board. With that, the nearly 300 franchisees that have been exposed to the idea have provided unanimous encouragement and support of both the concept and execution, which is a ringing endorsement, to say the least.

The ultimate success of this program will come down to the full participation of IHG owners and managers across the system. However, the best reward will be on an individual level, when each person who is recognized understands their value in everyday service. ■

For more information as it develops, keep posted to iahi.org and Merlin.