

Where Have All The Mentors Gone?

David M. Brudney, ISHC, February 2000

**Experience is a hard teacher
because she gives the test first,
the lessons afterwards.**

Vernon Sanders Law

The young hotel sales director leaned back in his chair, let go with a huge exhale, and said to me, “this is great, really great. I had forgotten how long it’s been since I had a mentor.”

I had just finished going over in some detail the key action steps I would be recommending as part of my written sales audit for the owners and operators of his suburban, full-service, chain-affiliated hotel.

My role as an independent hospitality marketing consultant enables me to go inside U.S. hotels, resorts and conference centers, evaluating the Sales and Catering Departments and, whenever warranted, making specific recommendations to enhance performance.

What I find all too often is sales directors and senior sales managers whose careers were fast forwarded because of demand and supply, a result of too many new hotels and too few qualified sales and marketing directors and managers. I read the need for mentoring all over their faces.

“I’m expected to know all of this”

I thanked the DOS&M for the mentor compliment but later I thought more about what he hadn’t said. He could have spoken

for so many of his peers and said “David, there’s nobody here to mentor me - - not my general manager, not at this hotel, there’s no one in the region and there’s no one in corporate. I don’t have anyone I can turn to and ask about some of the things I never got to learn. I’m expected to know all of this. There’s still so much I have to learn about this job, about selling, about technique, relationship building, about strategy.”

I was more fortunate. When I broke into the business in the mid-‘60s, mentors seemed to be everywhere. I had legendary Dick Flynn in Chicago, Bob Kielt in New York and Peter Goldman in San Francisco - - all competitors, every one. If you wanted to learn back then, mentors wanted to share what they knew.

My very first employer mentors were Westin’s Bruce McKibbin and David R. Evans. McKibbin had the patience of Job. He allowed me to make all the mistakes a rookie could make. Evans took the time to teach me so many basic things I needed to know. What a relief it was working for bosses who knew I didn’t know everything!.

“too much monitoring, too little mentoring”

Mentors are still “out there.” Some, like myself, are consulting. Some have retired and would love a chance to be useful. And many more are sprinkled throughout corporate and regional offices. Unfortunately, they are far too consumed with tasks management deems more critical, i.e., penetration scores, budgets, forecasting, endless meetings and still more reports. Frankly, there’s too much monitoring and too little mentoring.

I suspect that all of the recent mergers, acquisitions and key player movements may have created an environment that is not conducive to good mentoring.

No country in the world can match the skills U.S. hotel sales professionals have developed over 50 years in filling empty rooms and optimizing revenues. Whatever the cause, a great tradition of sales and marketing expertise is not being passed on.

Training is important. U.S. corporations spend nearly \$50B annually. Yet so much of the training I see is devoted to

improving technology skills. Training must be complemented by solid mentoring programs.

If Marriott, Hyatt or Starwood have developed good mentoring programs that are working today, please enlighten me. But based upon my reviews of hundreds of properties this past decade, I don't see it working - - anywhere, at any level.

Maybe HSMAI or AH&MA needs to set up a web site chat room or a hot line for young sales and marketing professionals so they can rap with a Dick Flynn or Peter Goldman "clone." How does 1-800-MENTORS sound?

Where have all the mentors gone? They're still around. Those in corporate offices need to step forward. Those retired need inviting back.

David M. Brudney, ISHC is a veteran sales and marketing professional concluding his fourth decade of service to the hospitality industry. He is the principal of David Brudney & Associates of Rancho Palos Verdes, CA, a marketing consulting firm specializing in the hospitality industry since 1979 and a charter member of International Society of Hospitality Consultants. Previously, Brudney held sales and marketing positions with Hyatt, Westin and Marriott.

Contact:

David M. Brudney, ISHC, Principal
David Brudney & Associates
Carlsbad, CA 92009
760-476-0830 Fax 760-476-0860
EMail: David@DavidBrudney.com
Web Site: www.DavidBrudney.com

Return to David Brudney & Associates [Special Reports and Articles](#)

Return to Hotel.Online [Ideas and Trends](#)

[Search Hotel Online](#)