

AHEAD OF THE CLASS

Continuing education can propel your career forward

By Dana M. Wong, the International School of Hospitality

Are you ready to move to the next level in your organization? Do you know why you were not considered for that last promotion? Do you truly understand what the power of networking is all about? Perhaps it is time to do a reality check to determine what may be holding you back from advancing your career.

There are several ways to advance or change your career focus here in Las Vegas. One proven way is through continuing education. The options for this route include matriculating in a traditional academic institution or enrolling in a professionally oriented school providing shorter certificate programs (from four weeks to two years) with more convenient hours for current employees who must balance work, school and family responsibilities. The latter, a nontraditional option, may provide a hands-on classroom learning

environment inclusive of internships, networking opportunities, exposure to real-world professionals and their work, as well as other experiential scenarios.

The term networking is used to describe informal personal interactions and communications involving industry incumbents and students for the purpose of establishing mutual acquaintances that may ultimately result in an interview or job offer. This is especially valuable since, in reality, no school can guarantee a student job placement in the industry, because the final decision to hire any applicant is left to the employer—not the school.

However, the school has a responsibility to students as well as the industry. It must prepare the student for specific industry work, and assist them in the job search and application process. From an industry perspective the school should conduct on-going needs assessments while utilizing job analysis, job descriptions, and industry professionals to provide instructions relative to what the job responsibilities and tasks are.

Las Vegas is the recognized capital of the hospitality industry—the major purveyor to the world for gaming, entertainment and convention services. It is also home to more than sixteen of the world's largest and finest hotels, with many more on the way.

Because of this, Las Vegas is a magnet for leading professionals in this industry. Therefore the most successful schools and programs are those that do the best job in marketing their instructional and training programs to bridge the gap between academic learning and industry work.

This is accomplished by emphasizing applicable industry knowledge, skills and task oriented hands-on experience as much as possible. Such programs give students access to recognized leaders in the industry who actually manage services and direct employees to accomplish the mission of their respective organizations. Collaborative partnerships and/or arrangements between schools and hospitality industry organizations with mutual interest in the overall growth and quality offerings are imperative for successful program content.

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