



A Place to Start, A Place to Grow

The Modern Hotel Job Is a Launchpad for Career Growth, Powering
Local Communities



NATIONAL HOTEL EMPLOYEE DAY

SEPTEMBER 1, 2026 — RELEASE

Executive Summary

Across the United States, hotel jobs are a launchpad to long-term careers. The hotel industry directly employs approximately 2.2 million people¹ across more than 200 distinct career pathways² — offering accessible entry points, real mobility, and opportunities that require no college degree.

Hotel careers can take many forms — from guest services, food and beverage, housekeeping, sales, operations, technology, human resources, management, and more. And from those positions, roughly 80 percent of entry-level hotel employees become eligible for promotion within their first year.² Indeed, more than half of hotel general managers started in entry-level positions.² Employees can build expertise in a single discipline, move across departments or properties, and take on increasingly complex management and specialized roles over time.

The experience of hotel professionals across the American Hotel & Lodging Association (AHLA) network reinforces that story. Most began in entry-level positions and now serve in leading roles at their hotel or across a network of hotels. According to a new AHLA survey, an overwhelming majority of hotel professionals agree that an employee can advance and build a long-term career in the industry, with three in four respondents reporting advancement into a management role within five years of their first hotel job.

Hotel careers also power local economies. Every hotel job supports approximately 4.25 jobs¹ across the U.S. economy — 3.25 additional jobs beyond the position itself — supporting the small businesses, restaurants, retailers, transportation providers, attractions, and public services that communities depend on. Each hotel job is also associated with about \$365,000 in annual guest spending and roughly \$39,000 in annual tax revenue, including nearly \$25,000 in state and local revenue.¹

A hotel career also builds durable skills — communication, problem-solving, adaptability, teamwork, and service under pressure — that employees carry throughout their working lives. The industry helps turn that potential into advancement through investments in training, certifications, scholarships, apprenticeships, leadership development, and clear career pathways, like those provided by the AHLA Foundation. Hotels offer more than a first job: they offer a place to build skills, move up, lead, and propel a career with lasting impact.

4.25 jobs across the U.S. economy are supported by every hotel job.

What Hotel Employees Are Saying

To mark National Hotel Employee Day, AHLA asked hotel professionals across its network to reflect on their careers — how they got started, how they advanced, and why they have stayed. Their answers point to a consistent, hopeful story about opportunity in the hotel industry.

Accessible starts, many paths

Most began on the front lines — in guest services, food and beverage, or housekeeping — and entered simply by applying for an entry-level or hourly role. From there, their careers rarely stood still. Hotel employees describe moving across departments and properties, taking on new responsibilities, and building expertise in specialties they discovered along the way. The through-line is opportunity: in hotels, a first job opens doors in many directions.

Advancement, and often quickly

Career advancement can come quickly in the hotel industry. Among the hotel professionals AHLA surveyed, nearly all reported at least one promotion since beginning their careers, and more than half had earned five or more. Many moved into management within a few years of their first hotel job — for a large share, within about five. As one long-tenured leader put it, “There is opportunity for all who seek it.”

3 in 4

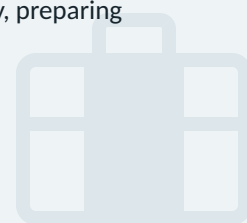


hotel employees moved into a management role within five years of their first hotel job.

Skills that travel

Hotel work builds a broad set of transferable skills that hold value far beyond any one property, preparing employees for the broader workforce wherever their careers lead:

- Adapting to changing situations
- Customer service and guest relations
- Problem-solving, de-escalation, and thinking quickly under pressure
- Multitasking and cross-department coordination
- Clear communication



Why people stay

Asked why they have built their careers in hotels, hotel employees point overwhelmingly to people and purpose: the guests they serve, the colleagues they work alongside, and the meaning they find in creating memorable and special experiences. Growth matters too — the chance to keep learning and advancing. Again and again, they describe hospitality not as a job they fell into, but as a career they choose to stay in.

Community and Workforce Ripple Effect

Hotels do more than employ people — they anchor the local economies around them. Nationwide, hotels are main-street businesses that directly employ about 2.2 million people and support more than 9.1 million jobs across the economy. Each hotel job supports approximately 4.25 jobs, is associated with about \$365,000 in annual guest spending, and generates roughly \$39,000 per year in total taxes, including nearly \$25,000 in state and local revenue.¹ Hotel wages have also outpaced the broader economy, rising 35.4 percent since February 2020, compared with a 31.9 percent national average.³

2.2M people directly employed by U.S. hotels	9.1M+ jobs supported across the economy	35.4% hotel wage growth since February 2020
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That impact is concentrated in the markets where hotels have the largest presence. Across these cities, hotels sustain tens of thousands of jobs and substantial local spending and tax revenue for every hotel position.

MARKET	DIRECT HOTEL JOBS	TOTAL JOBS SUPPORTED	JOBS SUPPORTED PER HOTEL JOB	GUEST SPENDING PER JOB	TOTAL TAXES PER JOB
United States	2,159,795	9,172,346	4.25	\$364,155	\$38,648
Denver	8,879	33,809	3.81	\$481,834	\$51,211
Los Angeles	15,609	63,795	4.09	\$459,466	\$49,010
New Orleans	9,524	51,322	5.39	\$563,660	\$50,199
New York City	61,727	263,487	4.27	\$622,185	\$80,074
Philadelphia	8,608	34,057	3.96	\$429,833	\$104,171
Phoenix	9,776	42,237	4.32	\$423,199	\$37,469
San Francisco	16,220	48,497	2.99	\$508,514	\$53,459

JOBS SUPPORTED PER HOTEL JOB

Each bar shows the total jobs across the economy sustained by one direct hotel job.



Per-job figures reflect the annual economic activity associated with each direct hotel job; total taxes combine federal, state, and local.

Philadelphia's per-job guest spending and taxes are derived from the city report's reported totals (\$3.7 billion in guest spending; \$897 million in taxes) and its 8,608 direct hotel jobs. Sources: Oxford Economics, AHLA Economic Impact of the U.S. Hotel Industry — national and city reports (2025–2026).

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Investing in Current and Future Talent

Opportunity in the hotel industry is cultivated, not left to chance. For more than 70 years, the AHLA Foundation — the philanthropic arm of the American Hotel & Lodging Association — has worked to advance the industry's people: developing and supporting today's employees, attracting tomorrow's, and strengthening hospitality's reputation as a place of access, opportunity, and rewarding careers for all. Its work centers on three goals — recruit, retain, and advance — and reaches people at every stage of a career and from every background.

RECRUIT

RETAIN

ADVANCE

The AHLA Foundation invests in workforce growth and mobility. Registered apprenticeships developed with the U.S. Department of Labor pair on-the-job learning with classroom education in in-demand roles, and industry-recognized certifications help employees build skills and open doors to advancement. Through the FORWARD movement, the AHLA Foundation develops the next generation of leaders and works to ensure the industry’s leadership reflects the depth of its talent — its 2026 FORWARD gathering drew more than 1,000 participants.

To welcome the next generation, the AHLA Foundation connects students to the industry through academic and travel scholarships, mentorship, and partnerships with dozens of affiliated schools, high schools, and HBCUs. And it works to open doors to hospitality careers for people from all walks of life and lived experiences — because the industry’s promise of opportunity is strongest when it reaches everyone.

70+

YEARS

the AHLA Foundation has invested in hospitality’s people — recruiting, retaining, and advancing the industry’s workforce since 1953.

1953

TODAY

Employee Profiles

The profiles below offer individual perspectives on the career paths described throughout this paper — careers that began in frontline roles and grew, over time, into leadership.



Tiffany Poole
Director of Catering and Events, Arizona Biltmore (LXR Hotels & Resorts)
PHOENIX, ARIZONA

CAREER PATH:
Pool attendant (2002) → fun coordinator → PBX operator → front desk agent → administrative assistant → pre-arrival coordinator → senior events manager → assistant director of events → Director of Catering and Events (2022).

Tiffany Poole’s hospitality career began in 2002 with a summer job her mother helped her land at a local resort. She never left. Over 24 years she worked in nearly every corner of the operation — from the pool deck and front desk to reservations and events — and each role deepened her understanding of how a resort works.

That range of experience led her to discover her passion: catering and events. After two decades at her first resort, she made the decision to leave and pursue a new opportunity, and in 2022 she joined the Arizona Biltmore, which she now brings to life through celebrations and events.

“It was supposed to be a summer job, and I never left,” Poole said. “I quickly discovered how many opportunities the industry offers and took every chance to experience different roles and departments.”

“Never be discouraged by starting in an entry-level position. Do the job you were hired to do, and do it exceptionally well,” she said. “Learn the business beyond your role, seek out new experiences, and embrace every opportunity. You never know which one may shape the course of your career.”

Her career illustrates how experience across departments can help employees discover a specialty and grow into leadership.

CAREER SNAPSHOT	
Started: Pool attendant, 2002	Today: Director of Catering and Events (since 2022)
Experience: 24 years across guest services, reservations, and events	Leads: Catering and events at the Arizona Biltmore



Kenan Tekin

General Manager, Sandbourne Santa Monica (Crescent Hotels & Resorts)

SANTA MONICA, CALIFORNIA

CAREER PATH:

Breakfast attendant (2005) → front office supervisor → front office manager → assistant general manager → task-force general manager → general manager → VP of operations → VP of hotel openings.

Kenan Tekin started at the entry level, as a breakfast attendant working to pay for school. What began as a way to support his education became a career spanning more than 20 years across luxury, lifestyle, full-service, and limited-service hotels for many major hotel brands and independent operators.

As his career progressed, Tekin took on increasingly complex assignments — hotel openings, rebrandings, operational turnarounds, and major property transitions. He has managed settings ranging from boutique lifestyle hotels to convention properties with more than 800 rooms, gaining experience in both the day-to-day demands of operations and the longer-term work of improving and transitioning properties. He is particularly focused on mentoring emerging professionals and helping them translate operational experience into leadership.

“What began as a way to support my education quickly became a passion,” Tekin said. He describes hospitality as “ultimately about creating memorable experiences and building meaningful relationships,” and offers a simple message to newcomers: “Stay focused, embrace every opportunity to learn, and never allow setbacks or negativity to define your future.”

His path shows how an entry-level role can become a foundation for broad operational experience and large-property leadership.

CAREER SNAPSHOT

Started: Breakfast attendant

Today: General manager

Experience: Openings, rebrandings, and turnarounds

Properties: Boutique hotels through convention properties with more than 800 rooms



Omar Bouchaar

General Manager, Wyndham Garden Brooklyn Sunset Park

BROOKLYN, NEW YORK

CAREER PATH:

Housekeeping manager (2000) → assistant director of housekeeping → executive housekeeper / project manager → director of rooms → task-force interim GM / operations analyst → assistant general manager → general manager and hospitality executive consultant.

Originally from Constantine, Algeria, Omar Bouchaar has spent more than 26 years in New York City hospitality, advancing from the housekeeping and rooms ranks to become a general manager.

Bouchaar describes his career as an evolution from core hotel operations into openings, turnarounds, and crisis leadership. Over a 15-year period, he says, he helped brand and open eight hotels in New York and other markets — assignments that involved building teams, establishing operating systems, and guiding properties through major transitions. During the COVID-19 pandemic, he says, he kept his property open and made offline guest rooms available as temporary housing for frontline employees affected by transit shutdowns, pointing to the experience as leadership that considered both business continuity and employee needs.

“My favorite part of my job is no longer just hitting revenue goals but guiding entry-level team members along the same path of professional growth that I took,” Bouchaar said. He describes hospitality as an industry where “hard work, accountability, and a passion for people” create opportunities to grow.

His career demonstrates how operational experience can develop into leadership through periods of growth, transition, and crisis.

CAREER SNAPSHOT

Started: Housekeeping manager, 2000	Today: General manager
Focus: Openings, turnarounds, and crisis leadership	Languages: English, French, and Arabic



Daniel Benton

General Manager, Renaissance Denver Downtown City Center Hotel
(Stonebridge Companies)

DENVER, COLORADO

CAREER PATH:

Assistant banquet manager → director of banquets → food & beverage director → general manager

Daniel Benton's hotel career began on the operational side of the business — in food and beverage and banquet operations, including banquet leadership at the Grand Hyatt Denver. Those roles taught him the unique blend of service, business, teamwork, and problem-solving that defines a hotel, and revealed how many different career paths exist under one roof.

Over more than 25 years he progressed through banquet and food-and-beverage leadership before earning his first general manager role at Winter Park Mountain Lodge — the moment everything he had learned in individual departments came together across an entire hotel. From there he led increasingly complex full-service hotels for many major hotel brands, and today runs the Renaissance Denver Downtown City Center.

"The positions people hold early in their careers are not destinations — they are opportunities to build skills," Benton said. "A job in banquets, housekeeping, the front desk, engineering, food and beverage, or sales can be the beginning of a much larger career." What has kept him in the industry, he adds, is watching associates "grow from simply performing a job into understanding the business, developing confidence, taking ownership, and eventually becoming a leader."

Benton's path shows how frontline operational roles can build the foundation for full-service hotel leadership.

CAREER SNAPSHOT

Started: Food and beverage / banquets

Today: General manager

Experience: 25-plus years



Burnell Goldman

Area General Manager, Modus Hotels by PM Hotel Group; General Manager, The Windsor Suites

PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

CAREER PATH:

Bellman (1992) → food & beverage leadership → manager on duty → director of rooms → assistant general manager → general manager → area general manager

Burnell Goldman had wondered about a career in hospitality since he was a child. Drawn to it partly because he saw few leaders who looked like him, he set out to one day run a hotel. He took his first hotel job as a bellman at the Statler Hotel while a student at Cornell University — an education, he says, that went well beyond the classroom in how a hotel's departments work together.

Over nearly 34 years he built the well-rounded foundation he had been advised to seek — deep experience in food and beverage, then rooms — before earning his first general manager role. He spent 17 years at Omni Hotels & Resorts across five roles in multiple cities, and today serves as an Area General Manager with Modus Hotels by PM Hotel Group. His definition of a milestone has evolved: today, the ones he values most are seeing the people he has coached earn opportunities of their own.

“Take ownership of your career, but never forget that nothing gets accomplished without the team around you,” Goldman said. He urges newcomers to “become a servant leader,” adding that hospitality “is about more than making money — it is about creating memorable experiences, improving lives, and providing opportunities for others.”

Goldman's career shows how an entry-level start — and a commitment to developing others — can lead to decades of leadership.

CAREER SNAPSHOT

Started: Bellman, 1992

Today: Area General Manager

Experience: Nearly 34 years, food & beverage and rooms

Milestone: 17 years and five roles at Omni Hotels & Resorts



Elizabeth Vargas

Director of Human Resources, Omni San Francisco

SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

CAREER PATH:

Front desk manager (2014) → guest services associate > front office manager > director of rooms > reservations revenue manager > recruiter > assistant director of people and culture → director of human resources.

Elizabeth Vargas's hospitality career began with a chance conversation at a Starbucks in 2014, when someone she had just met asked whether she would be interested in an opportunity at the San Francisco Marriott Marquis. She took the chance — and found an industry she quickly grew to love.

She started at the front desk, where the simple joy of upgrading a guest or giving a family a larger room “became my addiction,” and that passion for making people feel valued eventually led her into human resources. Guided by early advice to “give it a year” and to keep saying yes to new roles, she moved from operations into HR, and today serves as Director of Human Resources at Omni San Francisco — connecting associate well-being to the guest experience.

“I started in hospitality because someone believed in me,” Vargas said. Her advice to newcomers echoes the counsel that shaped her own path: “Give it a year. There is almost nothing you can’t dedicate yourself to for one year. Hospitality can open so many doors, but you have to be willing to give yourself a chance to discover where you fit.”

Vargas's path shows how a single opportunity — and a willingness to say yes — can grow into a career built around developing other people.

CAREER SNAPSHOT

Started: Front desk agent, 2014	Today: Director of Human Resources
Path: Operations to human resources	Focus: Associate engagement, culture, and career growth



Cierra Minor

Assistant General Manager, Hilton Garden Inn New Orleans Convention Center
(Aimbridge Hospitality)

NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA

CAREER PATH:

Hired at a job fair, Holiday Inn Westbank → hotel operations and leadership roles → Assistant General Manager, Hilton Garden Inn New Orleans Convention Center.

A New Orleans native, Cierra Minor returned home after Hurricane Katrina and found her path at a job fair hosted by the Holiday Inn Westbank, where she was offered an opportunity on the spot. She embraced it — and has since built a 19-year hospitality career serving others.

Over nearly two decades she explored other professions more than once, but each time hospitality drew her back. Mentors shaped her leadership along the way, and today she serves as Assistant General Manager at the Hilton Garden Inn New Orleans Convention Center, focused on the relationships and growth that first made the industry feel like home.

“Success is not defined solely by the position you hold, but by the relationships you build, the experiences you create, and the positive impact you have on others,” Minor said. Her advice to anyone considering the industry: “Stay curious, embrace every opportunity to learn, and never lose sight of your goals.”

Minor’s story shows how the hotel industry can offer both stability and a lasting sense of belonging — through every kind of life experience.

CAREER SNAPSHOT

Started: Holiday Inn Westbank (hired at a job fair)	Today: Assistant General Manager
Experience: 19 years	Company: Aimbridge Hospitality

Conclusion

Across these stories, a consistent picture emerges. Hotel careers offer accessible entry points, varied paths for growth, and skills that hold value across a lifetime of work — and their benefits extend beyond employees to the communities that hotels help support. Through the AHLA Foundation, the industry backs that opportunity with real investment in its people — recruiting, retaining, and advancing a workforce drawn from every background. On National Hotel Employee Day, the industry recognizes the people at its heart — and the many places a hotel career can lead.

Sources

1. Oxford Economics, prepared for the American Hotel & Lodging Association, “Economic Impact of the U.S. Hotel Industry” (2025), national and city-level reports. Source for direct hotel employment of approximately 2.2 million; total jobs supported; jobs supported, guest spending, and taxes per hotel job; and all market-level figures.
2. American Hotel & Lodging Association, thehotelindustry.com. Source for more than 200 career pathways; roughly 80 percent of entry-level workers eligible for promotion within a year; and more than half of general managers beginning in entry-level roles.
3. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Employment Statistics (Accommodation, NAICS 721, and total private). Source for hotel wage growth since February 2020.
4. AHLA Foundation, 2025 Annual Report and 2026 AHLA talking points (ahlafoundation.org). Source for the Foundation’s founding (1953) and recruit-retain-advance framework; registered apprenticeships and certifications; the FORWARD leadership movement; No Room for Trafficking (more than 2.6 million employee trainings and Survivor Fund grants exceeding \$2.3 million); and academic and travel scholarships and mentorship.

