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The Hotel Yearbook
**Hospitality
ESG Edition
2024**

**Unlocking the
ESG Innovation Stack
in Hospitality**

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Building a culture around an ESG strategy is not a linear process

Operational Efficiency

Steve Pratt

VP for Operations, Support and Training, Aleph Hospitality

Synopsis

Aleph's Steve Pratt emphasizes the importance of fostering a passion-driven, rather than checklist-focused, culture of ESG awareness in the hospitality sector. The article highlights the challenges of implementing a uniform ESG strategy across diverse hotel portfolios and the necessity of localizing efforts to fit individual hotel contexts. The key to success lies in empowering hotel staff, particularly 'Pioneers', to take ownership of ESG initiatives and apply their knowledge and passion to create viable solutions tailored to their specific hotel. This approach has led to significant results, including the formation of sustainability teams and innovative local projects. The article also discusses replacing traditional reporting methods with storytelling and shared experiences, and the role of corporate support in facilitating these efforts. Additionally, it outlines the importance of forming partnerships for broader impact and engagement in sustainability practices, demonstrating a successful model for integrating ESG into hotel operations globally.

HOW TO BUILD AN INTERNAL CULTURE OF AWARENESS AND COMMITMENT TO ESG WHICH IS PASSION DRIVEN, NOT CHECKLIST FOCUSED.

With a portfolio of hotels which are both dissimilar in character and in location, as different from each other as Dubai from Nairobi, it can be a challenge to implement a corporate ESG strategy. What works for one hotel or location doesn't necessarily work for another. Lack of knowledge at the individual hotels is also a potential stumbling block. As for ESG reporting, the traditional checklist approach often stifles or confuses the local hotel teams, with the risk of local efforts grinding to a halt.

In my experience, certain aspects are crucial for an umbrella ESG strategy to succeed and thrive in a diverse, global hotel portfolio. First, rather than imposing corporate control, the focus should be on building an internal culture which is self-driven by passion and knowledge. Second, it has to have a realistic approach to local efforts, allowing ESG efforts to evolve organically. Finally, I have seen great results with replacing structured reporting with shared experiences and storytelling.

BUILDING AN INTERNAL CULTURE SELF-DRIVEN BY PASSION AND KNOWLEDGE

In my role in leading the Aleph Cares programme for Aleph Hospitality, a hotel management company with a diverse hotel portfolio across the Middle East and Africa, I've found that the principle for success is to engage team members to take ownership. We ask each hotel to appoint a Pioneer who is inherently passionate about environmental, social, and corporate governance, and who is committed to raising awareness of these issues. Taking on this responsibility, each pioneer researches and initiates viable solutions at their respective hotel, working closely with the local team to develop and implement best practices. The results have been astounding, to the point that some hotels now have not just a single pioneer but what they themselves have proudly termed: a sustainability army.

From the corporate side, we teach the hotel teams about environmental issues, diversity and inclusion in the workforce, human rights, energy and water conservation, waste

management, eco-friendly product selection, community work and much more. Every new team member at every hotel gets an induction into our ESG programme and every head of department receives dedicated training as a foundation for awareness and understanding.

Armed with knowledge, the pioneers drive the initiatives independently at their hotels, with corporate functioning essentially as a support system only. It has been astonishing to see how these pioneers flourish and take ownership, spurred on by a personal passion as well as pride in seeing their initiatives succeed at their hotel.

LOCALISING THE ESG STRATEGY

As I mentioned earlier, a corporate ESG strategy isn't a one-size-fits-all solution. We focus on localising the strategy at each hotel, inviting the pioneers and hotel teams to bring forward their own ideas. Ideas that fit the hotel because they stem from an in-depth understanding of opportunities and limitations in their community and country.

For example, we learned that recycling options in Qatar are limited, so the hotel found alternative solutions with external partners to recycle plastic bottles and send wastepaper to paper mills for the purpose of recycling.

Another example of localised efforts includes the "give a soap, give a hope" project at three hotels in Kenya. Soap leftovers from hotel rooms are melted down to make new soap bars which are then donated to children's homes and people in the community who cannot afford to buy soap. In addition, project displays in hotel lobbies with a call for donations have been very well received by guests. The proceeds are earmarked to buy essential items for a children's home.

Finally, a kitchen garden on hotel premises in Kenya was sprouting more greens than could be used in the restaurants' menus. Thinking creatively, the team started to sell excess greens to the hotel staff for private use, reducing food waste and putting the revenue back into ESG initiatives.

SHARED EXPERIENCES & STORYTELLING INSTEAD OF REPORTING

We have replaced structured reporting and checklists with shared experiences and storytelling. Our quarterly calls, attended by pioneers and general managers, are seen as an important part of hotel operations. Having created a common language around ESG, all the hotels share ideas and experiences with each other. We talk about what you CAN do as opposed to dictating standards which could be unattainable under certain circumstances.

PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE FUTURE

After a year of building awareness and commitment around ESG, we are taking the next steps in identifying partnerships which can widen our reach and impact beyond our portfolio of hotels.

Humanitarian partnerships on a corporate level include Aleph Hospitality's donation to Kenya Red Cross of 5% of our fees for the three Boma hotels in Kenya. We also partner with the Boma International Hospitality College in Kenya by offering internships, training opportunities and employment to students

within our hotels. Finally, we have chosen to sponsor the regional summit for the Cornell Hotel Society EMEA Chapter which offers scholarships for professional development programmes for the hospitality community.

Our latest partnership is with World Travel & Tourism Council for sustainability verification of our hotels. We have chosen WTTC, as their approach is partner driven instead of audit based, which will allow our hotels, when they are ready, to become verified within Hotel Sustainability Basics. We are not just looking for a badge of approval but see this as a great opportunity to contribute to a global organisation with criteria for people, planet and efficiency. This partnership will give us access to resources and best practices, helping us to step up our future game to become more impactful. Currently, eight hotels in our portfolio are lined up to start the sustainability verification process.

In conclusion, our success in scaling sustainability is based on instilling passion and excitement throughout the organisation globally. With corporate's role being one of support and encouragement, we focus on what CAN be attained at local levels instead of dictating standards.



Steve Pratt — VP for Operations, Support and Training, Aleph Hospitality

As VP for Operations, Support and Training, Steve's role is to create and implement learning solutions to support Aleph Hospitality team members' growth and development. Coaching and training programmes span all levels of the company from front-line staff in the local hotels in the Middle East and Africa to senior leaders in the corporate office. Steve is also responsible for the company's sustainability programme, Aleph Cares. As a hospitality training professional and coach, Steve holds a bachelor's degree in Leisure Management from Coventry University and a master's degree in Transdisciplinary Practice from Middlesex University.

Aleph Hospitality — alephhospitality.com

Born and based in Dubai, Aleph Hospitality is the leading independent hotel management company in the Middle East and Africa. Trusted by the world's leading brands, Aleph Hospitality manages hotels directly for owners, either on a franchise basis for branded properties or as a white label operator for independent hotels. Tailored-to-fit management solutions allow owners better control of their assets, clearer operational visibility and more contractual flexibility. Aleph Hospitality manages all aspects of hotel operations at any stage of development - from site and brand selection to technical assistance, pre-opening and day-to-day operations. Aleph Hospitality has earmarked a pipeline of 50 hotels in the Middle East and Africa by 2026.