



Caste out the nasty side of hierarchies

Love of hierarchies in the hospitality industry is damaging its potential for success, warns *Julian Saïpe*, managing director of party caterer Zafferano

The first half of George Orwell's famous book *Down and Out in Paris and London* contains a riveting and often hilarious account of his experiences working as a dishwasher in a large Paris hotel in the 1920s.

Among the many things that fascinate Orwell about the hotel is its "elaborate caste system" and he writes that "our staff had their prestige graded as accurately as that of soldiers".

Of course, conditions in the industry have improved greatly since the book was written in 1933, but the "caste system" is often just as strong as it was then. Indeed, don't TV programmes even make comedy out of it when a restaurant trainee gets sworn at or insulted by the boss?

Some people may think that makes good TV, but does it make for happy customers? I doubt it. Nobody works better after being

humiliated or insulted, and after all, what really matters is the overall service that's being delivered to the customer who pays the bill and understandably wants a great time.

My own branch of our industry – party catering – frequently features its own caste system, too. Party planners and head chefs are unlikely to be too happy feeling they're on the same level as waiting staff, while waiting staff will feel they're "higher up" than kitchen porters.

How helpful are these attitudes, though? The answer must surely be not at all. The point is, hierarchies are really about ego, and about some people feeling inherently better than other people because of what they do.

But who, really, is to say that some members of a team are more important than others? A cleaner at Nasa was once asked



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by a visitor what exactly he did. "I'm helping to put a man on the moon," the cleaner replied – and who's to say he wasn't right?

The remedy seems clear: use job demarcations, but don't let yourself be hidebound by hierarchies that are unhelpful, uncreative and often plain nasty. Instead, try to work together not only as a team but also a family.

It's no coincidence that family businesses in our industry often number among the most well-run and enduring.

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Over to you

How do you keep all your staff motivated?

Rajesh Suri, chief executive, restaurant group Tamarind

"Know your staff on a personal level to appreciate their strengths and help them improve weaknesses. Involve staff emotionally so they understand how important they are in their role, which will encourage them to take more initiative. It's also important to motivate with encouragement and sometimes with incentive or rewards."

Ingo Wiangke, general manager, Lords of the Manor hotel and restaurant

"Involve your team members in the decision-making process by asking for their views and their advice on matters. Incentives on special projects can also be motivational and it's really important to be caring and respectful and show an interest in them and their wellbeing."

Jean-Michel Fabre, marketing and supply chain director, pizza chain Papa John's

"A sense of being appreciated and an enjoyment of the role is vital for staff motivation, along with a clear understanding of success criteria. It's vitally important to focus on a small amount of key objectives and communicate frequently to assess progress, celebrate success publicly and reward people accordingly."

Gary King, director, recruitment firm Collins King

"Teamwork is paramount, and the most successful organisations have stable structures where the management recognise the worth of staff. We have a flat management structure and a relaxed atmosphere with regular team meetings and social events. We encourage everyone to have their say in the development of the company."