

 KEY TAKEAWAYS

Developing hospitality talent:

The webinar notes (and a little extra)



Introduction

Managing talent in hospitality requires a proactive approach as businesses navigate a dynamic sector with evolving workforce expectations and operational demands.

Our webinar with William Reed, **Developing hospitality talent: From new starts to leaders**, explored strategies to develop, nurture and retain talent by focussing on management development, leadership skills and innovative training programmes.

Below, we summarise key insights shared by industry experts James McLuckie (Chief Learning Officer, Mapal), Ettienne Vind (Learning & Development Manager, Beds and Bars), and Craig Benson (Learning & Development Lead, Wingstop).



The role of *management* in *hospitality*

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 1. Developing management skills requires structure:** Implementing structured programmes such as step-up initiatives and career mapping ensures managers receive the right training at the right time.
- 2. Coaching is a core leadership function:** Managers should incorporate coaching techniques to enhance team performance, provide real-time feedback and create a culture of continuous improvement.
- 3. AI is transforming learning and development:** AI-driven tools such as chatbots and scenario-based learning are helping hospitality businesses improve consistency and efficiency in training delivery.
- 4. Feedback and data drive effective training:** Organisations that implement continuous feedback loops and use data-driven decision-making can better align learning and development efforts with employee needs.
- 5. Identifying and nurturing talent early is essential:** Hospitality businesses should actively seek out high-potential employees and provide them with development opportunities before vacancies arise.
- 6. Gamification boosts engagement:** Leaderboards and competitive elements in training programmes can motivate employees, but they must be carefully implemented to ensure inclusivity.
- 7. Leadership development is a journey:** Transitioning from management to leadership requires a combination of strategic thinking, soft skills training and practical experience.
- 8. Cross-functional collaboration is key:** Learning and development teams must work closely with operations and HR to ensure learning programmes are aligned with business needs and practical for frontline employees.
- 9. Real-world application enhances learning:** Training programmes that include hands-on projects and real-world applications help managers and future leaders develop the skills necessary for success.



Further reading: [Balancing recognition and development](#)



Practical management development programmes

Developing effective managers requires structured programmes that provide clear career pathways and targeted support. Hospitality businesses benefit from tailored initiatives that blend formal training, mentorship and real-world application.

Below are examples of successful programmes implemented by Beds and Bars and Wingstop.

Beds and Bars

- 1. Footsteps programme:** A structured development path covering all levels from service roles to senior management.
- 2. Training needs analysis:** Regular assessments identify confidence gaps, ensuring targeted training interventions.
- 3. Rising stars initiative:** A rigorous selection process where employees propose operational improvements, culminating in leadership coaching and a 'Dragon's Den'-style presentation to senior leaders.

Wingstop





- 1. Step-up programmes:** Career progression frameworks guiding employees from crew members to general managers, integrating online modules, workshops and project-based validation.
- 2. Talent development metrics:**
 - 95% of employees were externally recruited in 2023; in 2024, this dropped to 45% due to internal promotions
 - 0% turnover within 90 days for programme participants
- 3. Continuous feedback:** Weekly learner feedback ensures training remains relevant and impactful.



Explore more: [Build better leaders with Leadership Collections](#)

The role of AI in Learning and Development

Potential benefits

-  **Efficiency and accessibility**
AI can streamline content creation and knowledge sharing, making learning materials more accessible.
-  **Real-time learning**
AI-driven chatbots can provide instant answers to workplace queries, supporting 'just-in-time' learning.
-  **Scenario-based training**
AI-powered simulations allow employees to engage in realistic, reactive training exercises.
-  **Consistency across teams**
AI can support standardised training and improve knowledge-sharing across multiple locations.

Ethical considerations

- The importance of maintaining human oversight in AI-driven learning
- Ensuring AI is used as a support tool rather than replacing genuine engagement and leadership



Related webinar: [AI in hospitality](#)

Spotting and *nurturing* talent

Identifying and developing talent early is key to building strong leadership pipelines and reducing reliance on external recruitment.

By leveraging data-driven insights and engagement strategies such as gamification, hospitality businesses can create a culture of continuous growth and career progression.

Below are some approaches used by Beds and Bars and Wingstop to spot and nurture talent effectively.

Early talent identification

- Businesses should proactively identify talent rather than waiting for vacancies to arise

Data-driven decision making

- **Wingstop** uses a bespoke talent management platform to map skill gaps and career progression opportunities
- **Beds and Bars** integrates leaderboards and competency tracking via Mapal OS to visualise employee development

Gamification and motivation

- **Leaderboards** can drive competition and engagement but should be carefully managed to ensure inclusivity

Proactive talent pooling

- **Wingstop** prioritises early talent identification and development, ensuring high-potential employees are tracked for future opportunities

Employee-driven development

- **Beds and Bars** enables employees to take control of their learning journeys by making training programmes freely accessible to all staff, allowing motivated individuals to progress at their own pace

Feedback and transparency

- Both businesses stress the importance of transparent talent development processes, ensuring employees understand available progression opportunities and the steps required to achieve them

Cross-functional collaboration

- **Wingstop** integrates collaboration between Ops, HR and L&D teams to ensure talent development aligns with broader business needs

Retention impact

- **Wingstop's** structured internal promotion system has significantly reduced their need for external hiring, reinforcing employee retention and engagement



Further reading: [The science of play](#)

Transitioning from *management to leadership*

Moving from a management role to a leadership position requires a shift in mindset and skillset. While managers focus on operational execution, leaders must think strategically, inspire their teams and drive long-term business success.

The following approaches help bridge the gap between management and leadership.

Distinguishing leadership from management

Leadership requires a strategic, long-term mindset beyond operational management.

Career mapping

Wingstop's Career Map clearly outlines progression routes, required skills and behaviours for leadership roles.

Validation through projects

Real-world application of skills, such as writing personal development plans or handling performance management cases, ensures managers develop true leadership capabilities.



Related webinar: [Learning by design](#)



Final *thoughts*

Developing effective managers in hospitality requires a combination of structured training, real-time coaching, talent identification and emerging technologies like AI. Organisations that invest in leadership development will be better positioned to retain top talent and drive business success.

For further discussion, feel free to connect with the speakers, [James McLuckie](#), [Ettienne Vind](#) and [Craig Benson](#) on LinkedIn.

Watch the *webinar*:
Developing hospitality talent

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