

# Futureproof your **HOSPITALITY TALENT PIPELINE**

Your guide to effective  
succession planning



**Caterer.com**  
LEADERSHIP COLLABORATIVE

# Introduction

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## Why you need to build succession planning into your business development strategy.

As the UK's hospitality industry continues to recover, now is the time to start planning for the future.

According to a recent report from Ignite Economics, which analyses data from the Office of National Statistics (ONS), in 2023, the wider hospitality industry was the 3rd largest employer in the UK.

Overall, in the past 6 years the sector has increased its annual economic contribution by £20 billion to £93 billion.

With interest rates expected to reduce over the next few years, and average earnings predicted to outpace inflation, consumer spending is set to increase.

Certainly at Caterer.com, we saw sustained demand for talent across the sector in 2023, with daily listings on our platform rising by almost 30% throughout the year.

All of this is good news for hospitality businesses looking to grow over the coming years. However, it's important to remember that regardless of the size of your company, employees will always progress into new roles.

That's why it's important to continuously develop your workforce. Planning ahead not only minimises disruption, but it futureproofs your business by ensuring skills, expertise, and inside knowledge is passed on.

Equally important, it will build your reputation as a company that values and supports its employees by providing opportunities to grow.

In this guide, we'll outline the five steps to developing a succession plan that delivers the results you need.



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# What is succession planning?

Succession planning is about preparing rising talent to take on key roles in your business. As a practice, it's vital to ensure that your company will thrive in the future.

When done well, succession planning makes sure that when change does happen, everything continues to run smoothly.

It isn't just about replacing people who leave, it's about futureproofing your business by developing people for roles that may not yet exist.

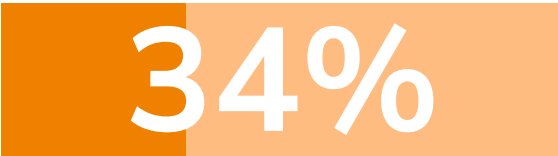
For example, you may be planning to open new restaurants, or hotels, or expand overseas. In which case, you'll need people with the skills to launch a new venture, or drive international development. Or perhaps you need to create a new HR role to handle international functions.

All too often though, we see hospitality businesses put succession planning on the back burner when they should be making it a business priority.

## The business case

According to Caterer.com's Age Diversity in Hospitality report, the average age of hospitality workers stands at 34 years old, with just over a third (34%) over the age of 50.

### Hospitality workers over the age of 50



34%

Traditionally, hospitality has been powered by young talent at entry-level, with many seeing the industry as a stopgap rather than a career. However, the sector is evolving, and many employees are climbing the career ladder, moving into mid-level and senior positions.

As such, the business case for succession planning in the hospitality industry is strong. Employers need to plan ahead and develop a strategy that's focused on retaining ambitious talent.

### Some of the business benefits of succession planning include:

- More stability and having the resources to work towards your goals
- Knowledge being passed on when an expert leaves, reducing the learning curve for those taking on new roles
- The opportunity to evaluate the future of your business and build a more diverse workforce
- Boosting employee retention and engagement by demonstrating that there are opportunities to progress in the company
- Being proactive instead of reactive when change happens
- Long-term cost savings - it's more affordable to develop talent internally than to recruit externally

# The five steps to developing an effective succession plan

Planning the future of your company calls for strategy, structure and debate. Here's how to go about it:



## Set up a focus group to define your goals

With this mindset, gather the decision-makers in your business and allocate time to evaluating your long-term goals and employee development process.

Make sure the group includes people who understand how the business works from the top level down. For example, you could include HR managers and the leadership team.

Task the group with defining your current and future business goals.

**Some other areas you might want to evaluate include:**

- Your gross revenue targets
- Your five and ten-year plans
- Expansion into different locations
- New products and services
- Headcount targets
- Your Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion (DE&I) policy



## Identify the roles that will drive your business forward

Once you have your goals in place, you'll need to identify the specific roles that will get you there.

For example, let's say you want to be known as the best restaurant in your city within five years. To achieve this, you'll need the right talent and expertise.

You may need to fill existing roles if employees have moved on, or you may end up identifying roles that still need to be created.



“ I think focus groups are important to when it comes to developing a retention strategy, bringing together a panel of diverse people to ensure all perspectives are taken into consideration.

The biggest focus should be around Values and a sense of belonging, this consideration should be at the core of your business to create a culture people want to work in therefore positively impacting retention ”



**Laura Maddams**  
Searcys  
Head of Recruitment

**Here are some questions to consider when identifying your hospitality roles:**

- Where do you currently have a skills shortage?
- What emerging skills will you need more of in the future?
- Which roles are held by leaders or decision-makers who are preparing for retirement?
- Are there key positions that are held by just one member of staff?
- Which hospitality positions are typically hard to fill?

# 3 Pinpoint the skills and experience you'll need

Once you've mapped out your key positions, it's time to pin down the skills you'll need. You should think about the knowledge and experience required, as well as candidate values and culture fit.

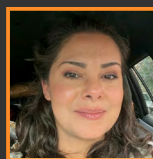
When developing a succession plan, HR teams often use a competency framework, similar to what would be used when assessing employees for promotion.

Your succession framework will likely include both general leadership skills and those that are exclusive to specific roles. In some cases, you might want to use psychometric profiling for a more data-driven approach.

**Here are some criteria your succession planning framework might include for the hospitality sector:**

- Customer service skills
- Organisation and time management
- Conflict management
- Teamwork and interpersonal skills
- Compliance training
- Leadership potential
- Sales ability

Of course, you don't always have to focus on a specific role. Your criteria could target a particular skill set that's in short supply. For example, you might need employees who are skilled in using hotel management software, or customer relationship tools.



“ When you're hiring for a role, it's important to make sure it's there for a purpose. ”

And then it becomes easier to identify what someone can bring to the role. ”



**Melanie Amphlett**  
IHG Hotels  
HR Lead for UK & Ireland

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## Identify potential successors for each role

When searching for hospitality talent, it's important to remember that you don't need to find candidates who meet all of your criteria. You're looking for people with potential, and who align with your business values and culture fit.

With the right development, enthusiastic candidates can often be better suited to the demands of the role. Your competency framework will help you carefully assess each candidate's background, experience, and career plans.

And, of course, many candidates will already have in-depth knowledge of the hospitality sector, and your business.

When Caterer.com spoke with Catherine Hunter, Head of Cultural Development at Nando's as part of our Hiring Strategies virtual series, she said:



“ Culture is the microclimate that sits in the background and often goes completely unnoticed. But your business values matter because they can be an emotional energiser for your people and how good they feel about the work that they do. ”



**Catherine Hunter**  
**Nando's**  
Head of Cultural Development

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## Integrate succession planning into your employee development

Combining your succession planning goals into your employees' development plans encourages them to upskill in areas that will be beneficial to their future.

Whether they pursue on-the-job training, executive coaching, or mentoring, documenting employee progress in a performance review is essential. These reviews can be annual, bi-annual, or quarterly.

Integrating succession planning into your employees' development ensures your business has a leadership pipeline, all the while helping your staff excel in their careers.

# Top tips for effective succession planning

## Develop your succession plan now

Succession planning takes time. In some cases, it may be ten years before you see the results of your efforts. That's why it's important to act now.

## Provide employees with opportunities to gain experience

For employees to be ready to step into their future position, they'll need experience. For example, if senior staff are on annual leave, delegate responsibilities to their successor.

## Review your plan regularly

As your business evolves, your succession plan will need to evolve with it. For this reason, it's a good idea to keep your plan flexible and update it to reflect trends and events in the industry.

## Think outside the box

Don't automatically assume that you need to replace like with like. For example, if you need to replace a guest relations manager, would it be better to divide their role up among several other positions?

## Be transparent

It's important to be open and honest with your employees, and remind them that there are no career guarantees.

Things can change quickly in the hospitality sector, and businesses need to change with the wider industry. However, do reassure staff that if there are any changes, they'll be the first to know.



“ I think it's important to be as transparent as possible when it comes to talent retention. Providing opportunities is key, but we're also seeing a lot of candidates who are interested and driven by factors like sustainability. For example, on our website, we publish our sustainability report, outlining what we're up to and what our goals are. ”



**Hanna Lawler**  
**CH&CO**  
Resourcing Business Partner





# Case study:

## Melanie Amphlett, IHG Hotels and Resorts

To provide more insight into what succession planning looks like in action, we spoke with Melanie Amphlett, HR Lead for UK and Ireland at IHG Hotels and Resorts. As a company, IHG employs 350,000 people globally, with around 2,500 people employed in the UK.

### **What do you think makes an attractive employer proposition for candidates in hospitality?**

At IHG, we offer lots of flexibility in working patterns and in career development opportunities. Particularly in the last year, we've invested a lot in skills training to help people develop their careers and stay with us for the long term. We aim to set them up for success in the future by providing meaningful careers and leadership opportunities.

### **Recruitment and retention have been a strong focus for IHG over the last couple of years. Have you seen an increase in staff retention?**

Yes, definitely. Post COVID-19, we had a high turnover because it was such a tricky operation to manage. From a recruitment perspective, people were looking for skills that were no longer available and new people coming into the industry were finding it daunting.

So, we had to pivot swiftly to ensure that we were providing training and support, particularly around wellbeing.

We wanted to make sure that people felt comfortable being in a busy environment post-covid. We've seen retention rates increase and then stabilise, and now we're seeing people looking at future roles with us.

### **In terms of professional development, can you provide an example of something you're doing that's achieving a good success rate?**

So, we're looking at things like management training programmes and making sure that there are training initiatives at the right stages of someone's employment journey with us.

We want to make sure that our managers understand what they need to do to support team members with their personal development. And depending on where that person wants to go, we can put them on the relevant career path.

We're trying to do it in a way that provides a tailored, personalised learning experience. And we use our global learning platform to offer lots of virtual opportunities.

**Is there anything specific you do to train your team leaders?**

We offer different levels of leadership training depending on where people want to take their careers.

We offer on-site leadership programs, which are delivered face to face. And we leverage technology to offer virtual training online.

We also provide apprenticeships, which has been key to nurturing future leaders. By working closely with schools, we help people build their hospitality experience and understand the various roles in the industry. Then slowly, we build their leadership capabilities.

**What top tips do you have for employers looking to recruit right now in the hospitality industry?**

Because it's challenging to find relevant skills and experience, there's a need to invest in developing people and offer them training and learning opportunities.

I think what people are looking for now is a reason to come to work. They want to know that they're adding value. So, when you're hiring for a role, it's important to make sure it's there for a purpose. And then it becomes easier to identify what someone can bring to the role. Also, leveraging your company strengths and building on them can help.

By creating a positive and engaging work environment, people will stick around, knowing they're adding value.





# Case study:

## Hannah Lawler, CH&CO

Hannah Lawler is Resourcing Business Partner at CH&CO, a collection of specialist catering and hospitality businesses across the UK and Ireland. The company employs 10,000 people and is involved in event catering, workplace cafés and restaurants, and corporate fine dining.

**At CH&CO, you're using TikTok as part of your recruitment campaigns.**

**How do you communicate your employer value proposition on social media?**

Incorporating social media into our recruitment campaigns has opened up a whole new audience. TikTok and other social media platforms provide a great way for us to reach people who want to know what it's like to work for a company but might not use the traditional review sites.

The videos we create feature our people talking about the benefits they enjoy most and whilst we can't always include every benefit we provide; we ensure that we showcase the most relevant depending on the roles we are looking to target.

**With many candidates now looking for careers in the catering industry, how do you manage professional development?**

We want people to grow with us and stay with us, so we offer the development opportunities people need to progress their career, whether that's at entry-level or in the board room. We do this by creating bespoke learning plans that cater to people's individual needs, as well as access to over 28 different apprenticeship programmes, our future-leader courses, on the job coaching and mentoring as well as access to over 100 e-learning courses.

**Do you have any top tips for talent retention?**

It's important to remind people of all the reasons to stay with you and focusing on areas that are over and above the normal work-related benefits. What opportunities are available to them to grow, does the company culture support their work-life balance, do they understand and know the business' aims / business plans, what is the company doing to support the environment and how as an employee they can support that. All of this helps people keep informed of where the company is heading.

**Sustainability is becoming a big part of company culture in hospitality. How do you manage cultural change within the organisation?**

We have a great team who are focused on sustainability and cultural change and engagement.

They're always working closely with our operators and managers to share information and provide two-way communication. It's so important to get buy-in at all levels when it comes to culture change and to involve people from day one of any changes. You need to communicate change clearly, and then you need to be able to demonstrate it again and again.



## Case study: Laura Maddams, Searcys

Laura Maddams is Head of Recruitment at Searcys, the UK's oldest catering company. It was founded in 1847, employs just under 1,300 people, and has several restaurants, champagne bars, and events venues across London.

### How do you communicate your employer value proposition?

Last year, we launched a Searcys careers page on Instagram, which has given us a chance to share what we do for our people. It has also enabled us to give prospective employees an insight into our incredible family-oriented culture.

We also launched our Searcys Careers Page, which allows candidates to delve into the rich history of our company and get to know our venues, and what opportunities we have.

### Once employees have been onboarded, how do you continue to keep them engaged with the brand?

It is paramount to our business that we retain great people!

It is essential that our teams feel engaged. As we have just under 1300 people in Searcys, it is very much a family orientated business, it also enables us a chance to listen to what our teams want from an employer. In 2024 we've launched a monthly wellbeing calendar, where our people can participate in monthly activities, from sponsored walks to advice forums and yoga classes.

We are also thrilled to be hosting our Annual Searcys Family Day, where we invite all our teams and their families to enjoy a summer afternoon with us. It's a chance to celebrate and share great memories.

We also plan activities around International Women's Day and Black History Month. These are key dates in our diary, and we know employees value our efforts around these important events.

### How important is professional development in the hospitality industry?

It's very important. I think it's a way for companies to stand out against their competitors. If you have a great training and development programme available, you'll be able to ensure people stay within your business for longer, whilst also keeping them motivated and feeling rewarded.

Searcys offer a broad selection of professional and personal development courses, that are reviewed annually to ensure we are always evolving and improving what we offer to our teams.

We have a Chef Academy that's available to all our Culinary Team across the business. This is a 12-to-18-month programme. We all know how hard it is to recruit chefs, so being able to offer an enhanced development program is crucial. This year, we're also launching a development program for our sales teams, to help individuals to learn, grow and have the confidence to step into more senior positions for the future.

We've joined forces with a leadership development consultancy that helps individuals and organisations nurture inclusivity and people-centric performance cultures.

And we have launched our first reverse mentoring program, where junior employees share their experiences with a more senior colleague. We've started with the first cohort and the feedback has been incredible so far.

### What are your top interview tips for attracting the right candidates?

The feedback I always receive when I conduct interviews is that I create a relaxed environment. It's about listening, understanding, and delving into what is important for the individual / job seeker.

It's also about offering genuine career advice and sharing case studies or personal experiences to ensure that the candidate feels you are there to support them. This also helps the employer / potential employee build a long lasting and trusted relationship for the future.

### Do you have any advice for companies looking to develop their retention strategies?

Employee retention has many contributing factors and can be impacted throughout recruitment stages, onboarding and beyond.

Searcys aim is to be an "Employer of Choice" offering industry leading benefits, inclusive working environments and offer its employees a place they can be celebrated for being themselves.

We are constantly reviewing our people practices and ensuring that we offer a seamless recruitment and onboarding process, allowing any potential employee a chance to meet the team and get to know our business in more detail so they can make an informed decision over us as an employer. During that crucial first year, we are checking to make sure that each employee has all they need to succeed and offering further learning and development to them should they want to advance their knowledge and careers. Searcys are also a growing company, which enables us to offer our employees a wide variety of different roles within some of London's best events venues and gives them a chance to step up into more senior positions should they want to.

# Summary

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Effective succession planning not only prepares your business for the future, but it can become a part of your talent attraction and retention strategies.

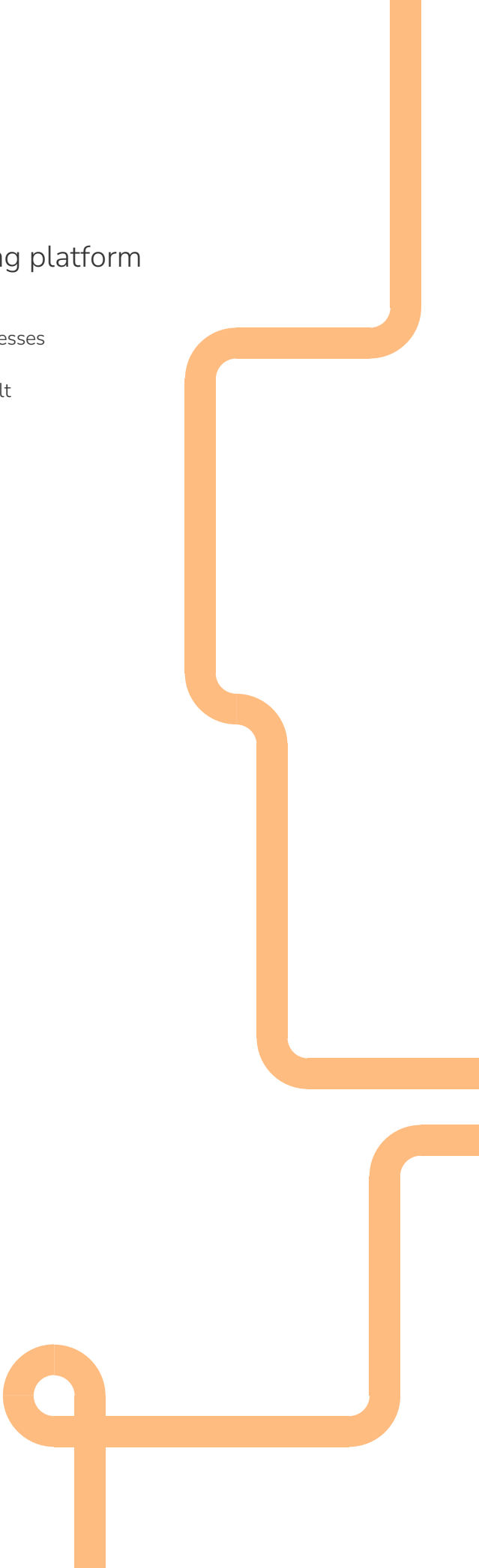
The hospitality industry will always need people with fresh ideas, experience, and different perspectives. And in a competitive hiring environment, ambitious candidates will always choose employers that take an invested interest in their career development.

By focusing on your goals for the next 5 to 10 years and documenting the roles and skills you'll need to achieve them, you can futureproof your business.

Remember, succession planning is an open-ended process. It should be fluid, regularly reviewed, and updated to reflect inevitable changes in the ever-evolving hospitality sector.



# Overview of Caterer.com



Caterer.com is the UK hospitality industry's hiring platform matching the right people with the right jobs.

Caterer.com has unrivalled technology, teams and solutions to help businesses reach the right hospitality people with their jobs and brand messaging. With search, match and apply tools unlike any other, Caterer.com is built to find you the right hospitality hires for future business success.

**Supercharge your hiring success with our vast range of innovative business solutions and insights.**

## **Equality Boost**

A diverse and inclusive workforce is key to strong business performance. Engage the right people for your roles in a diverse talent pool with our bespoke targeting tools

## **CV Database**

Take direct control of your hiring and find the ideal person quickly with our CV Database. Our intuitive search and filters mean you can easily reach the most relevant people for your jobs in our database of over 4.4 million profiles

## **Appcast Xcelerate**

Pinpoint the best candidates, quickly. Our sophisticated technology uses rule-based algorithms to distribute jobs to the best places throughout the entire web and engage the people you need

## **Universum**

Become an employer of choice and attract the best talent by developing the right value proposition, expertly crafted messaging and a strong visual identity

## **Mya**

Our Conversational AI superstar allows you to connect quickly with the right candidates by communicating with them at every stage of their application process, so they find you more efficiently

## **Access valuable support & insights**

Benefit from peer-to-peer insight and thought leadership. Our Caterer.com Hospitality Leadership Collaborative is an open community that pulls on joint forces to provide peer-to-peer support

**Get in touch** to find out more