

Groundbreaking new course to strengthen local leadership in the hospitality industry

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Professionals working in the hospitality industry will, for the first time, have access to high-level, industry relevant learning in South Africa thanks to an innovative partnership between the UCT Graduate School of Business (GSB) and industry players that has seen the launch of a new executive education short course tailor-made for the industry.

“There is nothing like it in the market,” says Jonathan Steyn, convenor of the Hospitality Leadership short course at the GSB.

The course fills an educational gap for mid-level managers in the industry. Steyn explains, “There is a lot of technical and operational training and education in the hospitality industry. People move up through the ranks, and they are very astute technicians, but they don’t have the necessary conceptual skills and critical thinking skills to make that transition to senior leadership positions.”

“Instead of sending staff overseas to learn relevant, up-to-date best practice and crucial managerial and leadership skills, we wanted to rather grow our own and encourage industry up-and-coming stars,” says Michael Pownall, managing partner at PMR Hospitality. Pownall is one of a group of industry leaders who approached and worked with the GSB to design the course content.

This collaborative and industry-driven intervention combines expert knowledge from industry with the GSB’s five decades of research, cutting-edge teaching methods, and world-renowned faculty. Chris Godenir, general manager at The Peninsula Hotel, says, “The aim is not to tell people how to run a hotel the way we’ve done for 30 years, but to use our experience to address current challenges. Together we can think about new ways of doing things.”

The course has a longer-term goal of creating a body of leadership knowledge that will get passed down to future leaders. Pownall and Godenir agree that “current experienced managers want to leave a legacy, a body of knowledge for the new generation.” Steyn adds that “there hasn’t been enough transfer of retained know-how in the industry,” and this course will change that through building a strong alumni body combined with the experts who helped design the course.

“The cohort of delegates will form an alumni group which builds year-on-year,” explains Pownall. “This will lead to a think tank, a network of knock-on related industry professionals as a valuable resource.” He adds, “The only industry body is FEDHASA, and they are supportive of this effort to strengthen industry leadership.”

Another unique aspect of the course is its use of mentoring throughout the programme. “Each delegate gets paired with an industry mentor and this process is central to ensuring knowledge transfer, and that the content can be implemented once the delegate returns to work. The interaction between the mentor and delegate counts towards the final assessment and course results,” says Steyn.

The course builds leadership skills and stresses the importance of innovation in leadership and in strategic thinking. “Innovation in leadership is key,” says Steyn, “and the course encourages blue ocean thinking, especially around how to deal with disruption in the industry. It also looks at sustainable innovation around resources, for example how to manage the current Cape water crisis.” He adds that it is crucial to develop an innovative mindset, not just in response to a crisis, but as an inherent leadership capability.

The programme will kick off with an innovation day that will be open to industry experts and serve as a networking event to encourage conversation around innovation in the industry. Godenir feels the innovation day is important as it will expose

delegates to innovative products and services in the market. He says, "Particularly as Cape Town is known as a design capital, it is important to see what creative people are doing."

Importantly, the course is designed for and by the South African industry and seeks to find innovative solutions for the emerging market context. Godenir shares his vision of the course "becoming the gold standard for the industry in Africa."

"As the course builds in strength, global hotel chains wanting to open hotels in other African countries will send their people here, to learn how we do it here in the African context."

The Hospitality Leadership short course runs from 8-16 June at the GSB's Waterfront campus in Cape Town. For more information about the course please visit the website <http://www.gsb.uct.ac.za/hospitality>.

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