



The Leadership Gap in Hospitality

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Struggle to Hire & Retain Executive Talent

By Eli Marie Rodriguez



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The hospitality industry has always been people driven. It's been my experience that guest experience, operational performance, brand reputation, and owner satisfaction all hinge on leadership quality. Yet many find securing quality leadership to be elusive. We find this to be particularly true for hospitality management companies that oversee hotels, resorts, restaurants, and multi-property portfolios. Attracting and retaining top performing executive and functional leadership talent has become increasingly difficult.

Labor shortages often dominate headlines, but the more significant issue for management companies today is acquiring effective leadership talent. Specifically, identifying executives and functional leaders who can drive operational excellence while navigating margin pressure, ownership expectations, workforce instability, and evolving guest demands.

I find that two challenges consistently rise to the top of the list.

1. Finding Leaders Who Can Balance Operational Excellence with Commercial Strategy

Hospitality management companies are no longer simply looking for experienced operators. They need leaders who can simultaneously execute at the property level while thinking strategically across portfolios, ownership groups, and long-term growth initiatives.

This presents a major hiring challenge because many candidates are heavily weighted toward one side of the equation.

Some executives are exceptional operators. They understand guest service, labor management, property stabilization, and frontline leadership. However, they may lack experience with:

- Multi-property oversight
- Financial forecasting and asset performance
- Ownership and investor relations
- Commercial strategy and revenue optimization
- Organizational scalability
- Change management and transformation initiatives

On the other hand, commercially sophisticated leaders from adjacent industries may lack the hospitality-specific operational instincts required to lead complex service environments.

The result is a narrow pool of qualified talent capable of operating effectively at both the strategic and tactical levels.

This challenge is particularly pronounced for:

- Hotel management companies
- Private equity-backed hospitality groups
- Multi-brand operators
- Luxury and lifestyle portfolios
- Rapid-growth hospitality platforms

As organizations scale, the consequences of a poor executive hire become more significant. One ineffective regional leader or executive can negatively impact associate retention, guest satisfaction scores, ownership confidence, operational consistency, and financial performance across multiple assets.

Angel Alvarez is a senior HR executive within the hospitality management space, and he summed this topic up by saying,



“Over the years, I’ve seen hospitality leadership become increasingly complex. Organizations are no longer looking for leaders who can simply run individual divisions well, but instead, seeking talent that builds a strong team working towards a common property goal. They need executives who can drive operational excellence, develop talent, manage owner relationships, and deliver financial performance simultaneously. Like a seasoned conductor driving a fine-tuned orchestra, it starts by getting the little things right and build on that premise to align the team to perform in unison as in one team, one goal! Finding professionals who can successfully balance all of those responsibilities remains one of the industry’s greatest talent challenges.”

How Executive Search Firms Help

It’s important to note that a reputable executive search firm brings far more value than just candidate sourcing alone. Experienced search partners like ExeQfind maintain access to passive leadership talent that is often unavailable through traditional recruiting channels. More importantly, they understand how to assess whether a candidate can succeed within the specific operational and ownership dynamics of hospitality management organizations.

Here are some of the ways that we executive search consultants help hospitality management companies:

- Identify leaders with both operational and commercial sophistication
- Evaluate leadership scalability across multi-property environments
- Benchmark talent against competing organizations and markets
- Assess culture fit and stakeholder alignment
- Access cross-industry candidates with transferable leadership capabilities

The best search firms also provide consultative insight into compensation trends, relocation feasibility, succession planning, and organizational structure — all of which directly impact hiring success.

In a highly relationship-driven industry like hospitality, that level of strategic partnership matters.

2. Retaining Leadership Talent in a High-Pressure Industry

Even when hospitality companies successfully recruit strong leaders, retaining them presents another major challenge.

Hospitality executives operate in one of the most demanding business environments in the economy. Long hours, labor volatility, ownership pressure, operational emergencies, extensive travel, and constant guest-facing accountability create sustained leadership fatigue.

Over the past several years, burnout among hospitality leaders has accelerated significantly.

Management companies continue to face:

- Increased executive turnover
- GM and regional leadership burnout
- Talent migration into adjacent industries
- Difficulty relocating leaders into secondary markets
- Greater competition for commercially skilled executives

At the executive level, compensation pressure has also intensified. Hospitality management companies often compete against REITs, travel technology companies, luxury residential operators, healthcare service organizations, and other sectors offering more attractive work-life balance structures.

Today's executive candidates are evaluating opportunities differently than they did even five years ago. Flexibility, organizational culture, leadership support, growth opportunity, and long-term stability now carry substantial weight alongside compensation.

Hospitality organizations that fail to address these concerns risk losing top performers to competing industries.

How Executive Search Firms Help

Strong executive search firms help hospitality organizations reduce leadership turnover risk before the hiring process even begins.

Beyond evaluating experience, effective search partners assess:

- Leadership longevity patterns
- Motivational drivers
- Organizational fit
- Burnout indicators
- Relocation likelihood
- Career trajectory alignment
- Leadership adaptability under pressure

Executive recruiters also provide valuable market intelligence that helps hospitality management companies remain competitive in attracting senior talent.

This includes guidance around:

- Compensation structuring
- Retention incentives
- Succession planning
- Leadership onboarding strategies
- Competitive talent positioning
- Employer brand perception

Most importantly, executive search firms help organizations focus on long-term leadership alignment rather than short-term hiring urgency.

That distinction can significantly reduce costly turnover at the executive level.

The Bottom Line

Hospitality management companies face increasingly complex leadership hiring challenges. The industry's demand for commercially sophisticated operators, combined with rising burnout and retention pressure, has made executive talent acquisition more competitive than ever.

Organizations that rely solely on transactional recruiting approaches often struggle to secure and retain the caliber of leadership required to drive long-term operational and financial performance.

Partnering with a reputable executive search firm provides hospitality companies with access to deeper talent networks, more rigorous leadership evaluation processes, and strategic hiring guidance tailored to the realities of the hospitality industry.

In today's environment, leadership hiring is no longer simply about filling positions. It is about building resilient organizations capable of sustaining growth, operational excellence, and ownership confidence in an increasingly demanding marketplace.

At The ExeQfind Group, we partner with hospitality organizations to identify and secure executive and functional leadership talent capable of driving long-term success across complex operational environments.



Eli Rodriguez is an executive search consultant with The ExeQfind Group leveraging her career experience in various leadership roles with both boutique and global hospitality organizations to support client organizations within the hospitality sector. Eli and her husband own the Beechwood Inn in the northeast Georgia mountains.

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About The ExeQfind Group

Our Atlanta-based executive search practice – The ExeQfind Group provides mid-management to executive leadership talent to organizations across the Americas and in 45 countries through our global alliance partners on 6 continents. The ExeQfind Group is comprised of accomplished executive search consultants located in Canada, the United States, Mexico, Chile, Peru and Brazil.



About The QualiFind Group

The QualiFind Group is a California-based talent acquisition firm focused on providing specialist to managerial recruitment to client organizations throughout the Americas. We offer a diverse team of recruiters based across Canada, the United States, Mexico, Chile, Peru and Brazil with experience supporting multinational organizations wherever they need talent.



Forbes magazine has consistently ranked The ExeQfind Group among the **Top 200 Executive Search Firms in North America** and The QualiFind Group among the **Top 200 Professional Recruitment Firms in North America** for the past six consecutive years.