

Insights from AHLA ForWard at Hunter Hotel Investment Conference: Women @ the Top

By **Robin McLaughlin** - May 11, 2021



On the second day of the 2021 Hunter Hotel Investment Conference, Rosanna Maietta, executive vice president of communications and public relations for AHLA and president and CEO of AHLA Foundation, introduced AHLA ForWard: Women @ the Top, a conversation between top executives in the hotel industry. Among the topics discussed were how women in the workforce, particularly women of color, have been affected by the pandemic, initiatives to support getting women back to work, roadblocks women have experienced during their careers, and more.

“Overall, nearly [2.4 million women](#) have exited the workforce since last February compared to less than 1.8 million men. Women of color—who are more likely to have service sector or government jobs—have been hit the hardest by pandemic joblessness,” noted Jyoti Sarolia, principal and founder of Ellis Hospitality Group. “So how do we help our women get back to work? That’s the big question.”

Panelists highlighted the importance of mentorship and how their own careers have been impacted by the guidance and advocacy of others. Mary Beth Cutshall, executive vice president and chief development officer for HVMG, said that she doesn’t think mentorship “happens in a vacuum” and that mentorship “goes both ways.” She added, “We have to share who we are authentically. We have to have a conversation and we have to be able to be honest about what we want and ask for guidance and listen to it as well.”

Marina MacDonald, chief marketing officer of Red Roof, said she sees how effective mentorship and coaching strategies work close to home—within her own family. “[Mentorship] is not a formal thing. It could just be a conversation that you find important.”

And mentorship is something that Dianna Vaughan, senior vice president, global quality assurance, owner experiences, and engagement, Americas, and brand management, Americas, for Hilton, also values. Vaughan said that she is known for mentorship in Hilton, and during her first meeting with a new mentee, she asks them who they are mentoring. She said, "Often, they're not doing anything, but they're asking for my help to excel in their careers." That is an eye-opening moment for her mentees, and the second time they meet, "They have somebody, and they're really excited to tell the story. And it just really helps with that pipeline of talent; it's something I'm very passionate about."

Sarolia discussed how mentorship includes encouraging mentees to acquire more mentees, adding that mentorship is "acknowledging the hard work that they're doing in their respective role, but then also creating that next layer for them to go into so we don't lose them to our competitor."

As for the best career advice the panelists have received, Sarolia shared advice from her mother, saying that all jobs are respectable. "During COVID, due to lack of staffing, I had to roll up my sleeves and help out in the housekeeping twice this month. That mantra stayed in my mind," Sarolia said.

MacDonald and Cutshall had advice about accepting that not all people can be pleased, as well as grit and determination. And Vaughan added, "The best advice I ever had is 'don't be worried about your next promotion; just do your current job the best you can and people will come find you.'"

Robin McLaughlin

Robin McLaughlin is associate editor of LODGING.