



Hospitality Sector Opens Doors to Youth

by Christopher J. Nassetta, CEO of Hilton Worldwide and member of the IYF Board



Every day, as the father of six young women, I see the potential that every young person around the world has to offer. Our young people today are savvy, optimistic, creative and innovative. They are connected—digitally, emotionally and physically—to the people and world around them. But all too often, these youth don't get their chance to shine. All too often their bright, effervescent potential remains locked away because of the strain of life and lack of education or opportunity. Our youth deserve better. As the CEO of a global company that relies heavily on talent to deliver its value, I know first-hand that opening doors for young people can open doors to opportunity and prosperity for us all.

Yet today, according to the International Labour Organization, those doors of opportunity remain closed for some 75 million youth who are unable to find work. The results from this underutilization of such a dynamic segment of the world's population are dissatisfaction, demoralization, and ultimately, global unrest and instability. Like any industry, the travel and tourism sector depends on social and economic stability. But we recognize that achieving this goal requires us to do a better job of integrating young people into the workforce and giving them a real chance to act on their potential and make meaningful contributions to society.

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Every day, I see new hotels rising up in communities around the world. These properties support local economies but increasingly lack the skilled workers required to run them. With this trend projected to escalate, we are at risk of a global "talent gap" that could seriously impact the world's economy. At Hilton Worldwide alone, we have a development pipeline of over 950 hotels. Our industry needs to turn this youth bulge into a youth bonus so that we can match the business needs ahead of us. Fortunately, in the hospitality sector, we are uniquely equipped to do so.

Even as the global economy falters, the travel and tourism sector is gaining strength. The World Travel and Tourism Council has found that our industry is the single largest employer in world, accounting for more than 260 million jobs—nearly 10 percent of global employment. My very first job was at the Capitol Holiday Inn, where I worked in the engineering department, learning the more delicate points of hotel operations while, what else, plunging toilets. My ascent from there was no accident. I aspired to greater things and the ladder of success that the hospitality industry offered me—and has offered so many others—was crucial to my development. I started from the bottom, acquiring new skills along the way that prepared me for new roles and added responsibilities. This is our industry's unique role—we are the purveyors of meaningful career paths.

At Hilton Worldwide, we not only recognize the role we play, but also understand that becoming part of the solution to youth challenges around the world is both our business imperative and responsibility. That is why we have come together with the International Youth Foundation to address the vulnerable situations of youth around the world. Together we will provide support and resources to Hilton Worldwide properties so that they can support young people in their communities. Hilton Hotels & Resorts, our flagship brand, has committed in-full to supporting this call to action. The brand's *Bright Blue Futures* program engages Team Members and the public to provide stability and hope to youth in their communities around the world through skills training and workforce development initiatives. We want to develop and enrich relationships with local youth organizations that touch the lives of youth every day. And we're committed to collaborating with experts in the field as well as our peers to develop a reliable mechanism to monitor and evaluate our progress.

But we cannot do it alone. By working together, the public and private sectors, the NGO community and our industry, can make a real and lasting difference for youth around the world. We need to create company-wide strategies for youth development, and educate our stakeholders about the challenges facing our youth and their wellbeing. Join us. Help us write a brighter future for young people—and then watch the world thrive. **Y**