

# Cross- Training Q&A: Benchmark Hospitality



**W**hile some hotel companies are just now testing the cross-training waters, others, like Benchmark Hospitality International, have embraced the practice for years. The Texas-based management company uses cross-training not only to create efficiencies, but to enhance the advancement opportunities of its 6,500+ employees. We spoke with Calvin Banks, Benchmark's director of training & development, to learn more.

**What led you to implement cross-training?**

Cross-training has always been a part of our culture. It was a natural fit as our focus is great service, and this is done through efficiencies. In addition, career growth and training are at the forefront of all we do. Our learning and development promise is "Benchmark Builds Futures." Cross-training is a vital part of building the futures of our team members.

**How has the practice affected employee engagement?**

Cross-training leads to higher engagement scores as employees feel the company really cares about their growth and development.

**How about service?**

Engaged employees deliver great service. Also, cross-training allows employees to see how their contributions affect the overall service. Simply put, they don't work in a silo. For example, a housekeeper cross-training at the front desk is able to see how the work they do as a housekeeper affects the front desk and the guests' check-in experience.

**Guest Satisfaction?**

Higher employee scores lead to higher guest scores. Cross-trained employees are engaged, knowledgeable, and confident, positively impacting the service they deliver and, ultimately, the guest experience.



Calvin Banks  
 Director of Training and Development,  
 Benchmark Hospitality International





### **Productivity?**

Productivity increases when employees are engaged. You also have a well-informed employee, which creates efficiencies. When things happen and you need someone to jump in, there are multiple team members who can pick up the slack. Imagine a banquet function that is short on servers. Instead of bringing in temps, you can reach out to your cross-trained servers to assist with the banquet. This not only creates a better experience for the guest, it also saves the organization money.

### **Employee turnover?**

Our employees know we are invested in them and, as long as there is a career plan in place, there is no need for them to look someplace else for advancement. However, we do see positive turnover — individuals moving to other positions and other properties within the Benchmark organization.

**Have there been challenges?**

Nothing is perfect. It costs money and time to cross-train. However, we understand that an investment in our employees' future is an investment in the property and the organization.

**In your experience, are there certain jobs/functions that pair particularly well?**

Most hourly positions lend themselves well to cross-training. A few combinations to consider include front desk agents and reservations, banquet servers and restaurant servers, and concierge and front desk.

**What advice would you offer other hotels considering cross-utilizing employees?**

Understanding your employees is the key to cross-training. Not everyone can handle any position and you need to know who has the right skill set to take on an additional role. If you do so, at the end of the day, cross-training is a win-win for the employee and the company.

**Do you think cross-utilizing staff will become the hospitality industry norm?**

I believe it's the norm already.

**Author's Bio**

*Calvin Banks is the Director of Training and Development at Benchmark Hospitality International. He has more than two decades of experience within hotel management, food & beverage, and entertainment and has previously held roles at The Broadmoor in Colorado Springs and for Gaylord Hotels.*

*Mr. Banks is a Certified Hospitality Trainer through the American Hotel and Lodging Educational Institute, and a certified instructor through Development Dimensions International. He is a former president of the Council of Hotel and Restaurant Trainers, and he currently is a member of the Education and Certification Advisory Committee for the American Hotel and Lodging Educational Institute as well as the Department of Labor competency model panels for both the National Restaurant Association Education Foundation and the American Hotel and Lodging Educational Institute. Banks has been named a "40 Under 40 Rising Star" by Full Service Restaurant Magazine and received the Doctorate of Food Service Award from the North American Food Equipment Manufacturers Association.*