Women make up 70% of the hospitality industry—but hold less than 40% of its top positions. We’re closing that gender gap.
Dear SHA Family,

As I write this note, politicians, athletes, news anchors, and Hollywood big shots are making front-page news for sexual harassment; the government is rolling back women’s access to birth control and proposing dramatic cuts to programs critical to women’s well-being, like the National Domestic Violence Hotline. It reminds us how far we still have to go to achieve equality. And our own industry is part of the problem.

A few years ago, I attended a hospitality investment conference in Boston. When I entered the main hall, I was struck by the fact that over 90 percent of attendees were male. How could this be, when there are so many strong female leaders in our industry, and so many exceptional female students entering the workforce every spring?

While the majority of SHA students are female, the senior leadership of major hospitality firms is still primarily male, and the percentage of women in leadership roles decreases the higher you get to the top. Some believe that women leave the ladder to have children, while others think they’re not aggressive enough, or lack the skills they need, to reach the top. I do not accept these explanations. Yes, it is true that some women leave the industry to have families and return many years later, but that is not true for all women. Many stay in the workforce and are equally or more accomplished than their male colleagues, who tend to hold higher positions.

It is imperative for our industry to be a meritocracy and reward performance. Either our companies will change voluntarily, or we must pressure them to change. This undertaking will require industry-wide support and will not happen overnight. So, in the meantime, we are focusing on what we can do to ensure that our female students have the skills they need to break through the glass ceiling. SHA communication classes focus on teaching students to express themselves with confidence, our networking workshops help them connect with other strong industry professionals, and our 2017 5th Gear Shift symposium offered female students three days of training with some of our industry’s top female leaders.

We must do more to level the playing field. I promise to do my part to push forward, to help create a society in which everyone has an equal chance to succeed.

Best wishes,

Arun Upneja
**DOES AIRBNB STEAL GUESTS FROM HOTELS?**

Airbnb’s three million listings surpass the number of rooms offered by the world’s three largest hotel chains combined. In just five years, they’ve hosted 50 million people, which begs the question: Is Airbnb stealing guests from traditional hotels?

In Boston, the answer seems to be yes, according to research by SHA assistant professors Tarik Dogru and Makarand Mody, along with former assistant professor Courtney Suess-Raeisinafchi. Based on data from Airbnb and Smith Travel Research, they measured the impact of Airbnb on Boston hotels in the Boston hotel market between July 2008 and June 2017, and reported the results in an article for the School’s Boston Hospitality Review.

Since 2008, Airbnb listings in Boston have increased by more than 100 percent each year, according to the researchers. By analyzing room revenues, average daily rates, and occupancy rates for Boston-area hotels, they were able to tie this dramatic uptick in Airbnb listings to a 2.5 percent annual fall in overall hotel room revenues—a loss of $5.8 million in 2016 alone.

Dogru, Mody, and Suess-Raeisinafchi recommend more research to fully comprehend the implications for Boston hotels, and how to compete with Airbnb. Preliminary suggestions for fighting back include featuring more photos of rooms online and making traditional hotels family-friendly.—AARA EHRULICH

**MAJOR CHANGES**

**SHA ADDS NEW DEGREE AND THREE NEW CONCENTRATIONS**

Now more than ever, the hospitality industry demands professionals who can effectively market restaurants and hotels to customers and clients. Does Airbnb steal guests from hotels? 

Founded 2017, is open to all Boston University Invitational Consumer Behavior students.

When he was 17, Goldberg ('20) made it to the final round on the teen version of Food Network’s Chopped. He has cooked at restaurants in Connecticut, New York, and Boston, and in summer 2017, he interned at a top bakery in New York City. Goldberg thrives on challenge, working “in a field you truly can’t master,” he says. “There are so many types of cuisines and ingredients that you constantly learn new things.”

Goldberg found the kitchen after a high school basketball injury sidelined him from the game. Looking for an alternative to sports, he attended a cooking class at UMass Amherst. “I knew I liked to eat, so I figured the class was worth a try,” he says. “I loved it. The teacher gave us creative freedom in the final exam to make a dish of our choice, and I made a stuffed tomato.”

Goldberg promised his parents he wouldn’t get a job during school so he could focus on his grades and making friends, but soon he was itching to get back into the kitchen. He knew desserts were a weakness—after Chopped, he was “too frustrated to look sweets in the eye”—so he sought out internships that would teach him the principles of baking. During his freshman year, he joined the award-winning Sofra Bakery & Cafe, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, which specializes in Middle Eastern desserts, and was eventually transferred to Sofra’s sister restaurant, Oleana. In the summer of 2017, he continued baking at Barbalu in New York City.

Now, right, he’s all about cookies, since he made seven types per shift at Sofra. “I make cookies because they are small, easy to make, and I have a lot of different flavors,” he says. “I would never have known that I like to bake if it wasn’t for Chopped.”
As a 26-year-old market sales executive with Marriott International, Nancy Medoff was determined to join the company’s coveted Global Sales Organization. She cold-called the vice president and said, “I’d like to learn more about your team and what I can do to grow my skills so that when you have an opening, I’ll be considered.”

Medoff (CGS'89, SHA'92) asked thoughtful questions, attended the vice president’s team conference calls, and networked to learn more about the job she wanted. When a position opened, she was first in line.

Throughout her 24-year career with Marriott, she never waited for someone to offer her a job. “You can’t, because they won’t,” says Medoff, who held various director positions at the company. Now the vice president of global sales at BCD Meetings & Events, Medoff is among just a handful of female leaders in her industry. Women make up 70 percent of the international hospitality workforce, but they hold less than 40 percent of its managerial and supervisory positions. The picture is far more bleak on corporate boards, which are composed of 5 to 8 percent women. SHA Dean Arun Upneja wants to improve those numbers.

—cover story—

Women comprise 70% of the hospitality industry—but hold less than 40% of its executive positions. We’re closing that gender gap.

BY LARA EHRICH
ILLUSTRATION BY GWEN KERAVAL
Fern Kanter, to chair 5th Gear along with fellow industry leaders Andrea Foster and Andrea Foster, senior vice president of Marcus Hotels & Resorts, and recently named one of the 30 influential women in hospitality by Hotel Management magazine.

At the 5th Gear Shift symposium, Foster encouraged SHA students to see themselves as qualified for—and then apply for—their roles. She suggests students and alumni should regard job descriptions as wish lists; determine which criteria you meet, and then present examples of how you’ll achieve the skills and experience you lack. “Great things don’t come from comfort zones,” Foster says. “The biggest thing I took away from the conference was to not shy away from big jobs. You don’t have to know everything,” says Sara Szymanski (T’17), who has already put this lesson into action at her manager-in-training position at the Palace Hotel, a Luxury Collection property in San Francisco. “My boss will ask me to do something before the conference, I would’ve probably said, ‘No, I’m a little uneasy. Can I watch you do it?’ Now, I’ll jump in and say, ‘Yes, I can do it. And I probably have a few questions.’”

A boss like Szymanski’s, who encourages her to learn on the go, can be an invaluable mentor, says Medoff. She recommends women develop a “personal board of directors” who are familiar with your work and can coach you through major career decisions. To cultivate industry connections, Foster suggests taking advantage of the SHA and BU alumni networks, participating in industry events, and reaching out to alumni who have offered to serve as mentors. Follow up with handwritten notes, and check in occasionally to nurture those relationships. Foster says that when it comes to getting that job or promotion, “It’s not about who you know; it’s about who knows you.”

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Fern Kanter, executive vice president of CHMWarnick.

Support your staff however you can, and make yourself versatile—even storing bags in the bell closet. The bell staff are typically men; it’s powerful to see a woman in heels doing that job just as well as they do. This is one way to build rapport with the associates.”

Sara Szymanski (T’17), manager-in-training at the Palace Hotel.

“These lessons resonated with Szymanski, who has since changed the way she talks about her accomplishments. At a meeting for front office managers at the Palace Hotel, she shared a successful adjustment she made to the reservation process during a previous internship at the St. Regis New York. Instead of saying, “This is how we did it,” she told her colleagues, “This is how I brought the idea to the St. Regis.”

Upneja adds that companies should initiate mentorship and advocacy programs for women. For example, Hilton developed the Executive Committee Diversity Networking Program, in which 75 percent of the mentees are women, as well as established global programming like the 2017 Africa and Indian Ocean Women in Leadership Conference to empower women and appoint the company’s first female general manager in South Africa. Industry leaders should also be proactive in reaching out to female employees, Foster says. “Have lunch with them, talk with them, and engage with them to help them move forward in our industry.” Women in leadership positions are particularly well poised to help other women advance.

“The higher you get in an organization, the fewer women you will see in the boardroom,” Medoff says. Once you get there, “If there are 8 seats at the table, you need to sit in the perimeter of the room, women will wait for those 8 seats at the table to be taken. I won’t. I’m going to sit at the table with everyone else, and if there’s a woman with me, I will have her sit right next to me.”

Balancing work and family becomes a major challenge for women in particular, because of the perpetuation of traditional gender roles. Women still often serve as the primary caregivers for families, despite their expanded activities outside the home,” former Assistant Professor Zoe Ho wrote in a 2013 study published in SHA’s Boston Hospitality Review. “Many of those interviewed (for the study) indicated that their careers reached a point where they were forced to decide between a family and career advancement.”

Suzanne Markham Bagnara didn’t have to make that choice when she was raising three stepchildren and working as a general manager at Holiday Inn Hotel & Suites, Staybridge Suites, and Holiday Inn Express. She was on the front line of organizations that never closed; if there was an incident at 3 a.m., it was her responsibility to resolve it. With careful planning, organization, and communication, she was able to juggle both work and family.

Foster and Fern Kanter, to chair 5th Gear Shift: Women Navigating & Powering Your Career. At the two-day symposium in March 2017, hospitality experts shared career advice and strategies to improve students’ communication skills, build their confidence, and achieve work-life balance. “We want our students to learn from the experiences and achieve work–life balance. “We want...
STIPO WAS ALWAYS AROUND FOOD, FROM HIS MOTHER’S HOME COOKING TO GROWING UP IN A BIG ITALIAN FAMILY IN MEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS, VINCENT TIPS FROM THE TOP. DESSERT GUY BROKE DOWN CRYING IN THE MIDDLE OF A BUSY SERVICE ONE SATURDAY WATCHING THE FOOD LINE. AND ONE DAY I GOT MY OPPORTUNITY WHEN THE SALAD-AND-CASH-PAYED DISHWASHER, “STIPO (‘08) SAYS. “I WAS SPRAYING DISHES AND SECRETLY WATCHING THE TABLE THAT NEEDED THEIR NEXT COURSE FIRED BECAUSE I WAS WATCHING THE BUTCHER BREAKING DOWN A WHOLE PIG.”

AFTER EASTERN STANDARD, HE WAS ASSISTANT MANAGER AND BEVERAGE DIRECTOR FOR THE HIGH-END DOWNTOWN-AT-371 COMM AVENUE, THEN BEVERAGE MANAGER AT VERNICK FOOD & DRINK IN PHILADELPHIA, WHERE HE SOON EARNED ACCLAIM AS HEAD BARTENDER—even striking a promotional deal with a brand of Moscow Mule mix that put his face on the label.

NOW, HE USES HIS RESTAURANT EXPERIENCE AS A REAL ESTATE AND HOSPITALITY CONSULTANT FOR MSC RETAIL, A PHILADELPHIA-BASED COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE FIRM, HELPING EATERY OWNERS FIND THE RIGHT SPACE IN THE RIGHT LOCATION TO SUCCEED.

“RESTAURANTEURS ARE EXPERTS IN HOSPITALITY AND HAVE A PASSION FOR THEIR PRODUCT, AND MY JOB IS TO ENSURE THAT THEY SIMULTANEOUSLY MAKE EXPERT BUSINESS DECISIONS,” HE SAYS.

RESTAURANTEURS WANT TO WORK WITH HIM, HE SAYS, BECAUSE HE SPEAKS THEIR LANGUAGE AND CAN OFTEN SEE A PROBLEM BEFORE THEY DO. HE HELPS THEM SCOUT LOCATIONS, NEGOTIATE LANDLORD RELATIONSHIPS, AND EVALUATE BUILD-OUT PLANS SO ESSENTIALS LIKE FOOT TRAFFIC, FRONT-AND-BACK-OF-HOUSE SPACE, AND PER-SQUARE-FOOT REAL ESTATE COSTS MATCH THE CONCEPT. “MARGINS FOR A FINE-DINING RESTAURANT ARE DIFFERENT FROM A CASUAL NEIGHBORHOOD RESTAURANT AND VERY DIFFERENT FROM A QUICK-SERVICE CONCEPT LIKE CHIPOTLE,” HE SAYS. “THEY MIGHT HAVE A GREAT CONCEPT BUT IT’S REALLY IMPORTANT TO MATCH THE ECONOMICS OF A CONCEPT TO A SITE.”

FOR EXAMPLE, HE SAYS, “IF A RESTAURANT OPENS A FINE-DINING, DINNER-ONLY RESTAURANT BUT THE SITE SITS IN A CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT WITH PEDESTRIAN TRAFFIC PEAKING FROM 9 A.M. TO 5 P.M., THEY MIGHT CONSIDER USING A BAG-NOON-TO-6 P.M. MODEL.”

HE COMBINES QUESTIONS WITH SURVEYS AND SOCIAL MEDIA, CAN REVEAL HOW TO SPOTLIGHT A HOTEL’S STRENGTHS. “ONE OF OUR HOTELS USED TO INCLUDE FOOD AND BEVERAGE SPACE IN ITS SQUARE FOOTAGE WHEN MARKETING, TO APPEAR LARGER FOR ACCOMMODATING MEETINGS,” KANTER SAYS. “NOW, THEY EMBRACE THEIR BOUTIQUE SPACE.” THIS ALLOWS THEIR SALES MANAGERS TO BE MORE EFFECTIVE, BY FOCUSING ON POTENTIAL CLIENTS WHOSE NEEDS ACTUALLY MATCH THE HOTEL SPACE.
ALUMNI OF THE YEAR

Winners are innovative and entrepreneurship-minded | BY ANDREW THURSTON

O ne works for a top craft brewer, the other founded a restaurant. The winners of the 2017 SHA Alumni of the Year awards share a strong entrepreneurial streak.

“In my mind, entrepreneurship does not just revolve around having your own business,” Dean Arun Upneja says. “You can be part of another organization and you can be very entrepreneurial in your approach and attitude and the way you’re working.”

Alumni of the Year Robert Vail (’85) has helped Boston Beer Company expand beyond its signature Samuel Adams line of beers, with brands like Twisted Tea and Angry Orchard. (His favorite product is Angry Orchard Stone Dry Cider, though it “depends on the weather, location, time of day, and who I am with.”) Vail joined the company 26 years ago as a brewery representative and has worked his way up through district and division manager roles. “I have been trusted to test and start many aspects of our company,” says Vail, who is director of innovation & commercializing.

The young alumni winner has focused her entrepreneurial talent on a new business. Shivika Kothari (CGS’13, SHA’15) is the cofounder of the 30,000-square-foot Meraaki Kitchen in Jaipur, India, which she says is one of the largest stand-alone restaurants in the country. Kothari credits her SHA education with allowing her to pursue her dream of starting a company.

“While teaching at the College, restaurateurs encouraged me to believe in myself and to work for what I wanted,” she says. “It opened my eyes to the endless possibilities that are out there and gave me so much clarity that within one month of graduation, I was sure about what I wanted to do.”

Upneja says the lesson for students hoping to emulate this year’s alumni winners is, “Whatever you are doing in your life, you’ve got to be entrepreneurial in your approach and attitude and you can be very innovative and entrepreneurship-minded.”

In addition to their entrepreneurial expertise, the alumni share a strong connection to SHA. Upneja says, Vail continues to visit and give to the School, and Kothari’s family has funded a student scholarship for an annual summer internship in India.
THE BOSTON UNIVERSITY
LOYALTY SOCIETY

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