

HOSPITALITY HEROES 2025

Real-world solutions
for attracting, hiring
and retaining top
hospitality talent



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Contents

Page 03 **Introduction**

Page 04 **Our Hospitality Heroes**

Matt Ford
Anneka Brooks
Sophie Bonnat
Caly Garcia
Lewis Spencer
Theo Watt

Page 13 **Conclusion**

Page 14 **Top tips to become a recruitment
hospitality hero**

Page 15 **Why Caterer.com**

Page 16 **Our solutions**

Introduction

Across the hospitality industry, one truth remains constant: people are at the heart of everything we do. Whether it's delivering exceptional guest experiences or building high-performing teams, success in hospitality starts with the right people.

But today, hiring and keeping great talent is more complex than ever. Businesses are grappling with staff shortages, shifting candidate expectations, and fierce competition for skilled workers. To remain competitive, employers must do more than offer perks – they must create purposeful, supportive workplaces where people want to build careers.

This report is designed to help hospitality employers meet that challenge head-on.

Hospitality Heroes 2025 shares practical solutions to the sector's most pressing people challenges. From enhancing your recruitment strategy to strengthening team culture and boosting retention, this report offers real-world advice from those doing it best.

We spoke with the teams at **MJMK Restaurants** – a collection of award-winning London restaurants, including Michelin-starred KOL, Casa do Frango, Lisboaeta, and **Fonda** – to uncover how they're attracting top talent and building resilient, values-led teams. Their people-first approach provides actionable insights for employers who want to thrive in a competitive and ever-evolving industry.

You'll hear from professionals working across the spectrum of hospitality – roles – from leadership and recruitment to front-of-house and kitchen teams. Their perspectives highlight both the day-to-day realities of modern hospitality and the key strategies that help great employers stand out.

Whether you're looking to fill roles faster, hire people who stay, or build a culture that drives performance, you'll find the advice and inspiration you need here.



Meet our Hospitality Heroes



Matt Ford
General
Manager
Fonda



Lewis Spencer
Head
Chef
Fonda



Aneka Brooks
Group
Operations
Director
MJMK



Calypso Garcia
Assistant
Restaurant
Manager
Fonda



Sophie Bonnat
People and
Recruitment
Officer
MJMK



Theo Watt
Head
Waiter
Fonda



Matt Ford
General Manager
Fonda

Matt is the General Manager at Fonda. Originally hailing from New Zealand before settling in London in 2011, Matt brings 15 years of hospitality management and expertise to Fonda, ranging from silver service to casual dining.

We discussed building a great team, listening to candidates, and adaptive recruitment. Matt shared, “My team are a big motivator for me. I enjoy coming to work, catching up with the team, and managing the robustness of each service. No two days are the same.”

The right people in the right roles

Matt has very clear views on recruitment. “The greatest recruitment challenge is finding the right people for any role. It’s a numbers game.”

“Currently, there are fewer candidates at all levels looking to join the industry. Many people have left hospitality since COVID. It’s very difficult to find team members who have the quality and experience we need for our team at the level of hospitality we work at.”

Be open and authentic

“You need to be crystal clear with candidates from the outset. Be open and genuinely care about what your new hires want out of a role. Look for people who share the same personal characteristics and core values – that’s a big drive for me when recruiting.”

For Matt, what makes a successful hire is shared values and team alignment.

“If people share the same personal characteristics, whether it be values, trust, integrity, and if they align with the team we already have, then we should be successful in integrating that new team member into our team.”

“You might not necessarily capture the perfect, finished article at the recruitment stage. Understand that you might need to put a lot of time and effort into a new team member entering your business, whether that be developing their skills or knowledge. Employers should be prepared to train and develop a new hire from onboarding into the next stage of their career, and then continuously to suit what you need for the role they were recruited for.”

Look after your people and reward them well

Matt emphasised the importance of retaining great people: “Our retention strategies focus on looking after our people, their work-life balance, fair compensation, and continuous training.”

“Be genuine in your approach and how you work with your team. Showing genuine care is a big part of looking after your people and keeping them. One of the most important benefits we have within Fonda is our ‘refer a friend’ scheme, where we offer a bonus to a team member if they bring someone new into our business.”

Listen to what candidates want

“I think it sounds a bit silly, but you need to listen to what candidates want. It’s no longer a dictatorship working in hospitality. It’s not a scenario of us having team members come in and we tell them what to do.”

“It’s very much we work as a team, and we work cohesively. To do that, we have to ask for their opinions and suggestions, then listen and act. There’s a need to be quite adaptive with all aspects of the business, whether it be the work-life balance or what’s required of them day to day.”



Be forward thinking when recruiting

“We’re constantly looking for new avenues and channels to attract talent. You’ve always got to be looking forward. You can’t just stay with the same platforms or processes for multiple years because the hiring landscape is constantly changing, and we have to be competitive.”

“What is special about recruitment and hospitality? I think the opportunity of meeting lots of new people and finding the right person. There’s something really rewarding when you find someone who is of similar culture and values.”

Your people are your biggest advocates

“How we look after the team, and how the team then goes out into the open world and talks about us as an employer is our biggest asset. When it comes to reputation, we have a great opportunity to leave an imprint on our guests and how we look after them, but it goes a long way to how we look after each other too. The team always come first.”



Anneka Brooks
Group Operations Director
MJMK

Anneka radiates passion for FONDA and the hospitality industry as a whole. Her journey started with waitressing and bartending, managing dining experiences in hotels and restaurants in the UK and France.

She believes in the emotional power of hospitality

"The most amazing thing about hospitality is that every day, someone comes into the restaurant to celebrate, forget, or share something special. Facilitating these moments is incredibly rewarding. If we focus on this, we will attract passionate individuals to the industry."

Be aware of the impact you're making

Anneka's focus is the strategic and cultural impact she can have on MJMK's teams and restaurants. She loves ensuring that the teams have everything they need to be happy and can make guests feel welcome.

Anneka's number one tip is care about your team. "Make sure they feel valued, are learning, and are excited to come to work. Listen to them, praise them, and focus on their strengths. Praise is addictive, and the more people receive it, the more they strive to improve. Spend time understanding how each person works and support them in their growth."

"What excites me the most about my role is the impact I can have on the teams and the restaurants. I love ensuring that the teams have everything they need and are happy at work, which in turn makes our guests feel welcomed."

How can we share that passion with the next generation?

"Engaging with the next generation is crucial. Hospitality is not just about serving dinner; it's about changing lives through interactions and experiences".

Anneka continues, "To effectively communicate the broader impact of hospitality, employers and managers should focus on storytelling that goes beyond technical skills."

"Highlight how hospitality professionals can create meaningful experiences, provide emotional support, develop critical interpersonal skills, offer dynamic career paths, and make a tangible difference in people's lives."

"Use real-life examples to showcase the transformative power of hospitality and engage potential recruits by sharing personal stories of how hospitality professionals have made a difference to them personally."



Sophie Bonnat
People and Recruitment Officer
MJMK

With a strong background in hospitality in the UK and Europe, Sophie is ideally placed to share her know-how on recruiting for new and existing hospitality businesses.

Passion and cultural fit

Passion and cultural fit are high on the list of things Sophie considers essential when hiring. She believes that technical skills can be taught but a genuine interest in making guests happy is crucial.

Sophie sees herself as a 'matchmaker', in her own words: "Helping to place the right people in the right jobs at the right restaurants". However, finding the right people takes time and in hospitality recruitment speed matters. Her solution? Embracing technology.

Leverage AI to recruit more efficiently

Whilst it's all about the people, Sophie believes there are ways in which businesses can streamline their recruitment processes, most notably by using AI.

"AI helps us quickly identify promising candidates by scanning for relevant keywords, especially when application volumes are high. It's streamlined our process and freed up time to focus on the human side of recruitment. I'm optimistic about the future of AI in enhancing our recruitment efficiency"

Explore the concept of "passion-driven" recruitment campaigns

Sophie believes that businesses should take ownership of their unique hospitality culture, showcasing their passions and how they align with candidates' core values.

"Feed into candidate's needs – highlight opportunities for personal and professional growth and share success stories of current team members who started at entry-level positions."



Reach candidates where they live

Online is where most candidates job hunt and their go-to place to see who's hiring. "Hospitality is a tough recruitment market, so businesses have got to reach candidates using engaging content that not only shows your business as a great place to work but also highlights the amazing benefits on offer."

"MJMK Restaurants actively promote our 50% employee discount and use live testimonials from our current team to emphasise the benefits and show potential hires who they could be working with."

"We target hospitality student and professionals on platforms like Instagram – and it works."

Use cultural storytelling

Sophie expanded on the social media aspects of recruitment. "Hospitality is about the people and the experiences we deliver. Creating content that captures our restaurant's unique work environment, coupled with our team's passion for creating exceptional guest experiences, are valuable ways to reach, and engage potential recruits."

"Be authentic, use real behind-the-scenes content, and be honest about what working with your brand entails. It's a really fun way to involve everyone in marketing your business and a way to showcase your existing teams, showing them how valuable they are."





Calypso Garcia

Assistant Restaurant Manager Fonda

From working at her aunt's street food stand at weekends to Assistant Restaurant Manager at Fonda, one of MJMK's newest restaurant, Calypso's career has flourished. Her enthusiasm for the industry drives her to give guests the most enjoyable experience possible.

Enjoy the challenge

Caterer.com asked Caly about her career path and why she chose hospitality. "I kind of accidentally got into the role by being the person that I felt like I needed to be for other people, and then kind of going from there."

Caly expressed her enthusiasm for the daily challenges working in a restaurant can present, and how she finds excitement in dealing with challenging guests, which she considers a unique opportunity to make a positive impact.

"I really enjoy inspiring and encouraging my team members and having a positive impact on someone's day, especially when they may have started their day on a negative note."

Remaining calm under pressure is what Caly calls her superpower. She draws parallels between her job and hobbies like gaming and puzzles. No matter how pressured the shift is, she can stay in control and help her team deliver outstanding service. "It's the idea of recognising that you can bring outside skills to work and use them to make someone's day better. I try not to get stressed."

Appreciate the environment

We asked Caly what excited her most about her role. "Fonda is a place that's quite special. It really values art and creativity, as well as high culinary standards. Just being a part of it and being able to teach people about art whilst also delivering really high standards is something that makes me, personally, really happy."

Have a positive mindset

As Assistant Restaurant Manager, Caly believes emotional support is vital in building and keeping a positive and engaged team. Her approach focuses on creating positive transformations in her team's work experience and offering support when they're having a bad day.

In hospitality, some days are harder than others. How does Caly tackle those? "I view workplace challenges as opportunities, not obstacles, and encourage those working with me to remain calm and stress-free, which sets a positive tone for the team, and we work through it together."

"I encourage employees to treat challenges like puzzles to be solved, fostering a problem-solving attitude in them. Make it fun and it stops being a challenge and becomes something to overcome and achieve."



Lewis Spencer
Head Chef
Fonda

A part-time hospitality job making salads and pizza prompted an unplanned career change, from construction to hospitality, and motivated Lewis, now Head Chef at FONDA into a role he relishes.

Lewis talked to Caterer.com about the challenges of finding new hires who understand the restaurant's goals and the importance of patience in the recruitment process.

He emphasises the need for flexibility, honesty, and integrity in attracting talent to the hospitality sector. He also stressed the significance of engaging with employees, showing genuine interest in their personal lives, and nurturing them, rather than just focusing on their work performance.

The challenges in attracting and recruiting talent

Lewis's personal experience of recruitment has shown that many candidates don't have specific knowledge about the restaurant industry. This can lead to missteps in the hiring process, and Lewis stresses the importance of taking time to find the right fit candidates, those who will ultimately enhance your brand.

"Everyone is unique and it's essential to consider individual differences. Be honest and avoid over-promising with candidates. Be transparent and straightforward in any communications and act fast to lock in your perfect candidates."

Nurturing the next generation of hospitality employees

1. Show an interest

Lewis explained: "Taking time to explain not just what tasks need to be done, but why they are important, is vital. Those extra moments spent with young talent will pay off in the future."

He continued, "At FONDA we show genuine personal interest in employees beyond their work performance. It matters to us that they are OK, both at work and outside the kitchen. We ask about their weekend, family, and personal interests and build meaningful connections."

2. Nurture career development

"Creating opportunities for mentorship as well as skill development and providing a clear career progression path within the restaurant are paramount. We want our new hires to succeed and thrive in an environment that nurtures their personal goals and aims within the industry. It's important to develop a supportive learning environment where employees feel comfortable asking questions."

3. Celebrate individual achievement

"Praise matters and we recognise and celebrate individual achievements and contributions. You can see people grow in a place where their input is seen and applauded. It's about demonstrating that we care about our team members as people, not just workers." Lewis believes that Fonda has created a positive, engaging work environment that attracts and retains talented young employees who feel valued and motivated.



Theo Watt
Head Waiter
Fonda

Theo loves the people aspect of working in hospitality. “It’s like being an actor, providing memorable experiences for guests and diners every shift. I value the social aspect, team camaraderie, and the satisfaction of creating a welcoming environment for everyone.”

For him, the role of people working in hospitality is to give guests the best experience possible and inspire the next generation to pursue a career in hospitality.

Finding the right employer

Theo emphasises the importance of finding employers who understand how to create great teams, recognize the need for flexibility, and value honesty and commitment. He believes the industry should share these values widely with potential recruits. “People in hospitality often have more than one job and appreciate employers who understand the need for a work-life balance; employers who make the adjustments to ensure that great team members stay in the industry.”

Create an environment that makes people smile

“Hospitality puts a smile on my face, because when people enjoy their time with us, when I enjoy my time at work, it affects not only the people you meet that come through the door, but the whole team too.” “There’s excitement and bustle working in hospitality and we’re doing something important, even if sometimes it doesn’t seem like it. There’s a real joy in working with a group of people who share your passion for providing excellent service.”

Become an employer of choice

Theo has some great suggestions on how to become an employer people actively want to work for:

1. Flexible scheduling

Build rotas that accommodate employees with multiple job commitments and encourage open discussions about time off and schedules. Support team members with other employments outside their hospitality work and recognise the importance of a work-life balance.

2. Build a compassion-centred culture

Prioritise empathy and understanding and provide emotional support during challenging shifts. Acknowledge the emotional labour involved in hospitality work.

3. Team building

Promote a collaborative, supportive atmosphere that recognises and celebrates individual contributions. Create opportunities for social interaction and team bonding.

By implementing these strategies, Fonda has created a workplace that aligns with Theo’s values of commitment, honesty, and compassion and a place he feels valued and respected.

Conclusion

In today's fast-paced and people-driven hospitality industry, successful recruitment is about more than just filling roles – it's about creating meaningful, lasting connections. By being transparent about job expectations, aligning benefits with what candidates' value, and showcasing your culture authentically, you attract people who genuinely want to be part of your journey.

But the work doesn't stop there. Investing in your team's development, listening to their feedback, and celebrating their contributions builds trust, loyalty, and pride. Hospitality thrives on energy, empathy, and shared purpose. When you foster an environment where individuals feel supported, valued, and inspired, you don't just hire talent – you grow future leaders.

Becoming a **Hospitality Hero** means committing to a people-first mindset at every stage of the recruitment journey. Whether you're a GM, recruiter, chef, or team lead, your impact shapes the experience of every team member and every guest. Use these insights not just as best practices – but as a foundation for creating a workplace that reflects the very best of what hospitality can offer.



Top tips to become a Recruitment Hospitality Hero

Attract with honesty and clarity

Make your roles and company culture visible, honest, and appealing to the right candidates.

- **Be upfront about job realities** – Ensure job specs are a realistic representation of expectations and challenges.
- **Be authentic** – Use behind-the-scenes content and be honest about what working with your brand entails. Involve your employees in telling your story.
- **Look at all aspects of your campaigns** – Evaluate your social presence, tone of voice, and use testimonials to bring your employer brand to life.
- **Explain your business mission and values clearly** – Candidates want alignment with their values; be transparent about your culture, goals, and opportunities.

Build a culture of belonging and advocacy

Great recruitment doesn't end with hiring – it's about creating an environment where people thrive and want others to join.

- **Use employee referrals** – Make it easy for your team to recommend others, backed by meaningful incentives and a positive internal culture.
- **Value your people** – Create a workplace where staff feel appreciated, understood, and supported in their growth. Take time to understand their individual working style and how it fits into your existing workflow.
- **Prioritise work-life balance** – Offer flexibility and accommodate the different lifestyles and priorities of your team.

Create a candidate-centric experience

Build trust and engagement from the very first interaction by putting the candidate experience front and centre.

- **Demonstrate genuine care** – show authentic interest in candidates personal and professional goals and communicate openly
- **Job interviews are a two-way conversation** – Encourage honest dialogue and make space for candidates to ask the questions that matter to them.
- **Are your benefits relevant to today's candidates?** – Regularly review your offer to ensure it meets current expectations and adds genuine value.

Engage and retain through leadership and learning

Retention starts with leadership. Focus on long-term growth, connection, and meaningful support.

- **Focus on positive reinforcement** – Celebrate achievements and strengths and make praise a regular part of your management style.
- **Active listening and support** – Check in regularly, take action on feedback, and provide tools for success.
- **Create meaningful connections** – Help team members understand their impact on guest experiences and the business as a whole.
- **Continuous learning and growth** – Make hospitality a career, not a stopgap. Invest in development and progression. Create a culture of ongoing learning and personal evolution.

Embrace smart, strategic recruitment tools

Maximise your efficiency and reach by using the right technology to support your recruitment.

- **Explore AI and ATS capabilities** – Automate where it adds value, streamline your process, and use data to match the right candidates quickly and fairly.

These strategies can help build a motivated, engaged, and committed team that feels valued and excited about their work.

Caterer.com – the hospitality industry's hiring partner

Transform your hospitality hiring

We are Caterer.com. We partner with you to deliver the hospitality talent your business needs to succeed. Our extensive network of industry partners ensures we spotlight your roles to relevant hospitality candidates. Helping you secure the people you need faster; we provide you with hiring insights, dedicated customer support and the latest tools throughout your recruitment journey.

For hospitality hiring that delivers, we are the name you can trust.

- Innovative JobTech to reach & engage the right candidates to your roles, **reducing cost of hiring.**
- Aggregator partners that drive **greater reach for your roles.**
- Build your talent pipeline by reaching a vast hospitality specific audience now. We partner with key industry organisations such as The Institute of Hospitality, Springboard, HR in Hospitality, HIT Scotland, Hospitality Titans, Catering Scotland, Choose Hospitality and we deliver our jobs feed directly into some of their sites, ensuring your roles are seen amongst their extensive hospitality audiences.
- Dedicated Account Management and Customer Success support.
- We actively partner with industry bodies, charities and organisations to promote the industry as a great place to work and champion the fantastic people within it.
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- Employer brand insights & support to help you elevate your brand.
- Regular sector insights & guidance through the Caterer.com Leadership Collaborative, an open community that pulls on joint forces to provide peer-to-peer support, insight and learning to help leaders navigate through challenge and drive team growth and development and business success.
- Access the largest specialist hospitality talent pool. With a database of **over 4.8 million profiles, each quarter an average 172k active jobseekers make over 1.7 million applications on Caterer.com, with over 4 million site visits.**

Hiring solutions

Enhance your hiring campaigns with our portfolio of end-to-end recruitment solutions:

Equality Boost

A diverse and inclusive workforce is key to strong business performance. Engage the right people for your roles in a diverse talent pool, by widening your hiring reach and taking new approaches to candidate targeting. Equality Boost can help you:

- Deliver a tangible impact on your DE&I strategy
- Extend your candidate reach into new and diverse talent pools
- Broaden the range of skills you attract to your business

Visibility Solutions

It's crucial you reach the talent you need ahead of the competition. Reach the right candidates first and build your team by targeting and attracting relevant hires. Our innovative Visibility Solutions can help you:

- Broaden the reach of your message
- Enhance your potential to grow applications
- Increase the relevancy of applicants

Programmatic

Find who you want, faster with programmatic targeting for a more efficient use of your high-volume hiring budget. Our sophisticated technology uses rule-based algorithms to distribute jobs to the best places throughout the entire web so you can pin-point the best candidates, quickly.

- Effortless integration with your ATS
- Only pay for the number of completed applications you receive
- Track performance in real-time and gain valuable insights to enable your campaign to be optimised quickly

CV Database

Take control of your hiring and find the ideal person quickly by using our CV Database to search over 4.8 million profiles. Using our intuitive search and filters, you can easily find and contact the most relevant people for your jobs.

- Save your searches and receive an email as soon as matching candidates register or update their profiles
- Get ahead of the competition and be the first to find candidates who may not have applied to your jobs
- Receive relevant candidates directly to your inbox

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