HYB26

The Hotel Yearbook
Foresight and innovation in the global hotel industry

HYB

SX = GX. Square!

Staff experience

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Mark Fancourt, Co Founder and Principal Consultant at TRAVHOTECH, argues that the guest experience can only be as strong as the staff experience behind it, and that 2026 must be the year the industry finally treats SX = GX = $ as a real strategy, not a slogan. He calls out fragmented tech, context switching, and poor visibility as design failures that exhaust teams, and makes the case for tri-discipline leadership, integrated systems that give staff a 360° guest view, and tech that amplifies human service instead of replacing it.

WHY THE STAFF EXPERIENCE IS THE PLATFORM FOR CUSTOMER SUCCESS IN 2026

It doesn't take an Einstein to grasp the direct, fundamental relationship between the quality of the Staff Experience (SX) and the ultimate delivery of the Guest Experience (GX). The equation is simple, absolute, and long overdue for universal acceptance: SX = GX. Yet, for decades, this wisdom has been the industry's single greatest hypocrisy. While every leader echoes the sentiment, strategic action consistently dictates a painful, costly sacrifice of the SX.

As we prioritize the GX above all else—often through narrow, siloed technology investments—we systematically introduce chaos, inefficiency, and friction into our operations. This broken design philosophy impacts job roles, industry attractiveness, and ultimately, compromises the very guest experience we seek to elevate.

2026 must be the year we commit to a strategic course correction. The only way to win the ongoing talent war, ensure operational fit & ecosystem, and deliver differentiated service and revenue growth is to prove and maximize the equivalence: SX = GX = $.

DESIGNING FOR FAILURE

The current operational landscape is plagued by two persistent design failures rooted in a lack of operational know how:

1 THE TECHNOLOGY TAX ON LABOR

Technology is often acquired to solve a narrow, guest-facing problem but is rarely integrated into the whole Technology Ecosystem strategy . This results in a heavy Fragmentation Tax on our teams:

- **Context Switching:** Staff must constantly jump between multiple, often non-integrated applications, leading to distraction, fatigue, and errors.
- **Manual Reconciliation:** Automated systems often fail to communicate with core platforms (PMS, POS, ERP), forcing employees to manually input data, negating any perceived automation gain and violating the principle of Integration vs. Interfacing.
- **The Service Erosion Paradox:** Staff are relegated to troubleshooting technical shortcomings and performing low-value administrative tasks, eroding their professionalism and diluting the very accountability and commitment they were hired to provide.

2 THE GREAT VISIBILITY DISCONNECT

We constantly strive for seamless alignment in the guest experience, yet we continue to structurally segregate the staff experience. This creates a contradiction where our most passionate employees are actively hindered by the technology and process environments we give them.

A travel agent often possesses visibility into all of their customer's plans across a trip. Does the typical hospitality professional have the same visibility and opportunity to monitor and improve a guest's experience across a property or stay? No. This lack of a 360-degree view stifles the fundamental professional satisfaction great hospitality employees gain from exceeding expectations. When data is siloed, the staff member's intent to serve is disconnected from their ability to act.

This dual problem—technological fragmentation coupled with a profound Visibility Disconnect—is the great accelerator of job dissatisfaction and industry turnover.

PRIORITIZING SX FOR COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

To reverse this trend, industry leaders must adopt a new design philosophy that views the SX not as a cost center, but as a critical lever for Competitive Advantage and revenue growth.

1 REQUIRE TRI-DISCIPLINE EXPERTISE AT THE TOP

Leaders directing strategy and investment must possess deep background and tri-discipline expertise—the rare simultaneous understanding that comes from a blend of:

- **Operational Know How**: Understanding the true day-to-day workflow and guest-facing reality of the hospitality product.
- **Technology Delivery**: Knowing the actual difficulty and technical requirements of implementation and integration.
- **Business Strategy**: Aligning technology deployment with a clear long-term vision and Strategic Asset Management principles.

This combined knowledge, experience, and perspective is non-negotiable for making informed, non-sacrificial investments.

2 DESIGN FOR AMPLIFICATION, NOT REPLACEMENT

The philosophy must shift from automation for cost savings to technology for human amplification.

- **Enable Visibility and Revenue Growth:** Invest in integrated platforms that provide the staff member with the necessary 360-degree guest visibility (e.g., enterprise CRM, integrated service management). This simple act of connecting data immediately amplifies the employee's ability to act on their professional impulse, enabling not just passive service but active engagement in value-added activities and revenue opportunities.

- **Empowerment through Tools:** The technology's job is to handle transactional elements and surface actionable insights (the "what") so the employee can focus on empathy and solutioning (the "how"). This immediately elevates the job role to one of high-touch service delivery and genuine connection, cultivating a "servant's heart" and improving talent retention.

3 ANCHOR SUCCESS IN INTERNAL ACCOUNTABILITY
Every technology project must carry Performance Management metrics tied directly to the Staff Experience.

- **Demand Alignment:** The implementation process must establish clear accountability and responsibility for the technology's adoption and performance at every level, ensuring true execution.
- **Discerning Application:** The strategic application of technology must be intrinsically aligned with the specific nature of the hospitality product. For high-touch service segments, the focus must remain on empowering teams; for transactional segments, a higher degree of automation may be appropriate.

The year 2026 presents an opportunity to course-correct a generation of flawed investment. By prioritizing the Staff Experience, we are not sacrificing the guest; we are finally putting in place the robust, cohesive, and human-centric infrastructure necessary for the realization of authentic, world-class hospitality and sustainable revenue growth.

Our's the future!