

Healthy Foods as a Wellness Trend for Any Hotel



I remember my early post-college days working for a Fortune 50 firm where there was limited regard for one's health. Meetings held in a haze of tobacco smoke; cholesterol and calories were mere words undeserving of their accounting ledger; and trans-fats weren't even known let alone demonized.

We've learned quite a lot in the past few decades when it comes to health and wellbeing. Science has illuminated a better way of living while society has in turn become more receptive to these findings. In other words, there is now a growing and mainstream demand for products and services that will increase one's vitality.

This is doubly true now that boomers are beyond their prime and are looking for every means possible to live to their fullest. As a member of this demographic, I too can attest that once you hit a certain sexagenarian age, money becomes far less important than time, and anything that is proven to extend the latter will be well worth the price.

Often a laggard on substantive, culture-wide trends or issues, the hotel industry was among the first to embrace the spa, recognizing the revenue potential of this guest-oriented amenity. Interestingly, the evolution of the spa acted synergistically – the more hotels that incorporated this feature, the more awareness of its benefits spread amongst the general populace, so much so that ‘spa’ is a commonplace term for relaxation and revitalization. From this as the bedrock, it was all but inevitable for more recent product differentiation to occur, all within the comfortable banner of ‘wellness travel’.

You Are What You Eat

Hospitality wellness does not just mean having an onsite spa or hosting the odd yoga event, it is a far more sweeping term that extends to all guests as well as all staff members for that matter. Finding the space for these facilities and getting the necessary capital for a renovation, however, isn’t something I’d recommend for limited-service, business-oriented or urban properties. The target customer doesn’t align.

You don’t have to rebrand as a destination spa. Instead, there are simpler ways to enter the wellness market. In a word: food.

Never have these words been more true. Wholesome living is having a profound effect on the industry, and it all revolves around your F&B team.

Now more so than ever before, people are striving to eat healthy and are seeking out establishments that cater to their system of beliefs. If you can appease this emergent bracket of consumers with new offerings and a guarantee of quality for your premier restaurant as well as your in-room dining (mini-bar and order-in menus), then it could easily morph into an additional revenue stream.

The first step is to get over the stigma that healthy food never sells. This isn’t entirely true. Guests want healthier options, but the problem is that the quick-and-now tendencies of our genetic makeup can overwhelm any drive for dietary perfection, especially when it comes to harried travel, hotel dining settings and unfamiliar, away-from-home cuisine.

It’s the same fundamental reason that proper weight loss dieting is so hard to sustain. We’re hardwired for junk food – that is, any calorie vehicle that delivers an instantaneous fix to replenish a brain’s sugar levels. And our brain craves sugar because this organ is metabolically deficient – it cannot process fat for energy, only monosaccharides and basic polysaccharides.

Most people have enough basic nutrition knowledge to understand that fruit is a better source of sugar than a candy bar and that a salad is better than a greasy burger. Unfortunately, junk food is too readily accessible. No prep time, no fear of decay; just pop the top and munch away.

To implement any new health-conscious facet of your operations is to first understand the chief obstacle of accessibility. When the human brain gets tired and cranky, it'll scrounge for sugar right away and you'll need a heavy dose of willpower to stop it from compelling your body to grab the closest source available. If that happens to be grapes, then the brain gets healthy sugars, but if it's a can of soda, the brain gets junk. Either way, the brain gets its fix.

For starters, the shelf life of fruit is a paltry fraction of that for candy bars and potato chips (read: preservatives), which means a hefty inventory replacement cost. This, plus fresh fruit and veggies can be significantly more expensive than the average piece of junk food. Preparation is also a more laborious task – as an example, compare mixing a salad to ripping open a bag of potato chips.

All told, these are pretty good reasons to back up the 'healthy food never sells' mentality. When junk is right there in front of you, it's irresistible.

Healthy F&B Tactics

Conquering this stigma begins with awareness – how you phrase and how you highlight such options. It's not just a minibar or room service, but an 'in-room dining experience'. This more illustrious and pleasing terminology has to be displayed in large, bold text and situated where guests are guaranteed to notice. Strategically placed brochures in the front lobby, above the minibar and on the bedside table are likewise a great start.

Next, do you provide your guests with healthy snacks upon arrival? It doesn't have to be anything as exuberant as a full spread in every room, but perhaps some light refreshments by the front desk. That'll make for a more social and enjoyable lobby atmosphere anyway. Or, given the on-to-go nature of business travelers, perhaps such guests could have the option of requesting a bowl of fruit to be placed in their rooms for an extra fee. Think quick, energizing food choices like bananas, oranges or freshly baked granola bars, all ready and in plain sight for the harried visitor.

Moving on to the menu itself presents even more opportunities to show off your healthier side. Salads are a no-brainer as are yogurt parfaits, smoothies, juices and cleanly prepared seafood. Not only do you want to offer these, but you'll want to consider giving a short explanation as to what your kitchen does

to make them particularly nutritious and beneficial when compared to regular foods. Start using buzz terms like organic, all natural, locally sourced, non-GMO, hormone free and bought fresh.

Additionally, there are subtle changes you can make to the classically unhealthy mainstays like pizza and burgers. For pizza, emphasize how your kitchen uses slightly more nutritious ingredients as whole wheat crust, high quality cheeses, fresh herbs and an abundance of vegetables. For burgers, highlight organic, free run or grass-fed meats and multigrain or breads made from anything but refined white flour.

The point is that there's always a way to spruce up your menu to appeal to a more health-conscious guest while not neglecting the junk food crowd. Moreover, these changes can be incremental, allowing you to test the waters quarter-by-quarter.

As nutritional awareness and healthy mindsets proliferate amongst consumers, this is definitely a topic to warrant consideration amongst your F&B management team. Wellness doesn't have to be a subject that's beyond reproach for properties outside of the four or five star resorts. Often, it is the small changes that will have the most impact, which is why I recommend food upgrades as a good starting point for anyone aspiring to rebrand in this direction.

A Healthy Team Means Healthy Profits

In tandem with the above argument in favor of healthy foods, there is now undeniable evidence linking one's eating habits and fitness routine with one's intelligence and drive for success. While there still is a genetic component at work, the bottom line is that the healthier you are, the more of your potential you will realize. If you dedicate yourself to living a healthier lifestyle with more omega-3 fats, a bountiful portion of green vegetables at every meal and less refined sugar, you will see a difference, both in your waistline and in your aptitude.

In this modern era we live in, where health is so much the focus of our everyday lives, it makes fiscal sense for organizations to improve the wellness of their employees so that the company can actualize the most of their potential. A healthy team means faster learners, less sick days and more efficiency across the board. Furthermore, a healthy change in company culture will reflect back on to your guests, helping them to see you in a more positive light.

As actions speak louder than words, I suggest you start by leading by example. If you initiate a change in your diet or your fitness routine without trying to dictate it onto others, people will come to admire you for your perseverance – especially when they see the results – and they will want to follow your lead.

Next is to reduce the temptations. You are what you eat, and you eat what you buy. It's all too easy to indulge when unhealthy options are readily available. Whether it's the treats that a colleague has graciously brought into the staff kitchen or the dessert items at the end of the cafeteria lineup, such temptations are everywhere, so much so that abstinence can zap any human's willpower.

Did you know that you are much more likely to eat the foods at the front of a kitchen cabinet than at the back? Simply moving the junk to the back of the cabinet will reduce its consumption. Out of sight, out of mind. Moreover, if someone brings in candies or another insulin-spiking food, don't leave them out on the counter. Your property's employee cafeteria is likewise a good place to think about removing bad choices from the equation.

Third would be piecemeal education. Giving someone a 400-page book on nutrition can be daunting, especially for those who are otherwise uninitiated in the cult of healthy eating. A brief article or tip passed around every day can be a far more effective reinforcement tool. And the best part is that you don't even need to come up with these on your own; there are dozens of resources already available on the web.

When bundling all these different F&B-related tactics together, it's easy to see that wellness is not just for boomers, spa-goers or millennials. It is an opportunity for all hoteliers to improve their business both externally and from within. Once you have reworked and mastered your foodservice delivery, then branch out to pursue other wellness ventures.

(Article by Larry Mogelonsky, published by [Today's Hotelier](#) on September 1, 2016).