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David A. Wernick
Siddharth K. Upadhyay

Does the U.S. Hospitality Market Offer Fertile Soil for Lemon Tree Hotels' Inclusive Business Model?

"It's true that some hotel companies have tried to include people with different abilities and incorporate them in the workforce. I do not think it has been very successful in any other hotel than Lemon Tree. It needs a lot of effort. The beauty is, once you implement it, then it's a flywheel."¹

— Patanjali Keswani, chairman and managing director, Lemon Tree Hotels

"We find that our entire team—not just those who are differently abled—but the entire team of 5,500 employees feel better engaged and more driven and more motivated because they work in a company which is so different and so inclusive."²

— Aradhana Lal, vice president of brand, communication and sustainability initiatives, Lemon Tree Hotels

It was not easy to catch Aradhana Lal by surprise. The vice president of brand, communication and sustainability initiatives for Lemon Tree Hotels Ltd., India's largest and fastest-growing mid-market hotel chain, was an industry veteran who felt she had seen it all during her two and a half decades in the industry. However, a conversation earlier in the day with Patanjali (Patu) Keswani, the company's founder, chairman, and managing director, had truly caught her off guard. Keswani stopped by her office on the way to lunch and dropped a bombshell: He was considering expanding Lemon Tree's international footprint by entering the U.S. market. That was certainly a stunner, given that the COVID-19 pandemic had brought the global hospitality industry to its knees. The real surprise, however, was what came next. The boss told her he wished to replicate Lemon Tree's highly acclaimed human resources (HR) strategy Inclusion Program in the U.S. market and wanted her advice on whether such an idea was feasible.

The Inclusion Program focused on hiring large numbers of people with physical and intellectual disabilities and people from other socially marginalized groups, including orphans, survivors of acid attacks, and members of the transgender community, and putting them to work throughout various areas of hotel

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