

Today's hospitality industry has a surplus of male role models but very few female. Keen to discuss the problem and tackle further gender issues, *Caterer* put together a round table of female industry experts. *Tom Vaughan* reports

THE RELUCTANT ROLE MODELS

There's no denying that the upper echelons of the hospitality industry is male-dominated. *CatererSearch's* guide to the Top 100 most powerful people in hospitality this year featured just four women, of whom only one, Robyn Jones, was not a joint entry with a male partner.

However, statistics from travel and hospitality recruitment company New Frontiers shows that of its registered general managers 70% are female. Furthermore, 62% of registered food and beverage managers are female, as are 72% of registered revenue managers, 72% of conference and banqueting managers, 72% of finance managers and 68% of sales directors.

So why are men traditionally seen as the movers and shakers of hospitality? Why is

there a shortage of female role models in the industry? And how can women be encouraged to work in hospitality? With these issues in mind, a group of female luminaries from the world of hospitality and tourism met last week for a round-table debate organised by *Caterer* in association with Shine, bespoke coach-mentoring services and organiser of the Shine awards, recognising women in the travel, tourism and hospitality sectors.

The lack of female role models was one of great importance, the panel decided. However, the first question raised was who decides whether someone is a role model. "There is an issue of visibility. Women often aren't seen as role models despite being highly placed in the industry. We know who these people are but the industry at large often have no idea they exist," said Petra Clayton, director of marketing and communications of HCIMA.

Gaby Marcon, joint managing director of Shine, feels it's women's reluctance to promote themselves that's partly responsible for this deficit. "I know a female general manager who has been in her position for 10 years and is a great role model to her staff, but as soon as I asked her whether she would apply for the Shine awards she went coy. Men are much better at promoting themselves," she said.

"The idea of self-publicising oneself is difficult," said Pippa Isbell, vice-president of public relations for Orient-Express Hotels.

SHINE AWARDS 2007

The Shine Awards recognise women in travel, tourism and hospitality who have made a significant contribution to the industry. Now in their fourth year, the awards are designed to raise the general profile of women in travel, tourism, and hospitality, provide role models for other women in the sector and promote and attract more female talent into the industry.

The nomination deadline is 22 December, after which judging will take place by a panel of industry professionals including Bob Cotton, chief executive of the British Hospitality Association, Sandie Downe, communication and strategy director of VisitBritain, and Philippe Rossiter, chief executive of HCIMA. Nomination forms from www.shineawards.com.



ROUND THE TABLE

With *Caterer* features editor **Helen Adkins** were:

- **Pauline Jackson**, commercial manager, Restaurant Association
- **Petra Clayton**, director of marketing and communications, HCIMA
- **Jane Renton**, general manager, Jumeirah Lowndes
- **Kristina Wallen**, managing director, Harp Wallen Executive Recruitment
- **Judy Gannon**, senior lecturer human resources, Department of Hospitality, Leisure & Tourism Management, Oxford Brookes University
- **Pippa Isbell**, vice-president of public relations, Orient-Express Hotels, Trains & Cruises
- **Julia Feuell**, chairman, Association of Women Travel Executives
- **Gaby Marcon**, Shine People & Places
- **Vicky Wood**, student in hospitality management at Sheffield University

Above: Kristina Wallen
Above right, from top:
Julia Feuell, Pippa Isbell
and Jane Renton

"To a certain extent women are worried about pushing themselves forward too much and thus having a detrimental effect. It's often the case that after heated management meetings men go into the boss's office to reinforce their points while women don't feel they can."

One topic very applicable to the lack of women at the highest levels of hospitality is the difficulty of juggling a young family with the demands of working in the hospitality industry. Jane Renton, general manager of Jumeirah Lowndes hotel in Knightsbridge, believes a family can be the death knell of many a promising female career: "I think we've broken the barrier of equal opportunities, and we are as able and committed as men," she said. "However, I know very few female general managers because often they have chosen family commitments above career progression."

According to Isbell, a good illustration of this point is the low number of female food and beverage managers. "Traditionally it's a route into becoming a general manager, but the period when one's career might encompass this role often coincides with the age when many women might be starting a family," she said. "So we see much fewer females progressing beyond that point."

One important factor is that women look more for a work-life balance compared with men, who will focus more on the long term

and where their career path is leading. "When you look at career paths of men in the CatererSearch Top 100 they're all extremely structured," said Clayton.

There can also be a reluctance with women to see themselves as role models, said Judy Gannon, senior lecturer on hospitality at Oxford Brookes University. "A high-ranking female who has not followed a structured career path to get where she is can believe that because she has muddled her way to the top she will not be a help to others, which is completely wrong."

So what's the answer to the shortage of role models? Petra Clayton is fairly certain: "We need to define what a role model does," she said. "Women are in the mind-set that a role model constitutes Gordon Ramsay when he's on the front cover of *Caterer*. It's not the case: any senior woman can be a role model. As an industry we need to stop being so cliquy and open up our contacts to other sectors and bring into the limelight other women who aren't necessarily well known to the industry."

Marcon agreed: "We've got to provide role models from a wide area and get industry practitioners to talk to young female staff and tell them that the upper levels of the industry aren't closed to them. The message has to be that there isn't a glass ceiling for women in this industry"

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