



Key food-and-beverage (F&B) industry leaders pose for a group photo with Secretary for Labour and Welfare Matthew Cheung Kin-chung (seventh from right) at a roundtable on job recruitment in Hong Kong on July 22. The conference heard that the local F&B sector not only creates new career opportunities, but also generates enormous economic benefits for Hong Kong. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

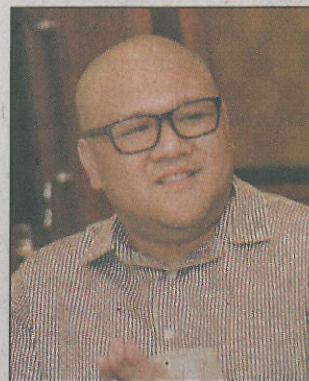


Matthew Cheung Kin-chung, secretary for labor and welfare



Anna Chau Lai-li, chief executive officer at King Parrot Group

F&B leaders move to shore up industry's image



Ronnie Cheng Hong-wang, business development director at Lab Made



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Food-and-beverage (F&B) industry players should utilize the qualification framework to provide a career path ladder, promote a job role model, endow job rotation and adopt flexible employment policies, and diversify the labor pool so as to alleviate the sector's labor shortfall, panelists urged at a roundtable on job recruitment in Hong Kong.

"Restaurants play a vital social function in Hong Kong as they provide a platform for bonding relationships when people interact with their par-

treasure work-life balance more in their career planning.

Second, the image of working in restaurants is usually associated with tedious manual work, low educational standards, and the lack of a career path ladder. All these factors reinforce a negative social perception of the industry. In due course, parents and local schools will not encourage their children or students to choose the industry as their first-career priority.

A deficiency of qualification framework in the industry also deters young people from joining the industry, worried they could not improve their positions by obtaining any professional qualifications.

(VTC) Group formed in 1982, said the VTC supports the professional development of the F&B industry.

"The VTC offers certificate, diploma, high diploma and even degree courses to provide a full spectrum of knowledge involved in the F&B industry. The knowledge involves academic subjects such as food science and operation management, as well as soft skills, including problem-solving procedures and cultivating team spirit," she said.

However, sometimes, it's not easy to enforce qualification training in the industry due to conflict of interest.

"Staff unions are worried

sador" for recruiting restaurant waiters. But, after five days, these newly-recruited staff decided to quit telling us it was just a manual waiter's job," said Wong.

Other roundtable panelists suggested the second recipe — the F&B industry must create some sort of celebrity chefs as role models to attract youngsters to the industry.

Showcasing culinary skills

"See how the UK cements the role model image of Jamie Oliver as the world-renowned celebrity chef. Hong Kong should organize more shows to showcase the culinary skills of the city's chefs. This is a pro-

Maxim's Caterers Ltd, said the company is "leveraging the different food brands within the group to create job rotation and culinary competition to entice employees' commitment to the company."

Maxim's Caterers is the bakery section of Hong Kong Maxim's Group formed in 1956 that specializes in Chinese, Asian and European restaurants, quick service restaurants, bakery shops and institutional catering.

So agreed that having a job role model can help lure young people to the industry. "How to make F&B workers feel respected and feel they have contributed to society is essen-



Victor Lee Sze-kuen, executive director at Hong Kong Management Association



Rebecca Kwan Suk-hua, general manager of Lan Kwai Fong Hotel@Kau U Fong



Simon Wong Kit-lung,
executive director at local
restaurant chain LHGroup



Tommy Chan Ka-keung,
deputy general manager at Tai
Hing Worldwide Development



Winnie Ngan Suk-yin,
principal of Hotel and Tourism
Institute, Chinese Culinary
Institute and International Culinary
Institute under the Vocational
Training Council Group



Henry Yip Cheuk-tak,
Hong Kong and new markets
chief executive at Jardine
Restaurant Group

and diversify the labor pool so as to alleviate the sector's labor shortfall, panelists urged at a roundtable on job recruitment in Hong Kong.

"Restaurants play a vital social function in Hong Kong as they provide a platform for bonding relationships when people interact with their parents, peers and friends," Secretary for Labour and Welfare Matthew Cheung Kin-chung said in his opening address.

The industry not only has a social responsibility, it creates enormous economic benefits for Hong Kong, he said.

The F&B sector — one of the city's major business segments contributing to employment — currently employs 242,000 people in the city, accounting for 6.3 percent of the local workforce and representing a 25-percent hike in labor recruitment over the last decade.

The Census and Statistics Department (CSD) says total income receipts from restaurants rose 1.9 percent year-on-year to HK\$26.6 billion in the first quarter of 2016. In the past five years, annual increases in restaurants' income ranged between 3.5 percent and 6.4 percent.

"From January to June, there were 662,200 new job offerings filed by the Labor Department, whereas the F&B industry takes up 17 percent of the total number, representing an increase of 10 percent from a year ago," said Cheung.

At the roundtable conference, held on July 22 by recruitment service provider Recruit, and co-organized by the Hong Kong Management Association (HKMA) and China Daily Hong Kong, government officials, industry players and vocational training institute officials exchanged views on rolling out a blueprint to stimulate employment in the industry segment.

Panelists agreed that the unique working pattern, a negative industry image, and a lack of qualification framework essentially impede labor recruitment in the industry.

Firstly, working in the F&B sector usually requires long hours and shift work that discourage young people from entering the industry, as they

not encourage their children or students to choose the industry as their first-career priority.

A deficiency of qualification framework in the industry also deters young people from joining the industry, worried they could not improve their positions by obtaining any professional qualifications.

These obstacles explain why labor shortage in the F&B industry is becoming more serious.

Job offers in the F&B business reached a high of 13,831 in 2014, but the number of employed people in the sector did not rise in the corresponding period, indicating that the labor mismatch problem is rampant.

Improving recruitment

Various industry practitioners told the conference that labor recruitment in the F&B industry should be improved with the following recipes — utilizing the qualification framework and providing a career path ladder, promoting a career role model, creating job rotation experience and adopting flexible employment policies, as well as diversifying the labor force.

"Restaurant chefs in Hong Kong too often rely on hand-on experience to perform their jobs. Restaurant management should consider incorporating work-based learning, thus enabling work experience to become a systemic criterion to evaluate job performance," HKMA Executive Director Victor Lee Sze-ken suggested.

"We encourage our staff to take higher diploma courses to encourage staff's life-long learning and help retain them," said Henry Yip Cheuk-tak, Hong Kong and new markets chief executive at Jardine Restaurant Group (JRG) — a member company of Asian-focused business conglomerate Jardine Matheson Group, which operates such well known food-brand outlets as Pizza Hut, KFC and PHD in Hong Kong and selected Asian markets.

Winnie Ngan Suk-yin, principal of the Hotel and Tourism Institute, the Chinese Culinary Institute and International Culinary Institute under the Vocational Training Council

science and operation management, as well as soft skills, including problem-solving procedures and cultivating team spirit," she said.

However, sometimes, it's not easy to enforce qualification training in the industry due to conflict of interest.

"Staff unions are worried that launching a qualification frameworks may provide an excuse for employers to recruit outsiders. Employers also worry that the provision of qualification training may encourage more staff to leave the company after they've obtained the relevant qualifications," said Simon Wong Kit-lung, executive director at local restaurant chain LHGroup.

Designing a proper qualification is the first step, and what needs to be done next is to "educate" parents and school masters in Hong Kong that a career path in the F&B industry is worth seeking.

"Many local schools, in launching their life-planning education, may not invite representatives from the F&B industry to 'sell' the career prospect to the students," Wong said.

JRG's Yip said the "Earn and Learn Pilot Scheme for the Retail Industry", jointly launched in mid-2014 by the VTC, the Hong Kong Retail Management Association and the Commerce and Economic Development Bureau, does not provide promotion opportunities for the F&B industry.

The government-subsidized pilot program provides vocational education to support the initiations in the 2014-15 Budget to promote youth employment through the VTC's structural classrooms.

"The industry category under this pilot scheme does not include the F&B industry. Employers in the industry cannot join the pilot program to enhance their working skills while receiving government subsidies," Yip noted.

Although the F&B industry is gearing up to polish its image, it must face the hard reality.

"We should avoid too much fancy in our promotion work, otherwise, young people may feel they're being deceived. At one time, our company used the frenzy term "service ambas-

ters to the industry.

Showcasing culinary skills

"See how the UK cements the role model image of Jamie Oliver as the world-renowned celebrity chef. Hong Kong should organize more shows to showcase the culinary skills of the city's chefs. This is a promotional campaign to attract young people and make them feel that being a chef can be respected in our society," said Tommy Chan Ka-keung, deputy general manager at Tai Hing Worldwide Development, a catering business group that operates a portfolio of food brands, including the Hong Kong-style tea restaurant Tai Hing.

Hong Kong-style tea restaurants, or *cha chaan tengs*, Chinese restaurants and fast-food chains are the top three food outlet categories in Hong Kong, accounting for 15.2 percent, 13.7 percent and 9.5 percent, respectively, of the city's food dining market by the end of last year.

"We all know that being a good role model in the F&B industry is imperative for young people to emulate. Together with an adequate qualification framework, it can convince young people that the industry is not just about manual jobs," said Ronnie Cheng Hong-wang, business development director at Lab Made — a liquid nitrogen ice-cream maker in the city.

The third strategy — enhancing job rotation and adopting a flexible employment policy — was also on the agenda.

Rebecca Kwan Suk-hua, general manager of Lan Kwai Fong Hotel@Kau U Fong, recalled how the boutique hotel group had provided customized solutions to retain staff.

"We once had a bar manger who had submitted his/her resignation letter. We tried very hard to retain the employee by offering rotational on-the-job training through three different hotels on the mainland. We also allowed this bar manger to use his signature drinks at hotel cocktails to enhance his/her job satisfaction. A video film was also made to record how signature drinks were made to satisfy the employee," Kwan recalled.

Patrick So Hung-kee, cakes and bakery general manager at

and European restaurants, quick service restaurants, bakery shops and institutional catering.

So agreed that having a job role model can help lure young people to the industry. "How to make F&B workers feel respected and feel they have contributed to society is essential for retaining workers in this industry."

"Young employees want to explore every opportunity, so we rotate the job duties to motivate them. We provide cross-sector staff training in various job positions — reception, bar and kitchen (Western and Chinese cuisine) — to keep them not feeling bored," said Anna Chau Lai-li, chief executive officer at King Parrot Group — a catering enterprise providing Chinese, Asian and Western cuisines in Hong Kong.

Partnership image

"Young people do not merely want to be regarded as restaurant waiters, they want the management and customers to treat them as partners," she added.

Korean and Japanese-styled restaurants, Western cuisine (French and Spanish) restaurants, as well as coffee shops, have recently mushroomed in the city's culinary scene, with the number of Korean restaurants and coffee shops having surged 50 percent and 32 percent, respectively, in the last five years, according CSD data.

Besides rotational job training, a flexible employment policy is vital. Labor Secretary Cheung urged employers to consider granting more routine working hours to help retain staff.

"Employers can rotate their staff for a five-day week at least once a month. This is useful for staff retention, especially when young people wish to have more spare time on weekends," he said.

Diversifying the labor mix can also be considered, especially when a large pool of female and elderly workforce is hugely untapped.

"Many women in Hong Kong can be employed to work in some rotational time-shifts when employers cannot find young people to fill up the time



Rebecca Kwan Suk-hua,
general manager of Lan Kwai
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Joyce Mak Man-mei,
Ginkgo House
chief executive officer



Patrick So Hung-kee,
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manager at Maxim's Caterers Ltd

slots," Cheung said.

Ginkgo House — a Western and Chinese restaurant company formed in 2005 with three outlets — pledged to provide employment for the elderly, with its 80 percent of its staff being elderly people.

"We found that the elderly, aged between 55 and 79, are more stable in their jobs. Our elderly employees are valuable assets to us as they can act as mentors to train our 20-percent youngster staff," Ginkgo House's Chief Executive Officer Joyce Mak Man-mei said.

"Once we've tackled the labor shortage problem in the F&B industry, Hong Kong's status as an international culinary capital can march on to a new level," HKMA's Lee said.

As of March this year, there were 16,516 culinary service providers in the SAR — a slight decrease of 0.3 percent from a year ago — according to the CSD.

