

[ADVERTORIAL]

RIGHT PLACE,

Wesley Buitenhuis and Annette van den Heuvel are hospitality experts. Together, they run Attend, a company that specialises in optimising the visitor experience.



RIGHT SMILE

The Amstel Hotel is an excellent example of true hospitality, and has been for 150 years. This mindset is shared by all of their in-house employees, and when the company needs reinforcements, they choose their partners carefully, partners like Attend, which specialises in hospitality. 'Hospitality used to be reserved for the higher segments,' explains Wesley Buitenhuis, CEO of Attend. 'Take butlers, for example, who were hired to cater to their employers and their guests, or well-trained receptionists at banks. The hierarchy among the people who were then referred to as 'servants' has been dismantled over the years. That structure became flatter over time, which gave employees the opportunity to inject their own identities into the company and share their opinions. This, in turn, enhanced the service level,' he explains. 'Hospitality has to be part of your DNA,' adds Annette, who is responsible for business development. 'It can't be learned. At Attend, we match employees to our clients. A receptionist who welcomes guests in an office building is not necessarily the right pick for a Michelin-starred restaurant. This requires an entirely different set of skills. We carry out in-depth interviews together with the client to determine the culture of the organisation, the competencies they're looking for in a candidate and the qualities they find important. We then launch a careful search and selection process. We also want to determine whether we share the same norms and values as our client. Sometimes we come to the conclusion that we're not a match. We deliberately choose to work with companies that share our vision of hospitality in order to make the best possible contribution.'

MAKING THE DIFFERENCE

'Over the past five years, we've noticed the importance of distinction, of standing out from the competition,' explains Wesley. 'People make the difference and companies want to offer immersive experiences. That interest in guest experience and well-being must be shared by all employees. We expect our people to take on the identity of the company. If you work for the Amstel Hotel, for example, you are expected to share their philosophy and vision, to really become the Amstel Hotel. We've grown a lot in a short time, on the one hand because companies are struggling to find their own employees, and on the other because the labour market is changing. Employees no longer want to work for just one company,' he says. 'Companies are also facing changing legislation, which is making it harder to manage employees in-house,' adds Annette. 'They want a bigger and more

flexible outer shell and they also want to avoid the risks associated with permanent contracts.' 'We work with men and women aged 18 to 65,' Annette continues. 'Coincidentally, we recently hired a 66-year-old woman, who will work as a hostess/receptionist at a major company. We don't believe in the superficial side of hospitality, in hiring a pretty face for a receptionist position, for example. Instead, we hire people based on personality and the content of their character. They have to fit within the organisation. A trendy, young company is probably looking for someone who fits the bill in terms of age and appeal, while other sectors prioritise warmth and familiarity. We recently had a client who was looking to fill a supervisor position for forty hours a week. Entirely by chance, we received a CV from a fifty-year-old man that same week. It had never occurred to the company to hire a fifty year old, but given the candidate's background in hospitality and his strong sense of responsibility, they hired him anyway. The candidate was motivated, enterprising and could bring added value to the company. When that happens, age really is nothing but a number.'

EXPERT SERVICE

'Our goals for the next ten years are strategic in nature,' explains Wesley. 'We want to grow in the three segments in which we currently operate: hospitality, offices and health care. After all, hospitals are also interested in enhancing their hospitality and making people feel like guests instead of patients. This goes beyond checking to make sure a drip needle has been placed properly. We offer companies optimum service and a robust and flexible outer shell in these three segments. Not only are we a company that delivers excellent candidates, we are increasingly being seen as an extension of the HR department and a valued partner.'

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