

# Hospitality turns hostile with envious employees

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Guest relationships can become collateral damage when hotel employees envy the relationships co-workers have with their bosses, according to an international team of researchers.

In the study of front-line hotel employees -- desk staff, food and beverage workers, housekeepers -- workers who have poor relationships with their bosses were more likely to envy co-workers with better relationships with supervisors, said John O'Neill, associate professor, School of Hospitality Management, Penn State. The study showed that the envious workers were also less likely to help co-workers or to volunteer for additional duties. The researchers report their findings in the current issue of *International Journal of Hospitality Management*.

"People who are less envious often go above and beyond their normal job duties to do things like cover for an employee who has gone home to help a sick family member," said O'Neill. "Conversely workers who are more envious are less willing to perform these additional duties."

Front-line employees are typically hourly employees who interact directly with guests. Since these employees have personal contact with guests, people staying at hotels become the unintended victims of on-the-job envy, according to O'Neill, who worked with Soo Kim, assistant professor, management and information systems, Montclair State University, and Hyun-Min Cho, tourism policy research division, Culture Contents Center, Republic of Korea.

"Guests often need hotel workers to go above and beyond their normal job duties, even if it's just making a cup of coffee when the restaurant is closed," said O'Neill. "Performing these extra duties for guests, in turn, creates guests who are loyal to the hotel."

O'Neill said that the study established a path linking workplace envy with hotel success.

"Limiting envy is crucial not just to the success of the employee in his or her career, but it's crucial to the success of the hotel itself," said O'Neill. "The success of a hotel lies in how it treats its guests."

In the study, researchers surveyed 233 employees from four full-service hotels on their relationships with their supervisors and fellow workers. Those who answered questions indicating low-quality relationships with bosses were significantly more likely to envy co-workers. The study showed that poor relationships between supervisors and workers accounted for 41 percent of the envy expressed by workers. The presence of envious feelings toward co-workers, then, significantly predicted uncooperative behavior. Envy accounted for 26 percent of the lack of cooperation with co-workers.

To combat envy in the workplace, O'Neill suggested [hotel](#) organizations develop a formal structure to establish and guide relationships between employees and supervisors. O'Neill said that supervisors, who typically manage between six and 10 workers, can establish bonds by using techniques such as formal employee reviews and open-door management practices.

"While it can be a challenge for leaders to establish these relationships, it's in their best interest to have a [relationship](#) with each of their employees," O'Neill said. "It's really about establishing trust and having a dialogue with all of your [workers](#)."

Despite previous research indicating that gender, age and length of service played important roles in on-the-job behavior, the study did not find that those variables contributed significantly to workplace envy and uncooperative behavior.

"The behavior went across ages and genders," O'Neill said. "Whether it was different ages, or men or women, the more envious the employees were, the less likely they were to do things above and beyond their job descriptions."

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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