

# Hospitality takes on a different challenge

**Vishakha Talreja & Meenakshi Verma, TNN**  
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NEW DELHI: A Smile says a lot even if it is not accompanied by words. And that's giving the hospitality industry an idea to walk the CSR talk. So next time you visit a Cafe Coffee Day or Costa Coffee outlet, you might be welcomed by a silent brew master carrying a note: "I'm hearing impaired. Please jot down your order."

If corporate social responsibility (CSR) beckons hotels and restaurants across the country, they are all ears. To do their bit for the society, they are recruiting physically challenged people for various operations.

Cafe Coffee Day (CCD) employs 50 speech and hearing impaired people at various outlets, Costa Coffee outlet in Greater Kailash, Delhi, is being run by 18 such people. Hotels, too, are proactively employing physically challenged employees. Take the case of hospitality major ITC Maurya that recruits physically challenged people in back-end operations and data base management.

We have been recruiting physically challenged people for some time," says ITC Hotels' vice-president Deepak Haksar. "Our Bangalore property is a fine example where physically challenged people are employed and recognised for the same." Similarly, JW Marriott employs mentally challenged school pass outs at its Mumbai property.

Costa Coffee plans to open eight to nine stores which will be run entirely by handicap employees in the next one year. "We have tied up with an NGO called Enable India and want to hire about 100 such employees per year," says Cafe Coffee Day's HR head, Shyamala Deshpande.

Costa Coffee India's chief executive, Virag Joshi, was touched to see physically challenged employees working at a restaurant in Singapore. Keen on replicating the same recruitment policy in India, he collaborated with All India Federation of the Deaf (AIFD). "We will take the initiative to the next level and employ them for our other brand outlets," says Mr Joshi, who is also the president of Devyani International (a Jaipuria group company and franchisee for Pizza Hut, KFC and Disney Artist in India).

While some have begun by tying up with NGOs, the JW Marriott Hotel in Mumbai recruits mentally challenged and dyslexic passouts from a special school 'Dilkhush'. "We have five such employees at present. They are trained for three months and then assigned housekeeping, laundry or back hand tasks in restaurants. For us it is a CSR initiative aimed at providing equal

opportunity to this segment of the society," explains Mielle Batliwala, HR manager, JW Marriott. Lemon Tree Hotels has three such employees working for its Gurgaon hotel. The hotel chain intends to recruit 100 physically challenged employees in next four years.

While it may be a great CSR initiative, it also offers hospitality industry, which is facing talent crunch and high attrition rate, an alternate talent pool for back hand operations. And with infrastructure for physically challenged mandated by the government for all three, four and five star hotels, it becomes easier to employ such people, says Rahul Pandit, vice-president of operations and people, Lemon Tree Hotels. ";Since a hotel already has infrastructure for physically challenged people it becomes easier to hire them. Also there are many job positions in a hotel which are not very technical and do not require specific skills."

As far as salaries are concerned, they are at par with other employees, say industry heads. At Costa Coffee they earn the same average salary of Rs 5,500 as other employees. Marriott also claims to pay equal salaries. Responsibility (CSR) beckons hotels and restaurants across the country, they are all ears. To do their bit for the society, they are recruiting physically challenged people for various operations.

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