



OPERATIONS > STAFFING

## International recruitment: A solution to the U.S. chef shortage?

*Attorney and recruiter discuss challenges and benefits of looking overseas for workers*

Becki.Young , Cynthia Billeaud | Mar 12, 2018

*Cynthia Billeaud is the founder and chief recruiting officer of FnBTalents, a recruitment firm for restaurant clients. Becki Young is co-founder of Hammond Young Immigration Law and head of the firm's hospitality practice. This article does not necessarily reflect the opinions of the editors or management of Restaurant Hospitality.*

The U.S. economy is booming and is widely considered to be at full employment, meaning that anyone who is able and willing to work is employed.

But restaurant employers still have jobs to fill. Some will be filled domestically, through training and development, and increased incentives to American workers. But employers will also look beyond the border to fill some positions for which American workers are simply not available.

Cynthia Billeaud, founder and chief recruiting officer at FnBTalents, a restaurant recruitment firm, and Becki Young, co-founder of Hammond Young Immigration Law, share insights on international hospitality recruitment and why it remains a valuable tool for U.S. restaurants, despite some challenges.

### **Why recruit from overseas?**

**Billeaud:** For any company, success is achieved through collaboration of the finest talent. Moreover, managers should always try to attract the very best candidates and lead them to achieve their full potential.

Culinary leaders should cultivate the potential of their talent and foster a culture that inspires excellence, personal achievement and professional fulfillment. Their success can be measured through low employee turnover, high productivity and morale.

Diversity through international recruitment plays a key role in the success of U.S. hospitality businesses, allowing international talents to gain firsthand knowledge of American techniques and methodologies and learn the differences in restaurant culture between the U.S. and their home country, and, just as importantly, offering American colleagues the opportunity to internationalize their culinary skills and foster creativity. To find the best fit and skillset for our clients, we focus not on origins, but rather on talent, personality and culture.

### **What are the greatest challenges in recruiting internationally?**

**Billeaud:** In a time of immigration uncertainty, the challenge in recruiting internationally has substantially increased. One of the non-immigrant visas most commonly used by hospitality employers, J-1, is under scrutiny and the application process is becoming more challenging. In addition, the duration of the visa has been reduced from 18 months to 12 months in the hospitality industry.

Alternatives to the J-1 visa — and the ability of foreign hospitality workers to pursue successful careers in the U.S. — have also become scarcer. The call for H-1B visa reform has never been more necessary, as hundreds of thousands of candidates apply each year for only 85,000 visas available.

**Young:** We are unquestionably operating in a challenging environment, where some of the staple visas (J-1 and H-1B) traditionally used by the hospitality industry have become much more difficult to obtain. On the other hand, a wide variety of lesser-used visas (O-1, TN, E-1/ E-2, L-1) are available to hospitality employers. For a stellar candidate, sometimes green card sponsorship can be an option, even if the person is not currently working in the U.S.

If an employer identifies a foreign talent and wants to bring that individual to work in the U.S., we can usually find a way to make it happen. However, employers need to understand that this process can take time and effort.

As an example, we often hear from employees who are on the cusp of O-1 status . They may have worked for great restaurants, but not necessarily have received a great deal of publicity or won any awards yet. We have had numerous clients who have made a deliberate plan to create an O-1 portfolio for themselves, and these clients have ultimately been successful in obtaining O-1 status.

The bottom line is that if employers and international candidates are willing to think outside the box, come up with a plan and stick to it, what appears impossible can become possible.

**What are the greatest rewards of recruiting internationally?**

**Billeaud:** International candidates remain a tremendous resource in our profession, as it has been drastically impacted by the shortage of talent. Employers often report that international candidates demonstrate a commitment and engagement that is missing with U.S. applicants; it could be that these international candidates have a greater appreciation for how gaining a broader knowledge of current trends in American gastronomy will serve as an excellent foundation for the continuation of their culinary career.

In employing foreign talent, our pool of U.S. restaurant group partners greatly benefits from the multicultural and diverse culinary exposure, both professionally and personally. Family meals have become the most interesting event to attend to and a way for culinary leaders to build and grow an international legacy.

**Young:** I second that!

I started working with hospitality clients more than two decades ago, and my first client was a luxury resort in a remote location that couldn't find American workers willing to endure the geographic isolation, despite the incredible natural beauty and solitude. By expanding recruitment efforts internationally, the property increased its labor pool significantly. Think about it: There are about 160 million U.S. workers compared with a global workforce of approximately 3.5 billion .

Over the years, my clients have lauded the positive impact that foreign workers have on their U.S. workforce, in terms of a valuable exchange of skills and cultures. While international recruitment is not a magic solution to all staffing challenges, it remains a valuable tool for restaurant employers that should not be overlooked.

---

**Source URL:** <http://www.restaurant-hospitality.com/staffing/international-recruitment-solution-us-chef-shortage>