When the team wants to do wine tourism and the owners don’t: the risk of extinguishing talent

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Across Italian wineries, a growing divide is emerging between motivated hospitality teams, often led by young professionals, and ownership that still views wine tourism as a marginal, costly distraction. When owners fail to listen, talented staff disengage, opportunities are missed, and market positioning erodes. This article explores why closing that gap is now a strategic priority, not an option.

In this week alone, I took part in two meetings with different hospitality teams, in different parts of Italy. In both cases, the conclusion was bitter and identical: “The problem is not the visitors, it is not the location, it is not even the wine. The problem is the owner who does not believe in the wine tourism project.”

When company leadership looks at hospitality with suspicion, every proposal from the team becomes an exhausting battle. It is a harsh reality that is emerging with force: ownership often not only holds back, but unconsciously sabotages its own success because it does not see wine tourism as a profession, but as a necessary nuisance.

Watching young people, full of energy and determination, fills our hearts with joy. These young people bring not just hands, but a fresh vision, free from the preconceptions that often slow down those who have been in the wine world for decades.

The short circuit between vision and caution

However, this energy often clashes with a scene that repeats itself with a frequency now far too high in Italian wineries. On one side, a prepared and motivated hospitality team that intercepts clear market signals every day. On the other, a cautious – sometimes wary – ownership that observes wine tourism as one might observe an interesting but non-essential experiment. In between, an enormous potential that risks remaining unexpressed.

It is a genuine cultural short circuit. Those who work in direct contact with visitors can clearly see that winery tourism is no longer an “accessory item,” but a true commercial and reputational hub. **Those who lead the company, however, often continue to read that world through old categories: cost instead of investment, distraction instead of strategic lever.**

When the silence of ownership kills motivation

The most critical point emerges when the team does not feel heard. It is not just a matter of denied budgets, but of a lack of recognition of competence. When a hospitality manager proposes a new tasting format, a smoother booking system, or a small investment in the shop – and receives a wall of rubber in return – the damage runs deep.

A team that does not feel heard by ownership stops making proposals, enters “survival mode” and, eventually, looks elsewhere. The frustration of those who see opportunities pass by and are not given permission to seize them is the first step toward losing the best talent. If owners do not understand that the hospitality operator is their first “market sensor,” they condemn the company to a dangerous strategic blindness.

The tangible value of the relationship

Hospitality managers are in the trenches every day. They collect questions, observe behaviours, listen to expectations that are changing rapidly. They understand that the visitor does not just want to “see the winery,” but to live a coherent experience. And that coherence often comes through the ability to take a piece of that world home.

When, however, after a well-crafted visit, the guest discovers they cannot buy anything – or that doing so is complicated and discouraged by ownership – something breaks. **The cost of “not acting” today is extremely high, not only in terms of missed revenue, but of lost positioning.** While decisions are postponed, the market moves forward, and the visitor who finds no answers at one winery will find them at the neighbouring one – perhaps smaller, but more responsive.

Beyond the excuse of complexity

It must be said honestly: ownership’s resistance does not always come from nowhere. Logistics are complex, staffing is often stretched to the bone, and those accustomed to the large numbers of export look with suspicion at managing individual shipments. But the risk is using these complexities as an excuse not to decide.

The real challenge is to launch pilot projects that speak the language owners know best: numbers. To demonstrate that wine tourism can reach break-even quickly and that it generates value even when it does not immediately translate into direct sales, but into brand loyalty. Today wine is no longer just produced: it is lived and remembered. And if the team is running, it is because it has already seen the finish line. It is up to ownership to decide whether to keep watching from the sidelines or to finally start walking together.

Key points

1. **Owners who distrust wine tourism unconsciously sabotage** their own winery’s growth potential.
2. **Young hospitality teams bring fresh market insight** that ownership often fails to **value or hear**.
3. **A team that feels ignored stops proposing ideas** and eventually leaves, draining the company of talent.
4. **Not acting on wine tourism has a real cost:** lost revenue, lost positioning, and lost **brand loyalty**.
5. **Pilot projects with measurable numbers** are the most effective way to convince reluctant ownership to invest.