The paradox of hospitality: valued outside, undervalued within

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In many Italian wineries, hospitality professionals are indispensable for building reputation, loyalty, and commercial relationships, yet they remain culturally invisible within their own organizations. Colleagues in production and sales still treat their work as secondary, often reduced to "presenting wines and having fun." Until this mindset changes, hospitality will stay a half-realized strategic investment.

In recent days I received many messages following a previous article I dedicated to work in wine tourism – *Wanted: professionals for wine tourism, but on the right terms. The wine sector looks in the mirror*. The issue was straightforward: on one hand, wineries complain about the

difficulty of finding qualified staff for hospitality; on the other, skilled professionals describe low salaries and little stability.

Among all the testimonials I received, one struck me more than the others. It brought into focus an even deeper problem: **in many Italian wineries, hospitality continues to be treated as a second-tier job, and often it is colleagues from other departments who say so, even just through a gesture or a passing remark.**

The phrase Hospitality Managers hear most often comes from colleagues in export, sales, or production, and it goes something like this: *“In the end, you present the wines and have fun with the guests.”*

It sounds like an innocent quip. In reality, it perfectly captures the mindset that still exists in many companies. What counts is what can be seen: the vineyard, the winery, the production, the bottles shipped. Everything involving relationship-building, storytelling, experience, and customer loyalty is perceived as something less tangible by those working in other departments. Almost an accessory.

And yet today wine tourism operates in a far more complex way. Those who work in hospitality guide people through tastings, certainly, but above all they build reputation, create commercial relationships, turn a visit into a purchase, generate word of mouth, retain customers, and manage importers, journalists, wine lovers, and international tourists. In many cases, the Hospitality Manager is the winery’s first face and the one the visitor will remember longest.

The problem is that these results are rarely immediate or easy to measure. A customer who returns months later to buy wine online, an importer who becomes convinced after several visits, an article born from a well-executed welcome: all of

this is rarely connected to the work of the person who built that experience.

So Hospitality Managers end up trapped in a paradoxical position: indispensable in company strategy, yet invisible within the winery's internal culture.

And this devaluation rarely arrives explicitly. It filters through in jokes, skepticism, poor collaboration, exclusion from shared decisions, or in the constant need to explain to colleagues why their work holds as much value as that of any other department.

This is where many companies make the mistake of investing in tasting rooms, architecture, wine clubs, events, and marketing, while failing to build a company culture that genuinely recognizes the role of hospitality. The result is that many skilled professionals grow tired. Because working hard is one thing; having to prove every single day that you deserve respect from those sitting at the same table is quite another.

Key points

1. **Hospitality Managers in Italian wineries are strategically essential but culturally undervalued** by colleagues.
2. **The phrase *"you just present wines"* reflects a widespread and damaging misconception** about the role.
3. **Hospitality generates reputation, loyalty, and commercial results** that are hard to measure but highly significant.
4. **Many wineries invest in spaces and events without building a culture** that respects hospitality work.
5. **Skilled professionals leave when recognition is absent**,

not just because of workload.