Praise for

A Wealth of Insight

“A Wealth of Insight is an enlightening read. One of the most important aspects of the hospitality

industry is understanding what drives its leaders, and this book takes you on a journey through their eyes and experiences—unraveling their motivations, lessons learned and perspectives on the future. Both in thought and art, this volume details every aspect of a world-class guest experience. A Wealth of Insight is intelligently written and comprehensive in its reflection, culminating in an impressive, long-overdue publication of this nature and magnitude. ”

— Dr. Dimitrios Diamantis

Dean of Graduate Studies

Les Roches, Global Hospitality Education

Switzerland

“A Wealth of Insight is a study in hard-earned leadership lessons from luxury hoteliers around the world. Mr. Kanani’s interviews take us behind the scenes of a complex industry—revealing the needs, behaviors and demands of both guests and colleagues through the career experiences of five-star general managers who know them best. ”

— Philip M. Barnes

Regional Vice President and Managing Director

The Savoy Hotel, London

“A Wealth of Insight should be required reading for students enrolled in hospitality management degree programs. It provides an orientation to the ineffable culture and character of hospitality, a thoughtful overview of the challenges of consistently producing excellent service, and many inspiring best practices. The book reinforces the proud traditions of hospitality at a time when competitive pressures tempt some to cut corners that should not be cut. Kanani writes in a direct and accessible style that inspires as it informs, and has created a book that should be on the coffee

table of every hotelier and that should be gifted to every hospitality student upon graduation.

A pleasure to read and savor, A Wealth of Insight is a reminder of why we love this industry. ”

— Tony Simons

Professor of Management & Organizations

School of Hotel Administration

Johnson College of Business

Cornell University

“Kanani has written an important book that details the very best attributes and behaviors of truly successful luxury hoteliers around the world. A Wealth of Insight should be read by all students of hospitality seeking to understand, from a leadership and luxury lens, exactly what it takes to deliver exceptional service in this industry. ”

— Stowe Shoemaker, PhD

Dean, William F. Harrah College of Hospitality

Michael D. Rose Distinguished Chair

Lincy Professor

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

“A Wealth of Insight is a beautiful and meaningful tribute to the art of making people the best

they can be. Anyone who loves learning about people—critical for those in the hotel industry, but helpful for any leader—will enjoy these colorful and personal stories about life lessons that informed great leaders in the competitive world of luxury hospitality. Kanani’s insightful profiles prove that the only way a five-star hotelier can ensure a quality experience for both guests and colleagues is by setting the tone at the top and leading by example. ”

— Katherine Melchior Ray

Former Vice President of Luxury Brands, Hyatt

Former Vice President of Marketing, Louis Vuitton Japan

“A Wealth of Insight has much to offer students of hospitality as well as those who simply love to

travel. This book will certainly be in our College’s library and our reception area. ”

— Dr. Dennis Reynolds

Dean, Barron Hilton Distinguished Chair

Conrad N. Hilton College of Hotel and Restaurant Management

University of Houston

“I truly enjoyed reading A Wealth of Insight. It is a very inspiring book with many life and leadership

lessons for both hospitality students and managers. I highly recommend it to future leaders of this industry. ”

— Prof. Fevzi Okumus

Editor-in-Chief, the International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management

CFHLA Preeminent Professor

Rosen College of Hospitality Management

The University of Central Florida

“ As the luxury tourism industry gains considerable momentum in emerging markets, A Wealth of Insight serves as a truly unique reference and guide from five-star hoteliers worldwide on how best to deliver on the promise of an extraordinary guest experience. ”

— Lanre Akinola

Editor, African Business

Former Director with the Bloomberg Media Initiative Africa

Former Editor, This is Africa, Financial Times

A Wealth of Insight:

The World’s Best Luxury Hoteliers

on Leadership, Management, and

the Future of 5-Star Hospitality

by Rahim B. Kanani

© Copyright 2017 Rahim B. Kanani

ISBN 978-1-63393-620-1

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be re-

produced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any

form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy,

recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed

reviews, without the prior written permission of the author.

Published by

BLACK

TRUFFLE

PRESS

Cover Photo Courtesy of Rosewood Beijing

Photo on the Right Courtesy of Pulitzer Amsterdamwww.blacktruffleclub.com

A Wealthof Insight

RAHIM B. KANANIThe World’s Best Luxury Hoteliers

on Leadership, Management, and

the Future of 5-Star Hospitality

Introduction . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . x

Aaron Kaupp—Le Royal Monceau,

Raffles Paris (France) . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 1

Adrian Gray—Lotte Hotel Moscow

(Russian Federation) . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 11

Alexander Pichel—Hotel Indonesia

Kempinski Jakarta (Indonesia) . . . . . . . . . 19

Alexander van Gastel—Pulitzer

Amsterdam (The Netherlands) . . . . . . . . . 27

Amit Majumder—Jumeirah Vittaveli (Maldives) . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 37

Anneke Brown—COMO The Treasury

(Perth, Australia) . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 45

Axel Bethke—Qasr Al Sarab Desert Resort by Anantara (Abu Dhabi, United Arab

Emirates) . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 55

Ayman Gharib—Raffles Dubai and Sofitel

Dubai Wafi (United Arab Emirates) . . . . . . 65

Brian Gullbrants—Wynn Las Vegas and Encore (Las Vegas, United States) . . . . 75 Christian A. Hassing—Mandarin Oriental, Singapore (Singapore) . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 85

Damien Bastiat—Ballyfin Demesne

(Ireland) . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 93

George Cozonis—The Plaza Hotel

(New York, United States) . . . . . . . . . . . 103

Gerrit Graef—The Ritz-Carlton,

Riyadh (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia) . . . . . . 113

Graham Ledger—Singita Serengeti (South Africa and Zimbabwe) . . . . . . . . . . 123

James Low—COMO Uma Paro and COMO Uma Punakha (Bhutan) . . . . . . 135

Kai Speth—The Reverie Saigon

(Vietnam) . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 145

Krister Svensson—St. Regis Hotel and Residences (Bangkok, Thailand) . . . . . . . . 153

Luc Delafosse—Waldorf Astoria Beverly Hills (United States) . . . . . . . . . 163

Mahmoud Skaf—The Ritz-Carlton, Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia) . . . . . . . . . . . . 171 Table of Contents

Ralph Radtke—Ciragan Palace

Kempinski (Istanbul, Turkey) . . . . . . . . . 273

Sjefke Jansen—Belmond Grand Hotel

Europe (St. Petersburg, Russian Federation) . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 283

Stephen Ansell—Ararat Park Hyatt Moscow (Russian Federation) . . . . . . . . 293

Susanne Hatje—Mandarin Oriental, New York (United States) . . . . . . . . . . . 303

Taljinder Singh—The Taj Mahal Palace, Mumbai (India) . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 315

Tom Roelens—Four Seasons Resorts Lana’i (Hawaii, United States) . . . . . . . . . 323

Torsten van Dullemen—The Landmark

Mandarin Oriental (Hong Kong) . . . . . . . 333 Marc C. Brugger—Rosewood Hong Kong

and Rosewood Beijing (China) . . . . . . . . 179

Marc von Arnim—Park Hyatt Sydney

(Australia) . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 189

Mariano Silvestri—Park Hyatt Maldives

Hadahaa (Maldives) . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 197

Michael Ziemer—Mandarin Oriental,

Taipei (Taiwan) . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 207

Nicholas Yarnell—Six Senses Douro Valley (Portugal) . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 215

Patrizio Cipollini—Four Seasons Hotel (Florence, Italy) . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 225

Pedro Dias—The Surrey (New York, United States) . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 233

Peter Hopgood—Outrigger Fiji Beach Resort (Fiji) . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 243

Philip Barnes—The Savoy Hotel

(London, United Kingdom) . . . . . . . . . . 253

Pinar Timer—Pera Palace Hotel

Jumeirah (Istanbul, Turkey) . . . . . . . . . . 263

xWhile pursuing an undergraduate degree

in philosophy many years ago, I devel-

oped a hunger for knowledge—not for

facts and figures, but for perennial wisdom and in-sight. Fueled by intense curiosity, a passion for con-

versation, and a desire to discover the world, I spent

nearly a decade distilling leadership and manage -

ment insights from some of the most innovative and influential chief executives across industries. As I tra-

versed the globe from San Francisco to Stockholm to

Seoul, I often laid rest at a world-class hotel befitting

of my interviewees. In fact, many discussions took place in glamorous suites, lobbies, and ballrooms.

Over the years, the luxury hotel—symbolic of my trav -

els and journalism—shifted from stage to spotlight.

From the moment I arrived, every aspect of the guest

experience was carefully crafted, catering to all five

senses. It was awe-inspiring, delightful, and flawless. I became obsessed with how such properties balanced

intuitive care with military precision, so I turned my

attention to pulling back the curtain and uncovering

the secret to creating a world-class guest experience.

To do this project justice, I needed to interview the tip of the spear—general managers who have spent decades on the frontlines, rising through the ranks

and ultimately stewarding some of the world’s most

luxurious hotels and resorts. Almost a year from

the moment I decided to embark on this journey,

I am honored and humbled to say that I’ve done

exactly that.

More than thirty-five of the world’s best luxury ho-

teliers participated in this special effort, contributing

many hours of their time and sharing many decades

of their experience. Every hotelier profile includes

bite-size insights, stunning photography, and re-

al-life examples on recruiting, culture, technology,

marketing, branding, personalization, authenticity,

anticipation, design, partnerships and more. Their

contributions represent the spectrum of a luxury ho-

telier’s mindshare.

Today, general managers are adapting their design

and service offerings to meet the needs of a new gen-

eration of modern luxury travelers who prize authen-

ticity over familiarity, simplicity over complexity, ex -

clusive experiences over champagne and caviar, and Introduction

xiinsider knowledge over high-end shopping—hall-

marks of becoming a serious destination authority.

In addition, luxury hoteliers now operate in a much

more dynamic and immediate environment—work -

ing closely with investors as owners to meet expec -

tations of financial performance, monitoring digital

platforms to rapidly react to guest feedback, and

constantly innovating to differentiate themselves in

hyper-competitive markets.

While the very definition of luxury has changed, and

the environment in which general managers operate

has become increasingly complex, core leadership

and management principles underpinning the in-

dustry remain intact.

Every hotelier featured in this book exudes a fun-

damental understanding of genuine human connec -

tion. They reveal a mastery in the art and science of recruiting, developing, motivating, and managing a

world-class team—explicitly designed to deliver on

the promise of personalized luxury at every stage of

the guest experience. This is one of the most pro-

found insights to emerge from this endeavor. The

most beautiful of hotels in the most coveted of lo-

cations cannot deliver on that promise without an extraordinarily passionate and talented team com-

mitted to perfection. There is no alternative. In an

industry that now Googles guests in advance of their

stay to glean personal and professional interests, likes and dislikes, anticipatory service is not simply pos -

sessing information, but acting on it deliberately, thoughtfully, and discreetly.

For aspiring and current general managers of luxury

hotels around the world, for hospitality executives

in search of a practical guide on how best to deliv -

er a world-class guest experience, and for the mod-

ern luxury traveler eager to go behind the scenes, A

Wealth of Insight is the holy grail of five-star leader -

ship and management.

The search for wisdom continues.

Rahim B. Kanani

rahim@rahimkanani.com

Aaron

Kaupp

GENERAL MANAGER,

LE ROYAL MONCEAU,RAFFLES PARIS (FRANCE)

BORN IN:

Siegen, Germany

SELECT GEOGRAPHICAL

EXPERIENCE:

France, Ghana, Italy

YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY:

24

Photos Courtesy of Le Royal Monceau Raffles Paris

1

GROWING UP

While born in Germany, I grew up in Switzerland

to parents who lived and worked throughout Africa

and India. My father was a businessman who dealt in

commodities such as rice and sugar. I was fortunate

to have had the opportunity to travel the world with

them and stay at many fine hotels. Through these

travels, we would learn about different cultures and

customs, and this nurtured a very open-minded and

curious view of the world. My parents always told me

to strive for the best, and it is that philosophy that continues to guide me today.

THE SPARK

My first job in the industry was serving breakfast at

the Golden Tulip Hotel, and I knew right then that

I wanted this to be my career. The combination of being in regular contact with people, the complexity of running a restaurant, the dynamism and energy

required to be successful, and the joy that permeated

through the smiles of guests and staff were priceless.

EMPOWERMENT

Never micromanage your team. They need to be

empowered to take ownership and responsibility of

their roles. In such a dynamic and fluid operation as

a restaurant or hotel, micromanaging leads to setting

boundaries, but your team needs to be able to impro-

vise and be flexible. This empowerment leads to mu-

tual trust, and if your team trusts you, they will look out for the best interests of guests and the company

more broadly as if it were their own.““Harnessing social media to connect with

people around the world in a way that sparks an instant daydream is a powerful proposition.

2

3LEADING BY EXAMPLE

If the General Manager picks up an empty coffee cup

on their way through the lobby, or stays in the office

until the middle of the night to greet a VIP guest, that

shows dedication and passion. If leadership does not

display such commitment, regardless of how big or

small the task, that lack of interest will filter down throughout the organization into staff and ultimately

the guest experience.

PEOPLE COME FIRST

To build a successful team, leadership must invest

heavily in getting to know their colleagues, including

their strengths and weaknesses, and celebrate their

successes along the way to show appreciation and

recognition. This translates directly into the guest

experience. At the end of the day, we are in the busi-

ness of the human touch—in treating both guests and

staff. The two are inextricably linked.

Early on in my career, a manager that I was reporting

to saw me one day, overworked and tired, but still

pulling my weight. He pulled me aside, took me out

for lunch, and sent me home, finishing my shift for

me. At first, I thought I had done something wrong,

but when I returned the next day, ready and rested, he asked whether I felt better. Acknowledging how hard

I was working and being valued for that effort cannot be understated. He took care of me, knowing I needed

to be at my best for my department to succeed, even if

that meant finishing my shift for me. This is the kind

of culture and spirit critical to success.

THE HUMAN TOUCH

Today, we can teach someone to shake the perfect

martini or to read a profit and loss statement, but

what we cannot teach is the human touch, and being

a people-person. When hiring, I inquire about dif -

ficult situations applicants have faced in the past at work and how they have handled them. Being able to empathize, reason, and resolve issues professionally,

calmly, and intelligently is a very important quality

in this industry.

ON DAY ONE

Every new team member participates in a two-day

orientation that takes place in the classroom and

on the floor. During the welcome, every colleague

describes something near and dear to them about

the hotel. Feeling integrated and knowing precisely

what to do and who to call for help if needed are also

critical to a smooth on-boarding. We also make sure our managers sit with line employees individually to

4

discuss their interests and career ambitions so

that we can develop a plan for them to advance

and meet their own professional goals.

CONNECTING EMOTIONALL Y

Today, our clients are international travelers who

have stayed in many of the world’s leading luxury

hotels. They are always looking for something

familiar or elevated. In other words, luxury today

is recreating an experience of what a guest al-ready has at home or would like to have at home.

At the same time, luxury means different things

to different people. For some, it means that their

pillows are monogrammed. For others, their fa-

vorite drink is stocked in the minibar or their

favorite fruits are served upon arrival. Beyond

these gestures, we need to connect on an emo-

tional level to maintain their interest and loyalty.

On one occasion, we had a guest who was trav -

eling solo for business. Our team felt that she

really missed her fiancé, having just recently got

engaged. While out for dinner, our staff filled

her bedroom up with 100 helium balloons with

a photo of her soon-to-be husband on each.

When she returned, she was not only shocked

but moved that we had gone above and beyond

to touch her heart in a way that she will truly never forget.

5A CREATIVE TEAM

Simply offering to book museum tickets for guests,

something you can generally do online, or sourcing

the best restaurants from an online list is not of any

real value. You need to offer an experience that’s tai-

lor-made to the guest’s interests, off the beaten path,

to demonstrate your knowledge of hidden gems in the city or ability to curate a unique excursion. We

challenge our team to discover what’s new and what

they would like to do themselves on their days off

in the city. They then present their ideas and expe-

riences to me, and if something really stands out as

different, interesting, and unique, we integrate that

offering into the hotel for guests to enjoy.

THE FUTURE IS DIGITAL

I’ve learned that responding immediately to com-

ments, questions, or concerns via social media and

key hotel review platforms is critical to success. At the same time, harnessing social media to connect

with people around the world in a way that sparks an

instant daydream is a powerful proposition. As tech-

nology advances, I believe the ability to digitally day -

dream will be even more instant and even more real. Downloadable virtual videos could inspire a future

traveler with sight, sound, and smell, or they could

bring back life-like memories of a past adventure.DON’T FORGET ABOUT PRINT

While a digital presence is very important, as today’s

clients are always connected, there is still an audience

for printed materials. The brochure is a dying breed,

but you can learn a lot about a hotel from such a

product: the kind of paper that was used or the pic -

tures chosen to take you on a journey of the property.

The sensory experience of a print publication is dif -

ferent, too, and cannot be underestimated. In short, print still matters.

KNOW YOUR CLIENT

Thanks to the Internet, we can learn more and more

about our clients prior to their arrival to try to design

a personalized stay. First, we contact their personal

assistant in advance of their stay. If that is not pos -

sible, we try to find out as much as we can online in advance. This includes social media posts about their

likes, dislikes, and recent travels, or articles they may have written. Doing your homework on your guests

goes a long way to feeling welcomed. We do this on

a regular basis and update our files even if clients

haven’t returned recently so that we have this infor -

mation ready for the future.

6

AMBASSADORS OF ANTICIPATION

When you are on vacation, you want to disconnect,

recharge your batteries, and not think about your

plans for the next day or the day after. You want the hotel to do this for you. Anticipation is key to deliv -

ering on this notion of taking care of things seen and unseen. If housekeeping, while cleaning your room,

sees a couple of books on local excursions, they can

communicate that to the concierge who will put something together and present it to the guest even before they ask. We empower staff at all levels to be ambassadors of anticipation.

If a client goes for a run every morning, and the or -

der-taker at breakfast knows this and makes note,

guest relations can offer up alternative jogging maps

without being prompted. If a client is an avid martini

drinker, serving their favorite drink in an engraved glass bearing his or her name is the kind of detail-ori-

ented touch we aim to provide. We try to recreate the

home away from home feeling, which in turn makes our guests feel valued and special.

REWARD ENGAGEMENT

After each shift, we quiz our colleagues on the top

three things they noticed about a client, which get

recorded in their profile. Staff with the most inter -

esting and substantive discoveries are rewarded with

lunch or dinner.

INTEGRATING TECHNOLOGY, WISEL Y

You can never quite get ahead of the curve with re-

spect to new technology. It comes out overnight. By

the time you research it, develop a plan to implement

it, and start executing across the property, it is no longer the latest innovation. However, not every new technology should be integrated into a luxury hotel. The key is to offer technology that is both beautiful and functional. It must be modern, on trend, and

simple to use for all ages. At the end of the day, you

need not be a rocket scientist to switch off all the lights.

SETTING THE GLOBAL STANDARD

Competition is a good thing, but it all comes back to

brand loyalty and an emotional connection. Armani,

for example, is a lifestyle. When traveling, if given

the opportunity to continue that lifestyle in a hotel environment tailored to your interests, likes, and dislikes, you may very well opt for that continuity. Getting the service right is another question. To that

end, standard operating protocols of the top luxury

hotel operators around the world are being adapted to new brands because they are proven, time-tested practices. It is the legacy luxury hotel brands that still set the global benchmark of design, quality, and service for the industry.

9

Adrian

Gray

GENERAL MANAGER,

LOTTE HOTEL MOSCOW,(RUSSIAN FEDERATION)

BORN IN:

Edinburgh, Scotland

SELECT GEOGRAPHICAL

EXPERIENCE:

Scotland, Russian Federation,

Israel, Hungary, United Kingdom,

French Caribbean, South Pacific

Vanuatu, Bahrain, France

YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY:

37

Photos Courtesy of Lotte Hotel Moscow

11GROWING UP

I was born in Scotland and grew up enjoying the out -

doors. We loved to go camping, hiking, and skiing.

My parents were always gracious and calm, and had

a great deal of integrity. Their outlook on life was

guided by asking what they could do for others. We

often had friends and family members visiting, two

of whom were in the hospitality industry. At the time,

one was completing an internship at a hotel in Ed-

inburgh, and the other was going off to study hotel

management. I curiously asked about the industry and developed an interest in the business.

EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED

After completing my degree, I began as a receptionist

in the front office of the Caledonian Hotel in Edin-

burgh. The rest of my team had been there for many years. Only a few months after I arrived, the hotel had been bought and was under new management. Many

employees resigned, and I was immediately catapult -

ed through the crisis into a position of responsibility. I trained new receptionists, covered additional shifts,

and embraced the challenge. I learned to step up and

deliver in a tough situation, gaining the respect of

new recruits in the process.

Later, I was promoted to assistant night manager. On

my first day in this new role, our computer systems

crashed, and in those days there was no IT manager.

At the same time, there was a flood in the kitchen of

our fine-dining restaurant, which caved the ceiling

in on another restaurant below. We could not find

engineers or plumbers fast enough. All of this taught

me to be tenacious, to expect the unexpected, and

manage crises calmly and professionally.To understand the evolving needs of young,

affluent travelers, hire young colleagues into your management team. They can help you see the future and adapt to change.““

EMPOWER YOUR TEAM

Once you clearly communicate your organization’s

objectives, empower your team to make decisions to

achieve those results—particularly with respect to

guests. As a leader, you need to support their abili-

ty to make decisions, and allow them to improvise.

Only then will they take ownership in the success of the company—and pride in their work. This pride

translates to sharing their culture, joy, and enthusi-

asm with guests. An empowered staff member makes

for a satisfied client.

ATTITUDE AND AMBITION

I hire people who demonstrate an openness to new

ideas, a willingness to develop and learn, and a pas -

sion for the hospitality industry. I believe a great deal in first impressions, too, and I often ask several

questions related to how an applicant has handled

real situations in the past. I also challenge them to explain what they would bring to the role, now and

in the future.

ENGAGE TO MOTIVATE

One of the most important ways to motivate your

team to excellence is by involving them in the deci-

sion-making process as it relates to operations and

other hotel business. Openly discuss what works,

what doesn’t work, and how best to improve. This

type of candid discussion avoids repeating mistakes.

By regularly involving colleagues in key decisions,

they will develop a deeper sense of ownership in the

ultimate success of the property.

Celebrating and rewarding staff is also a powerful

motivator. During monthly team meetings, we pres -

ent select staff with certificates or vouchers, organize external gatherings, and recognize those who went

above and beyond their responsibilities.

NO MATTER THE PRICE

Guests accept differences in price, but not quality. The

same minimum standard of service, quality, warmth,

and emotional connection apply to all guests, all the

time, no matter what category of room. Consistency

is something that applies across the board, and not

just to those who paid more.

PEOPLE ARE YOUR GREATEST ASSET

Every person on staff has an important role to play

in the success of the organization. They all need to

clearly understand objectives, mission, and vision.

Once internalized, every action they take should re-

inforce that direction. Your people are your greatest asset, and if they believe in the work, have a passion

for service, and enjoy their jobs, that will automati-

cally translate to guests.

LOCAL IS LUXURY

Quality is a mix of authenticity and personalization.

At the end of the day, if our wine list encompassed

only the best French wines, our guests would be dis -

14

15appointed. They do want something special, but they

also want it to be local and representative of where

they are. Therefore, we must take what is local, own

it, and then develop it into something personal.

DIGITAL VS. PRINT

Digital is instantaneous, but print marketing has

its place. Sometimes, print marketing serves a kind

of confirmation, or reaffirmation, that guests have

made the right choice. The sensory experience of a

magazine or other print publication will always be

important.

THE BUDAPEST WINTER INVASION

One of the most successful marketing campaigns I’ve

ever been involved in was promoting the winter sea-

son in Budapest, Hungary. Aptly titled the Budapest

Winter Invasion, it centered on how Budapest had

been invaded by the Romans, the Ottomans, and the

Soviets, and that they all stayed longer than intended.

The offer was that our guests could stay longer, too,

because there was so much to see. In short, we would

offer the fourth night as a gift to continue exploring. It

was not presented as a discount, but rather an extend-

ed vacation. We grew our winter business by nearly 30 percent by simply telling a more compelling story tied to the history of the country. It was authentic, witty, and enticing.

A SPECIAL NETWORK

While today’s concierge may find him or herself

in front of a guest who has more information than

they do, pulled from all kinds of websites and review

platforms, the concierge is the one with the special

network of contacts. These relationships allow the

guest to secure privileged access around the city that

simply cannot be purchased or discovered online.

PERSONALIZED SERVICE, GLOBAL REACH

We once had a guest who was very famous for his

tagline. We embroidered this tagline onto a bathrobe

and gave it to him as a gift. He was so excited that he

promptly showed it off on social media to his many

friends and followers around the world. It was a rel-

atively low lift, but highly personalized, and resulted

in fantastic digital exposure.

SEE THE FUTURE

With the rise of young affluent travelers, you need to

adjust and cater to their needs and interests, which

are often different from the more traditional gener -

ation of luxury lovers. One of the best ways to un-

derstand and adapt to this shift is by hiring young

members onto your management team that help you

see the future and adapt to change.

SUSTAINABLE LUXURY

When we think about sustainability and luxury to-

day, we must also think about authenticity. The new

luxury traveler craves a localized experience, so if we

can grow our own vegetables, produce honey on the

roof, or recycle our water to feed our gardens, we

are engaging in sustainable practices while creating

a more authentic experience.

HOTELS ARE GLOBAL, RESTAURANTS

ARE LOCAL

Food is extremely important to the luxury traveler.

However, to be successful, the restaurant and food

offerings must appeal to the local market. In many

cases, hotel guests desire to venture out of the prop-

erty to explore the dining scene, rather than stay on-

site. Therefore, to be successful, top chefs must cater

to both travelers and locals alike.

17

Alexander

Pichel

GENERAL MANAGER,

HOTEL INDONESIA KEMPINSKI JARKAT A,(INDONESIA)

BORN IN:

Bielefeld, Germany

SELECT GEOGRAPHICAL

EXPERIENCE:

Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Azerbaijan,

Ukraine, Russian Federation, Kyrgyzstan, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, Argentina, Germany

YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY:

30

Photos Courtesy of Hotel Indonesia Kempinski Jakarta

19GROWING UP

I was born in Germany and grew up in an old castle

surrounded by a moat. I had a passion for adven-

ture, sports, the outdoors, and exploring. My father

was a journalist and my mother was a housewife.

My mother most certainly influenced my leadership

style. From a young age, her calmness, understand-

ing, and empathy were instilled in me.

A SURPRISING PASSION

After leaving high school in the 10th grade, I did a

couple of internships in the industry after hearing

good things from a friend. I gave it a shot, and de-

spite working fourteen-hour days, I fell in love with

hospitality. I ended up sending 100 applications

for entry-level positions throughout Germany. My

mom would drive me around for interviews because

I didn’t have a driving license. HOW NOT TO LEAD

At seventeen, I was lucky enough to land a position

as a bellboy. I then managed to be accepted into the

hotel management apprenticeship program at Bris -

tol Hotel Kempinski Berlin, the best hotel in Berlin back in the 1980s. Back then, hoteliers were rather old-fashioned and ran a very tight ship. It was their

way or the highway. At first, I looked up to them, but I quickly realized that leaders must show empathy,

understanding, and actively listen to their staff. Only then will you be able to gain their trust. A top-down

approach without the human touch was not a recipe

for success.

THE AMBITION TO SUCCEED

I started working as an office assistant at the Hyatt

Carlton Tower, then a Park Hyatt Hotel in London.

I was savvy with computers, rising to become an IT In this business, you must always offer

experiences that guests themselves could not possibly arrange on their own. You must make them feel special.““

20

21manager, then overlooking the entire IT department.

Ten years later, I became a general manager with Hy -

att. The company believed in me to excel and deliver, and I believed in myself to do the same. Hard work,

resilience, passion, and the willingness to learn and

be challenged are the cornerstones of success.

TRAIN, THEN EMPOWER

After training your team, empower them to act. If

you are confident you have the right people in place,

trust them to do the right thing at the right time. You

may have thirty years of experience in the business,

but it is your team that serves on the frontlines and most often interacts with guests. Empower them to

adapt and make decisions. Similarly, if staff are not

encouraged to provide honest and candid feedback

about what works and what doesn’t, the property will

inevitably erode in quality and consistency.

THE RIGHT ATTITUDE

Aside from reviewing a resume, I ask applicants how

their friends and colleagues would talk about them

if I asked. I ask about their ambitions and how they

plan to achieve them. To that end, I make judgments

about an applicant based on their attitude and per -

sonality. Not every job requires experience in hospi-tality. In some cases, you can teach new hires every -

thing they need to know about a position once on

board. You just need the right attitude and the drive

to succeed.

EVERY HOTEL IS DIFFERENT

In one hotel, the team you worked with might be per -

fect, but that same team at another property could be

a disaster. A city hotel runs differently than a resort.

You need to know in detail what those differences

are—managerially and operationally—and you need

to be mindful of that when you hire.

NEVER STOP IMPROVING

One of the biggest challenges in this industry is stay -

ing relevant and innovative. Never stand still. You

must constantly seek new opportunities to improve

your offering in all its forms. The simplest example is IT infrastructure and all the technological expec -

tations travelers have today. If WiFi connectivity is weak in the room, restaurant, lobby, or bar, you will

hear about that via guest comments. Similarly, you

must regularly refresh the restaurant menus and

upgrade the look and feel of your rooms and com-

mon areas, otherwise guests will move on to anoth-

er property that does. Only those that continuously

strive for more and better will last.

LISTENING IS HALF THE BATTLE

When a guest experience is not up to par, the first

thing you must do is listen carefully and actively—

without prejudice. Take the time to genuinely hear a

complaint, and empathize with that frustration. Lis -

tening is half the battle. Second, you must honestly apologize and offer a solution. You must capitalize on this opportunity to turn an unhappy guest into

an ambassador of the property.

MORE LOCAL, LESS GLOBAL

Often, you enter a hotel lobby and forget which coun-

try you’re in. There is no local culture, artwork, de-sign, or décor. It could be San Francisco, São Paulo, or Singapore. Luxury travelers are not just looking

for a good night’s rest, quality service, and a fabulous

meal. They want a memorable experience unique to

their location.

MAKE THEM FEEL SPECIAL

Whether providing access to a coveted museum

before or after working hours, arranging backstage

access to the local theater, offering a new but yet-

to-be-public menu at a prominent restaurant, or

organizing a private fashion show, in this business,

you must always offer experiences guests could not arrange on their own to make them feel special.

INVESTING IN DIGITAL

Generally, print marketing is getting less important.

Digital marketing is critical. Investing strategically

in search engine optimization to ensure visibility has

proven to be a solid return on investment if done

right. Utilizing other channels, too, such as Face-

book, Instagram, and Twitter are also important, but you need to understand your target markets to

know what works best for each before jumping into

all platforms for all people.

23THE STREET FOOD FESTIVAL

With street food being part and parcel of local cul-

ture in Jakarta, we decided to organize a local street

food festival, engaging a social media company to de-

sign a contest that allowed the public to vote on the

best street food vendor and dish in town. After the

public voted, we worked with the vendors to secure

all the necessary licenses and had them cook the win-

ning dishes at one of our restaurants. This has now

become an annual event. It was a truly successful

campaign to engage the local community and food lovers, drawing them into the festival and ultimately

our restaurant.

THE DIGITAL CONCIERGE

The luxury concierge is here to stay, but the way

in which we communicate with them continues to

evolve. More and more, direct contact will be mini-

mized. We must accommodate other types of com-

munication such as WhatsApp, Skype, FaceTime,

text messaging, and email. Luxury concierges are

increasingly adopting these methods to react and

respond to any guest inquiry at any time of day or

night. We already regularly communicate with our

guests via email, and with some of our regulars, we are in constant touch via WhatsApp. In addition, mobile

and tablet applications are becoming more popular,

24allowing you to request room service, book spa ap-

pointments and more with ease and without calling.

LUXURY AND CONSISTENCY

Personalized luxury hospitality has always been

about knowing a guest’s preferred food or drinks, preparing the minibar, bathroom, temperature, and

lighting to their liking, and noting their preferred seat

at a restaurant. It is also about knowing the names

of their children and preparing amenities for them,

making special note of their allergies, placing a book -

mark in an open book and leaving it bedside, seeing that a guest always sleeps on one side of the bed, and

only preparing that side during turndown service.

The hardest part of delivering personalized service

is doing so consistently. That is what sets you apart

and ensures a repeat guest.

THE EXPANDING GUEST PROFILE

To deliver on the promise of personalized luxury, you

must know your guests intimately. You do that by

asking the right questions. While securing the book -

ing, before your guest arrives, during their stay, when housekeeping takes care of the room, when they’re

enjoying the restaurant, harnessing the concierge to book any activities, and following their departure. You must use any and all opportunities to continu-ally learn about your guest, without being intrusive.

THE HEAL TH-CONSCIOUS TRAVELLER

Luxury travelers are looking for a more natural,

healthy, and wellness-oriented stay. Consider insti-

tuting yoga classes, developing your own herb and

vegetable garden, and working with local organic

farms to source your ingredients. Such a collabora-

tion is both sought and appreciated. Having a nu-

tritionist on staff to assist and introduce guests to

healthy eating habits and a more natural lifestyle is

also a welcome offering.

FROM BEGINNING TO END

The journey of a luxury traveler must be tailored

from the moment a guest steps off the plane until

they depart. In some countries, you can arrange to

meet and greet your guests right at the plane, escort -

ing them to a limousine where a guest relations col-league may join them to answer questions on their

way to the hotel. That same colleague might also be

the point of contact throughout their stay as a kind

of personal concierge.

25

Alexander

van

Gastel

GENERAL MANAGER,

PULITZER AMSTERDAM,(THE NETHERLANDS)

BORN IN:

Geldrop, The Netherlands

SELECT GEOGRAPHICAL

EXPERIENCE:

The Netherlands, Germany,

Austria, United Kingdom

YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY:

23

Photo on Left Courtesy of Kirsten van Santen for Pulitzer Amsterdam

Photos Courtesy of Pulitzer Amsterdam

27GROWING UP

I grew up in a family of teachers in a little town called

Asten, in the southern part of the Netherlands. Hos -

pitality has always been a part our family’s DNA. Our doors were always open to friends, family, and

neighbors. We traveled a lot throughout the years,

experiencing many different cultures, countries, and

cities. I loved constantly meeting new people from

different backgrounds.

A PASSION FOR PEOPLE

My first job in the hospitality industry was at age six -

teen. Every Saturday morning, I served coffee, tea,

and eggs in a small hotel with only twelve rooms. I

was hooked. I realized my passion was working for

and with people. Hotels have been magical for me

ever since. LEARN AS MUCH AS YOU CAN

During my studies, I worked at a golf club just over

the German border. I was still a student at the time,

but worked very closely together with the owner

and restaurant manager. They taught me everything

I needed to know about running a restaurant, from

early morning shift until night. It was an invaluable

real-time lesson in the restaurant business.

GIVE RESPECT TO GET RESPECT

My first real leadership position was at a four-star

airport hotel in London Gatwick when I was fulfilling

my Rooms Division internship. I was only twenty and

as a trainee I was responsible for the entire night -

shift. I learned how to deal with a variety of cultures and personalities, and realized that in order to earn The most important thing people don’t

realize about this industry is that the soul of a hotel is its people, not the design or technology. You need to create a team culture of belonging and pride to succeed.““

28

29your team’s respect, you must show them that you

are working as hard as they are. Earning respect goes

both ways.

THE FREEDOM TO ACT

Do not micromanage your employees. Empower

them to make decisions. It is important to give em-

ployees the freedom to decide, in whatever situation,

what is in the best interest of guests. We never criti-

cize such decisions, and whenever mistakes are made

we treat them as learning opportunities. Even in such

cases where the guest experience could be improved,

staff are empowered to take action and resolve issues

as they see fit. This stems from a culture of continu-

ous improvement and striving for excellence. Many

organizations are afraid to give such freedom to staff,

but I believe it is critical to success.

MENTORS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

I had two mentors throughout my career that were

critical in developing my professional life. Each took

me under their wing. They believed in my abilities,

trusted me to learn from my mistakes, and over time,

entrusted me with greater responsibilities. Seek out

people who are willing to advise you, guide you, and

teach you. You will look back on such relationships

as instrumental to your professional growth.A SPARKLING PERSONALITY

Over the last few years, I have focused less on an

applicant’s resume and increasingly on attitude.

Someone’s smile and sparkle, and their natural mo-

tivation, are extremely important. Knowledge can

be imparted, but an attitude towards the industry,

towards people, and towards life is harder to change. At the same time, you must be mindful of the various

personalities on your team, and ensure any new hire

will complement the others, including their potential

manager.

EVERYONE A STORYTELLER

For new hires, we organize a range of interactive

trainings and educational sessions, including games

and role playing. Additionally, one of our concierges,

who holds the key to all the hidden gems and secrets

of the city, takes all new employees on a storytell-

ing tour through the neighborhoods of Amsterdam. Lastly, they visit the Canal House Museum to learn

about the history of the UNESCO canal belt, in which

the Pulitzer Amsterdam is located.

This is part of our effort to train and empower all

members of our team to become storytellers. It be-

gins from the moment a booking is made to when they checkin physically, to when a porter guides them

30INVEST IN HUMAN RESOURCES

One of the biggest challenges in this industry is hiring

the right person for the right job at the right time. To

do this well, you must go beyond a human resources

department, which primarily focuses on administra-

tive tasks. You must invest in dedicated people who

focus on training, development, and recruitment. Without the right people in place, you simply will

not succeed.

BEING A GOOD NEIGHBOR

Pulitzer Amsterdam is located in the middle of the

city, and we have more than 200 direct neighbors. Our

relationship to them is critical to the success of our

hotel. During a recent renovation of the property, we

introduced the “Pulitzer Neighbor Discovery Card” to

thank all those around us for their patience through-

out this process. The card entitled them to a 15 per -

cent discount at the hotel’s restaurant Jansz, Pulitzer’s

Bar, and our lobby-garden café Pause. This proved to

be a very successful way to engage our neighbors and

show that we appreciate their partnership.to their room, to when they sit for breakfast and be-yond. We are constantly sharing interesting insights

and happenings in and around the neighborhood.

More than seventy employees, or a third of our team,

have been with the hotel for more than thirty years.

They know all of our regular clientele and teach the

company’s DNA and history to all new recruits.

MILLENNIALS LIKE CHANGE

It is important to understand the ambitions and goals

of your team so you can tailor a professional devel-

opment roadmap for each member. The younger

generation in particular is eager to explore different

positions after relatively short periods. It is import -

ant to understand their motivations and try to ac -

commodate them to maintain interest and loyalty.

RAISING THE BAR

Over the last ten years, guests have rightly become

more critical, and their expectations have increased. Prior to their arrival, they are already armed with vast

amounts of knowledge about the property as well as

the other properties in the area. This comparative

insight puts every aspect of your hotel in the spot -

light, for better or for worse. The bar has been raised across the board.

THE POWER AND PERIL OF SOCIAL MEDIA

In our industry, we need to understand social media

and other digital platforms in a comprehensive way.

It is not confined to a review on TripAdvisor. The

younger traveler, in particular, shares their entire cus -

tomer journey online—soliciting ideas on where to stay on Facebook, sharing their booking on Twitter,

posting photos on Instagram, live-streaming their

experiences on Snapchat and beyond. The influence

of these platforms cannot be understated and is only

expected to grow.

32

Hotels are put under pressure by individuals with

a large number of social media fans and worldwide

followers, most of whom have never stepped foot in

your hotel. It is therefore hard for a hotel not to grant

their wishes because they fear a negative review or

experience would do far more damage than not com-

plying. Everything shared is from the perspective of

the poster, so two-sided context is rarely ever possi-

ble. Dealing with these kinds of situations is one of

the biggest challenges we face as an industry.

LUXURY TRAVEL IS GETTING

MORE PERSONAL

Over the last three years, we have expanded the

number of concierges at our property from four to

six. Guests are increasingly interested in arranging

activities and restaurant reservations far in advance

of their stay, rather than upon arrival. This requires

more manpower. At the same time, today’s guests are

interested in connecting with a local expert who can

guide them to hidden gems of the city not found or

recommended online.

The concierge is now chief curator, as there is too

much information online to sort through. They also

serve to reaffirm the choices of travelers who have

truly done their homework on how best to experi-

ence the city.

34SUITES THAT TRANSPORT GUESTS

As part of our recent renovation, our designer cre-

ated five Extraordinary Suites, in which he had the

freedom to completely customize the rooms to his

own creativity. The five suites are story-based. We

have the Book Collector’s Suite, the Antique Col-

lector’s Suite, the Art Collector’s Suite, the Music Collector’s Suite, and the Pulitzer Suite. Each one

transports guests into a truly special surrounding,

embodied in history and culture. It is also a unique

selling point, attracting many new guests to the hotel.

GOING ABOVE AND BEYOND

A certain percentage of our guests are marked as

VIPs in the sense that they may be celebrating a spe-

cial occasion, represent a particular travel agency, or

have a specific occupation. They all receive a wel-

come surprise, but more broadly, we try to go above

and beyond to create unique and memorable mo-ments for all guests. For example, one of our guests

loved the movie The Fault in Our Stars, which was

filmed in Amsterdam. We sketched out a route for

her through the city that covered all of the locations

in the movie. We also have a kids’ program for all ages

with a focus on the family travel, which includes per -

sonalized pillowcases, balloons, board games, travel diaries and more.DIFFERENT ORIGINS,

DIFFERENT PREFERENCES

Emerging market travelers are focused on A-list des -

tinations such as Rome, Barcelona, Berlin, Paris, and

London. They used to appreciate or even demand

that their native breakfast be served at the destina-

tions they were visiting. In a relatively recent shift, they are becoming more adventurous and open to

experiencing local tastes. Such travelers spend more

money on souvenirs, European brand clothing, and

taking pictures to share on social media platforms.

On the other hand, seasoned travelers are moving to

more unique and secondary destinations, spending most of their money on the journey itself, like fly -

ing first class, staying in five-star hotels, and placing a value on experience rather than on possessions.

Overall, customers are willing to pay for the conve-

nience and comfort of a travel agent, as the use of

travel advisors has skyrocketed.

35

Amit

Majumder

GENERAL MANAGER,

JUMEIRAH VITT AVELI,(MALDIVES)

BORN IN:

Kolkata, West Bengal, India

SELECT GEOGRAPHICAL

EXPERIENCE:

Maldives, United Arab Emirates,

Singapore

YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY:

17

Photos Courtesy of Jumeirah Vittaveli

37GROWING UP

I was born in Kolkata, India, and when I was young

my father would travel a lot for work. He allowed me

to join him on business trips during the holidays. I

loved visiting new places and meeting new people.

My mother, too, loved traveling and experiencing

new places. She was always surrounded by travel

magazines and books, and continues to write a trav -

el journal. As a family, we traveled every opportunity we could, and I developed a love for exploration.

A PASSION TO SERVE

My first job in the hospitality industry was with

Oberoi Hotels and Resorts at Rajvilas as a food and beverage associate, which is a fancier name for a wait -

er, barman, and butler combined. The company put an emphasis on becoming multi-skilled. Early on, I

developed a passion for guest service. I also learned the importance of each and every role, no matter how

small, and the value of teamwork in achieving success.

AN INVALUABLE LESSON

My first leadership position was at Jumeirah Dar Al

Masyaf in Dubai, which was a sprawling resort, and

was similar to managing a number of small hotels si-

multaneously. It quickly became clear that with such a

large and complicated operation, we had to constantly

train and mentor our staff, otherwise we would fail.

The best way to do this was through MBWA, or Man-Our signature restaurant, Swarna, was

initially planned to be a small Tandoori grill, but based on input from our guests, my team, and the owners, it was developed into a lavish restaurant consisting of three private cabanas and one chef’s table.““

38

39agement by Walking Around. We needed to be as vis -

ible as possible to seek feedback from customers and

colleagues alike, answering questions and resolving

issues swiftly. Walking around and being available to

listen, learn, and support is one of the most important

lessons I ever learned.

RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

You can only be successful in an environment where

everyone feels respected, demonstrates integrity,

has the right skill set for the job, is fully responsible

for their actions, and is empowered to contribute to

high-level decision making. In addition, a healthy,

candid discussion among the broader team helps us

think outside the box and ensures that we are contin-

uously reinventing our services and offering. Com-

bined, this is the recipe for success.

HARDWARE VS. SOFTWARE

You can have the best “hardware” any luxury hotelier

could imagine, including a beautiful property with

impeccable furnishings and a stunning décor. But if

you’re lacking in the best “software, ” such as a team

that doesn’t possess the right attitude, training, or

passion for service, you will always set yourself up

for failure.KNOW YOUR TEAM, INSIDE OUT

As a leader, respect is earned, and one of the hall-

marks of respect is knowing your team well. You

must have a complete understanding of their jobs,

their pain points, what inspires or motivates them,

and how to instill the confidence they need to be em -

powered and to take full responsibility for their roles.

OPPORTUNITY IN CRISIS

When the SARS epidemic continued to spread in

Asia, hotels were practically empty. Apart from a

few health officials, there were no guests. People

were losing their jobs in the hotel industry all over

Asia, and this forced us to think about how best to

save the jobs of our colleagues while also how best

to handle the crisis. We saw an opportunity and con-

vinced our shareholders to invest in a refurbishment

of the property. With an empty hotel, what better

time to expedite a renovation, opening renewed as a fresh product that commanded higher rates. In a few

months, without any loss or displacement of busi-

ness, we did exactly that. You must adapt when the

goal posts move.

A WARM WELCOME

At Jumeirah, we have company orientations and

more resort-specific training for all of our new re-

cruits during their first three months. Not only do

we regularly check in on the new colleagues’ job

satisfaction, but we also check in on their personal

satisfaction. Are they happy with their accommo-dations? Do they feel welcome and appreciated as a

new member of the team? Are they aware of all the

facilities available to them on-site? We also ask them,

and their immediate supervisor, if the on-boarding

process itself was sufficient. Never miss an opportu-

nity to improve.

BLOW OFF SOME STEAM

Colleagues need a break once in a while to refresh

their minds, so we arrange gatherings for both junior

and senior teams each month. These social events

provide me a chance to interact with everyone in a more relaxed atmosphere, giving me an opportunity

to get to know them better without discussing work.

Genuine friendships are often formed or reinforced

in informal environments.

41BENDING THE BRAND

Staying relevant and true to the brand is one of the

biggest challenges to our industry. In response to the

different needs and demographics of new travelers,

luxury hotels are challenged with how far they’re

willing to bend their own brand to adapt and evolve.

BETTER THAN HOME

Luxury hotels are supposed to be a step up from the

consumers’ own homes in every respect— design, dé-

cor, technology, and facilities. While the well-heeled

consumer can change aspects of their home more

frequently, luxury hotels often struggle to swiftly

bring those changes to their properties on a wider

scale. At Vittaveli, we have an advantage being in the

Maldives. Not many people in the world can have

an island home, steps away from the most beautiful

white, sandy beach, clear blue waters, and thriving

reefs. We coupled that with expansive villas, large private swimming pools and open bathrooms, high-

speed Internet, music and video content, twenty-four

hour butler service, and more. We also realized that

people from the city do not generally ride bicycles on

a daily basis, so we introduced them on the property

and they became an instant hit. We are now working

on a large, outdoor theatre and an ice skating rink.A REWARDING CAREER, AT A COST

Working in the luxury hotel business affords you

the opportunity to travel the world, meet new and

important people, and enjoy the very best food and

drinks, but it does come at a price. There are no nine-

to-five jobs in this industry. It takes dedication, com-

mitment, and long working hours. If you do not have a passion for guest service, I would not recommend

this industry to you. In order to succeed, you need to

be a true people-person.

INNOVATION REQUIRES INPUT

Our signature restaurant, Swarna, was initially

planned to be a small Tandoori grill, but based on

input from our guests, my team, and the owners, it

was developed into a lavish restaurant consisting of

three private cabanas and one chef’s table. Months

after we opened in 2015, it was awarded best Indi-

an cuisine in Asia. Similarly, we are now planning to introduce the first-ever ice rink in the Maldives—an

eco-friendly rink using material that does not require

to be cooled, thus minimizing our carbon footprint.

The rink will allow guests to go straight from a swim

in the warm Indian Ocean to gliding gracefully along

a magnificent winter wonderland, breaking the tradi-

tional concept of a Maldives resort holiday.

42EMBRACING THE DIGITAL FUTURE,

WITH CAVEATS

A feature on social media might have an immense im-

pact in the moment, while print articles tend to have

a longer-lasting effect on readers. Certain print pub-

lications are associated with prestige and positioning.

Social media, however, has altered our perception of luxury. We have had social media influencers stay

at our resort and posting to two million people on-

line, which is more than most print publications can

claim. While reaching customers has become easier,

competition has become fiercer.

In this new world, with social media being ubiquitous,

we now look out for guests posting about our proper -

ty online. For example, we had seen that a guest stay -

ing at our property shared that he just got engaged,

so we contacted the couple and arranged a private

symbolic wedding ceremony including a photo shoot

for them to memorialize their stay.

VIRTUAL REALITY

In collaboration with Google in 2015, Jumeirah intro-

duced the “Jumeirah Inside” platform, which made

all of our hotels available in virtual reality. Guests and

partners could pre-experience the hotel before book -

ing their stay. We were the first hotel brand to broadly adopt this new technology for all of our properties, demonstrating our ability to be innovative and em-

brace the future.

PARTNERSHIPS WITH PURPOSE

When partnering with others for help in strength-

ening your brand image, do not settle on something

that is a passing fad. Choose something that will have

a lasting association that you can be proud of many

years from now. Any branding must also enhance

your identity rather than distract from it.

ANTICIPATION IS CORE

True luxury is having what you’re merely thinking

about be presented to you before you voice that

desire. Every luxury brand invests in, and creates,

mechanisms to track the preferences of their guests,

but what sets each of them apart is how that informa-tion is used. Beyond having guidelines for how best

to observe and document preferences, it takes a lot

of training, a keen eye, and the right attitude to intuit

a need and take action. A perfect employee for the

luxury segment is the one who notices that the bath-

robe, for example, is a bit too long for the guest, takes

it down to the seamstress to alter its size, and then

discreetly places it back on the bathroom hanger.

43

Anneke

Brown

GENERAL MANAGER,

COMO THE TREASURY,(PERTH, AUSTRALIA)

BORN IN:

Sydney, Australia

SELECT GEOGRAPHICAL

EXPERIENCE:

Australia, Indonesia, Cambodia,

India, Sri Lanka, Bhutan,

Philippines, Turks and Caicos

YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY:

22

Photos Courtesy of Como The Treasury

45GROWING UP

As a family, we traveled frequently. When I was a

young child, we lived in Jakarta for two years. I

learned to speak Indonesian, fell in love with the

people and the country, and developed a passion for

the hotel industry when I was just twelve years old.

While on holiday with family in Bali, I sketched out

a beachside resort. My father was my greatest guide.

He always encouraged me to be confident and to pur -

sue academia, guiding me to university and ensuring I received a solid business education.

THE JOB OF A WAITRESS

At age eighteen, my first position in hospitality was

as a waitress. I still today believe the best hospitali-

ty people start in food and beverage. You are forced

to handle stressful situations that need immediate responses. For example, you need to deal with time pressures of a busy restaurant, prioritizing many

tasks, handling complaints from guests, handling

demands from the kitchen, dealing with money,

working long hours, being on your feet all day, learn-

ing how to communicate effectively and efficiently,

learning to empathize with strangers, and much

more. The food service industry is truly a gateway to

a successful career in hospitality.

PROBLEM MEETS SOLUTION

One of the hallmarks of my management style is en-

couraging colleagues to come to me with not only a problem but also a suggested solution. When pre-

sented with a challenge, I ask them what they would

do and what they think is the best option. I want

them to think for themselves, yet always be there to

provide guidance.Most luxury travelers living in highly-

commercialized worlds are thirsty for unique, authentic, local experiences. Embodying the local culture is critical to our success.““

46CUL TURAL NUANCES MATTER

My first leadership position was serving as the reser -

vation manager for Amanresorts, Indonesia. This was

a dream role, and I was responsible for seven staffers.

I was based at Amanusa in Bali, and all my staff were

Balinese and Indonesian. Because I spoke Indone -

sian, I was able to quickly build rapport with my team

and earn their respect. However, I was young and had

yet to earn their trust. I quickly learned the cultural

specifics of both Balinese and Indonesian staff. It was

in this role that I learned the importance of “face” in

Asian cultures, and the need to discipline in private.

AN ENGAGED TEAM

All staff must understand the importance of engaging

in the guest experience to ensure that each and every

guest is treated to a truly memorable stay. Engage-

ment requires care and concern. An engaged staff

can also identify when a guest experience can be im-proved, and can take action themselves to resolve any

issues with a service or offering.

THE SECRET TO DELEGATION

Developing your staff to take on roles of increasing

responsibility comes down to delegation. You need to identify those who are ready to take on additional tasks, select them, train them, trust them to deliver, observe their efforts, and ultimately provide feed-

back. Delegation empowers and opens the door for

stars to shine. It is also a smart strategy for any suc -

cession planning to be effective.

THE PERFECT CUL TURAL FIT

You must respect, integrate, and embrace the man-

aging team around you. As they ultimately run day-

to-day operations, include their voice and ideas in

all key decisions. When selecting senior managers,

it is critical that they be the right cultural fit, which

is the most important aspect of any business. When the management team is a perfect cultural fit, each

person understands and embodies the essence of the

vision and values. They work together, support each

other, and contribute their insight and experience to

important decisions.

MENTOR MATTERS

I had one primary mentor who played a significant

role in my career. His name was Guy Heywood, and

at the time he was the general manager of Amankila

in Indonesia. He taught me everything he knew about

the luxury guest experience, supported my growth

47

through the ranks, and even gave me my first gen-

eral manager role. He saw the talent within me early

on and nurtured it over many years, introducing me

to key management personnel for Aman Resorts. I

thrived on the trust he placed in me, and I learned ev -

erything I could from him. The main lesson he taught me about the luxury market was never to cut corners

on the guest experience when looking for efficiencies

in the business. Cost saving strategies should never

be at the detriment to the guest experience.

HIRE FOR THREE TRAITS

I hire for personality, personality, and personality. I

look for gracious people who are confident and pas -

sionate. I try to avoid arrogance or ego, as this will work against you in the hospitality business.

ROLL UP YOUR SLEEVES

As a leader, you need to be aware of when your staff

goes through tough times. When it’s so busy and the

team is exhausted at the end of their shift, they know

that I will step in and support them, no matter what

the task. The most important thing is that the guests

are looked after. If that means clearing a table of emp-

ty plates because the waiters are all tied up, or lifting a piece of luggage because the porter is looking after

49

someone else, then this is what leaders must do. You

must never stand back and let your team falter. Your

staff will never forget that assistance, and the loyalty

they’ll show simply because they witness you prac -

ticing what you preach will be invaluable.SMALL BUT MIGHTY

One of the biggest challenges to leading a luxury ho-

tel in a country like Australia is the associated costs

of delivering a high-quality service where the labor

cost is extreme. This results in delivering a luxury

experience with a very small team, which can only

be effective if you double-down on recruiting multi-

skilled people, and regularly invest in their profes -

sional development.

A BOTTLE OF WINE CAN’T FIX

When the experience is not up to par, the best ac -

tion is personal attention and speaking directly to

the guest, ensuring you understand all of the details

so that your solution is relevant. The worst possible

option in a complaint situation is to send a note of

apology and a bottle of wine. This rarely solves any -

thing. When a luxury experience goes wrong, you need to correct it, and compensate without question.

DO YOUR HOMEWORK

If you’re interested in joining the hospitality indus -

try, work while studying. Put yourself in the indus -

try while you’re learning it. This will be challenging

on your time, and will teach you how to manage it

more effectively. Then when you apply for the role

you want, show your passion, do your homework

and learn as much about the company as you can in

advance, including experiencing their product. Eat

at their restaurant, book a room, and make sure the

company and its values speak to you. If you’re just

looking to get your feet wet, offer to work a few shifts

on a trial basis.

51

53AUTHENTICITY IN ACTION

Everything we create is based on the local experience,

and that’s what makes us unique. Our food, wine,

amenities, and minibar are filled with local products.

We work with local businesses, sharing the story of

our city, the history of the area, and curating itin -

eraries that celebrate our surrounding. Most luxury

travelers living in highly-commercialized worlds are

thirsty for unique, authentic, local experiences. Em-

bodying the local culture is critical to our success.

CELEBRATING LOCAL

One of our most successful marketing campaigns to

date was titled State Makers. It was a campaign that

celebrated the very best of local experiences by con-

necting, in our buildings, guests with artisans and

craftsman around us.

STORYTELLING, NOT JUST PRODUCT

True luxury hotels are about experiences. In heritage

hotels, like ours, there are wonderful and very unique

stories from within the buildings. For example, one of

our suites is called the Cabinet Room, and it was in

this room that the State Cabinet sat, discussing and

determining the direction of the State. If only those

walls could talk.ONCE UPON A TIME . . .

During the final months of the restoration of the

State Buildings and COMO The Treasury, we were

contacted by a gentleman who once worked in the

treasury department in the 1960s. In fact, he met his

wife working in these buildings. I took him on a site

tour wearing a hard hat and boots, and we walked the corridors. He shared with me wonderful stories

of his working days, and that he was planning to book

a room to celebrate his 43rd wedding anniversary as

a surprise for his wife.

We invited them to stay as our guests—a small gesture

to thank him for the incredible history he had shared with us. We allocated one of our suites. The room

housed the chief accountant’s office, the same room

that he would deliver documents to daily during his

years as a clerk. During our tour, he said that every

anniversary he would play a couple of songs from

their wedding. We loaded those songs onto an iPod

in the room and had them playing as they entered.

His wife was in tears. Later during their stay, she had

been to the gift shop and had shown interest in the

locally made porcelain tea set. The shop owner con-

tacted me and we wrapped the tea set, gifting it to the guests at turndown for their anniversary.

Axel

Bethke

GENERAL MANAGER,

QASR AL SARAB DESERTRESORT BY ANANT ARA (ABU DHABI, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES)

BORN IN:

Heidelberg, Germany

SELECT GEOGRAPHICAL

EXPERIENCE:

United Arab Emirates, Germany,

France, United States, Austria,

China, Jordan

YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY:

30

Photos Courtesy of Qasr Al Sarab Desert Resort

55GROWING UP

I grew up in a small village in the countryside near

Heidelberg, Germany. My aunt was in the hotel busi-

ness, and when I was twelve she started taking me to

discover national and international luxury hotels over

long weekends. Being exposed to the industry at such

a young age, I developed a passion for traveling and

exploring other countries, cultures, and traditions.

SMILING MATTERS

My first job in the hospitality business was an in-

ternship as a waiter at a luxury hotel in Hamburg. I learned that while it was important to have the tech-

nical skills for the position, it was more important to

have the right service attitude towards guests. A smile

makes all the difference.KNOW YOUR TEAM

When I was twenty-five, I became restaurant man-

ager of a one-star Michelin restaurant in Germany. It

was my first serious leadership position, where I was

in charge of fourteen employees. The learning curve

was immense, but I realized I had to learn as much as

I could about each and every employee. What moti-

vates them? What are their strengths? What are their

weaknesses? I needed to understand everyone indi-

vidually so that I could inspire them, support them,

and set them up for success.

BE A ROLE MODEL

As a leader, we must display the values we want our

colleagues to emulate—honesty, respect, integrity,

commitment. Particularly in the service industry, A genuine relationship between an employee

and a guest cannot be manufactured. It can only be formed organically in an environment that prides itself on personal interaction and authenticity.““

56

when these values are shared and embodied in an

authentic way, the resulting environment translates

into more meaningful engagement with guests.

LASTING RELATIONSHIPS

Even in our remote location, 35 percent of our guests

are repeat customers. I am convinced that this is be-

cause our guests and employees develop a friendship,

and that personal level of hospitality is very hard to

find. Our colleagues across the board are valued as

individuals. They share their family stories, experi-

ences, and hobbies with our guests, who do the same

in return. A lasting relationship is formed during their stay, and that kind of relationship cannot be

manufactured. It can only come organically in an en-

vironment that prides itself on personal interaction

and authenticity.

TAKE A DEEP BREATH

Before making important decisions, take a few days

to reflect on your options. Think about the decision

from different angles, seek more information, and

consult with colleagues and close friends for advice

and insight. This will avoid a narrow-minded ap -

proach and lead to the best possible decision.

58RADICAL HONESTY

It is never wise to oversell a customer, and it is disas -

trous to oversell an employee. When it comes to peo-

ple, you must make sure that they want to stay with

you or work for you for the right reasons, and not

just a polished sales pitch. If you mislead people in

either case, you’ll feel it in your bottom line, and fast.LEARN AS MUCH AS YOU CAN

My aunt, who was a general manager of a hotel in

Germany, had great insights. She instilled in me the

importance of hiring good people, being an active lis -

tener, and remaining humble. Later on, I had the plea-sure of working for a three-star Michelin chef, also in

Germany, who taught me the essence of quality, how

59to deal with difficult colleagues, and how to survive

in a very competitive environment. Even at age forty,

when I joined Kempinski in Beijing, the Managing

Director of the hotel took me under his wings and

helped me understand the Chinese mentality and

how to deal with institutional owners. When people

with more experience and insight offer to teach you,

always say yes, and learn as much as you can.

RECRUIT WITH INPUT

When hiring new colleagues, I always involve the ex -

isting team. The right cultural fit is very important

to maintain momentum, keep the team motivated,

and continue the success story. In addition to ambi-

tion, I look for warm-hearted people with a positive

attitude. People without aspiration are usually not a

good fit, particularly for leadership positions. Being people oriented, driven, and sincere are also equally

important.

DEMAND AND SUPPL Y

One of the biggest challenges to leading a luxury ho-

tel is the rapid growth of this upscale market. Many

companies are under pressure to succeed as they are

publically listed. They see growth as one of the best

ways forward. The number of new luxury hotels in

some cities is already surpassing the demand, and therefore room rates are dropping, leading to even fiercer competition. When room rates are under

pressure, revenue streams are under pressure, and

luxury hotel operators are challenged to decrease

expenses to remain profitable.

THE GAME HAS CHANGED

In the beginning of my career, it was a special expe-

rience to stay at a five-star hotel, as they had a wide

range of offerings like afternoon tea, lavish brunch

buffets, pillow menus, luxury bathroom amenities,

butler service, and limousine service. This type of

service was only available at landmark properties. Now, our guests in the luxury segment live in beau-

tiful homes, drive expensive cars, have the latest

technology, and consume the best food. The question

now is how we can still surprise them.

We overcome this challenge by becoming acutely

aware of what our guests are looking for. Today’s luxury travelers are eager to experience the country,

culture, and tradition of the destination, something

they simply cannot get at home. They are looking

for authentic, local experiences, such as a Bedouin

restaurant next to a dune featuring Arabic cuisine, or

camel treks with overnight stays in the desert, where

guests enjoy stargazing while our astronomy experts

explain the galaxy.

KILL THEM WITH KINDNESS

When a guest experience is not up to par, you must

first understand the nature of the issue and the

source of the problem. If it is a guest complaint, you

must be an active listener showing genuine concern.

When guests are angry, you must kill them with

kindness. You must be sincere and honest. You must make them happy again swiftly and totally. In cases

like this, staff empowerment is a critical element to

make things right without involving leadership. Af -

terwards, you can investigate the issue and figure out what went wrong so that you can fix the root cause.

Once you have a solution in place, you must share it

across the team so that the mistake or issue doesn’t

happen again.

THE PROS AND CONS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is essential these days, whether we like it

or not. A strong presence on major social media plat -

forms is vital, but content has to be chosen carefully.

Done the right way, we can influence our audiences

with very creative messaging and receive positive re-

sponses. However, the downside is that everyone is

now a travel writer, and by merely writing about or

posting a photo of something, that may not tell the

full story. Omissions or distortions by individuals can

cause real damage to a business.

61Internet cannot mimic. They assist guests with spe-

cial requests on a daily basis, and know the secrets

of the city that may take hours for guests to discover

on their own. They provide a personal touch in real

time and can create unique, tailored itineraries. That

is the essence of luxury, and the digital world cannot

replace this offering.WHAT THE DIGITAL WORLDCANNOT REPLACE

While guests have an abundance of local, city-spe-

cific information online to dig through prior to and

during their travels, the role of the concierge cannot

be replaced. They have a personal network that the

63SURPRISING AND CARING

In general, a personal touch definitely makes the dif -

ference for a guest. We always coach our employees

to be surprising and caring. For me, the future is to

continue to make it easier and more convenient for

our guests in whatever way possible. If technology

is available to the advantage of our guests, we will use it, but we must make sure the basics are in place

first. Nothing is more personal than the sound of

your own name.

INTERVIEWING GUESTS, INFORMALL Y

Anticipating the needs of guests is the best way to

demonstrate excellent service and to make guests feel

cared for. Nevertheless, it is difficult to teach antic -

ipation and even more difficult to execute it consis -

tently. Conversation is the best way to understand

our guests and their preferences. This is why we

emphasize this topic so much when we’re coaching our staff. We are constantly in a dialogue with our

guests and have endless opportunities to interview

them about their likes and dislikes.

We once had a regular guest who would spend

a few months at our property near the end of the

year through Christmas, but on his latest visit, he could only stay until the end of October given oth-er obligations. He was quite upset that he couldn’t spend Christmas at our hotel, so a few days prior to

his departure, our team organized an early surprise

Christmas party in his suite. We all celebrated with

him, and it was one of the best moments of my career.

Anticipation at its best.

DINING BY DESIGN

Today, we are witnessing a very high demand from

our guests on the quality of our food. Guests still like

to recognize what’s on their plate, leaving molecu-

lar cuisine to the experts. They do appreciate a good

range of different dining options, including what we call dining by design, which are tailored menus

served in a unique and private setting. Nowadays,

guests are very knowledgeable about food, ingredi-

ents, and how to prepare a good dish. They do like

to explore new flavors, but they also appreciate the

basics if done well.

Ayman

Gharib

MANAGING DIRECTOR,

RAFFLES DUBAI (UNITED

ARAB EMIRATES)

SOFITEL DUBAI W AFI

(UNITED ARAB EMIRATES )

BORN IN:

Beirut, Lebanon

SELECT GEOGRAPHICAL

EXPERIENCE:

United Arab Emirates,

Qatar, Lebanon, Syria

YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY:

20

Photos Courtesy of Raffles Dubai

65GROWING UP

I grew up in the southern part of Lebanon, in the

beautiful city of Sidon. As a child, with all these

amazing beaches nearby, I spent the majority of my

time with family and friends enjoying the outdoors.

My upbringing in Sidon encouraged me to travel

and explore the world beyond Lebanon. With my fa-

ther being a certified teacher in the early 1960s, my

parents instilled in me the importance of education,

hard work, and commitment to excellence.

LESSONS OF A STEWARD

When I first joined the hospitality industry, I started

as a steward in a luxury restaurant chain in Lebanon.

My main responsibilities were washing dishes, peel-

ing onions, and polishing champagne glasses. This job taught me the fundamentals of the industry, coupled

with patience, perseverance, and determination. You need to understand the basics of the business to be

successful.

A LEADER AT TWENTY-ONE

My first leadership role was as a Restaurant Man-

ager at Kempinski Hotel Ajman in the UAE. I was

just twenty-one, and it was my first time working

overseas. This was a major milestone in my career,

as it was the first opportunity I had to lead a team

that comprised people from many nationalities with

diverse backgrounds. I soon understood that each

person has their own set of strengths and weakness -

es. As a leader, you must discover the right balance to achieve success while bringing the best out of every -

one on the team. People work and learn at different

speeds, too, and you need to accommodate for this.

This was also a role in which I learned the impor -

tance of empathy. Ultimately, you should treat people the way you wish to be treated.I always encourage my team to use their

creativity and discretion when looking for opportunities to wow our guests with memorable, unexpected moments.““

66

A SHARED VISION

As a leader, you must communicate a clear vision

to your team, focusing on the strategy and tactics

necessary to achieve specific goals. Everyone in the

organization needs to thoroughly understand these

shared goals in order to positively contribute towards

that vision. They must also be included in the deci-sion-making process to define that vision. Always opt

for being inclusive rather than exclusive.

OPEN DIALOGUE

To this end, I have a regular open dialogue with se-

nior management where we discuss expectations,

challenges, and how best to resolve them. Similar -

ly, these kinds of discussions take place between my management team and their colleagues. In addition,

we have monthly colleague engagement meetings,

quarterly town halls, and other moments to commu-

nicate successes and challenges, ensuring we’re all aligned. This culture of open communication and di-

alogue is driven by a desire to continuously improve

and deliver a seamless and outstanding experience

for our guests. It is not driven by rulebooks and a

desire to control.

68THE POWER OF EMOTIONAL LUXURY

In a competitive market like Dubai, it is our col-

leagues, the service they deliver, and the emotional

bonds they develop with our guests that differentiate

us from the competition. This results in about 40 per -

cent of our guests returning time and time again. I believe that true luxury is about how our guests feel when they stay with us—something we call emotion-

al luxury.

Our colleagues engage and share with guests, and

take the time to make each one feel important. I

always encourage my team to use creativity and

discretion when looking for opportunities to wow our guests with memorable, unexpected moments.

I want our guests to feel like Raffles is their home

and we are their family. In fact, repeat guests who

have developed longstanding relationships with their

butler, shisha sommelier, or spa therapist will often

contact them directly to arrange their next stay.

MORE IMPORTANT THAN EXPERIENCE

When we recruit for new positions, we start with an

online talent assessment to help identify high-po-

tential candidates. During the screening process, the

recruitment team uncovers what motivates the appli-cant, why they would like to join Raffles Dubai, and what their reasons are for leaving their current role. Experience is important, but even more important

is the impression left by an applicant after a face-to-

face conversation. Over the years, I have often found

that an individual’s personality, attitude, potential,

and desire to grow by learning the fundamentals has

proven to be very important to professional growth.

LEARNING FROM NEW STAFF

When a new colleague joins our team, depending on

their experience to date, the onboarding process can

take two to six weeks—both in the classroom and on

the job. New team members learn about the hotel, our brand values, our service promise, the history

of the Raffles brand, and our parent company, Ac -

corHotels. After the first six weeks, they are sched-uled to meet with human resources to discuss their

early experience and team acclimation. This is also

a chance to better understand how the onboarding

process can be improved. The best way to learn these

insights is by asking those at the beginning of their

journey.

CELEBRATE TO MOTIVATE

We have a variety of ways in which we celebrate col-

leagues who have gone above and beyond their du-

69

ties to deliver outstanding service. Accolades include

Colleague of the Month, Colleague of the Year, and

Most Mentioned Colleague. On a weekly basis, too,

we highlight a Raffles Champion.

A FRIENDL Y SHADOW

We have a very successful initiative called “Gemba

Day, ” based on the Japanese word meaning “the real

place” and the management concept of personally

observing a specific area of work. My senior man-agement colleagues and I spend a day shadowing a

colleague in one of their operational departments to

experience their daily routine and to gain a greater

understanding of their challenges and rewards of their

particular role. Colleagues across all departments val-

ue the time we share and then use that opportunity

to suggest ideas for them to be even more effective.

The effort was so successful that we launched a “Re-

verse Gemba Day, ” offering colleagues the opportuni-

ty to shadow senior management roles to inspire and

motivate them to progress professionally.

70

INVEST IN YOUR TEAM

I strongly believe that one key to success is investing

in your team. One of the ways we do that is by enroll-

ing colleagues in courses to strengthen their skills in

areas that will benefit their development while also

addressing the needs of the hotel. In addition, work -

ing in a multinational hotel group like AccorHotels

gives our leaders and colleagues the opportunity to

participate in cross-training programs at sister hotels

and brands around the world. This exposes them to

new ideas and ways of working that further expand

their knowledge and experience.

I also encourage my team to attend seminars and

conferences in the hospitality industry and in their

specialized fields in order to learn about new trends in

the market. In order to continue being a market lead-

er, we need to consistently innovate to stay ahead of

the competition. Professionally developing the team

while driving future success of the hotel is a win-win.

THE PARTNERSHIP EFFECT,

WITH AFTERNOON TEA

One of our most successful campaigns was a partner -

ship with Manolo Blahnik, the luxury shoe brand, for

our popular Fashion Afternoon Tea called The Col-lection. Our pastry chefs created a themed afternoon

72tea incorporating the essence of Manolo Blahnik’s

hand-crafted signature pieces, including the classic

Hangisi pumps. Menu items included peach praline

chocolate stilettos, a yoghurt panna cotta, a sour

cherries hat stand, and blueberry blushers to name a

few. The collaboration was incredibly well-received

by guests and resulted in a 20 percent year-on-year

increase in afternoon tea sales, coupled with over

US$135,000 in positive media exposure.

Another highly successful campaign was in 2012,

when Raffles Dubai hosted a showcase of the world’s

most expensive black diamond dress, worth US$4.5

million. It was created by British fashion designer

Debbie Wingham. We launched a one-off themed

Black Diamond Fashion Afternoon Tea to coincide

with the showcase, as well two indulgent Diamond

Spa Treatments at Raffles Spa. The campaign was a

tremendous success. It created a great buzz in the city as well as an array of global media coverage.ANTICIPATION AT ITS BEST

We once had a regular guest who was about to make

his first visit to another Raffles property overseas.

To surprise him and his family, we flew his regular

butler to the hotel so that when they all arrived, our

colleague would be waiting to welcome them to their

room and take care of them during their stay. The children ran right up to him and everyone immedi-

ately felt at home. Thoughtful and surprising gestures

like this create an emotional bond between our hotel

and our guests, and are an important contributing

factor to building and retaining guest loyalty.

73

Brian

Gullbrants

EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT

AND GENERAL MANAGER,WYNN LAS VEGAS AND ENCORE(LAS VEGAS, UNITED ST ATES)

Recently Named Executive Vice President, Operations for Wynn Boston Harbor

BORN IN:

Chicago, Illinois, United States

SELECT GEOGRAPHICAL

EXPERIENCE:

United States, Japan, China,

Indonesia, Korea, Egypt

YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY:

20

Photos Courtesy of Barbara Kraft and Jeff Green for Wynn Resorts

75GROWING UP

I grew up in the back of our family-run restaurant

in Chicago, playing in the storeroom with all of the

boxes after big deliveries. Over the years, I witnessed

my parents’ unbelievable work ethic. It didn’t seem

like they had jobs as much as they were always taking

care of the restaurant, its guests, and our employees

as though they were extended family. It was just their

way of life.

SURGICALL Y CLEAN

When I was seven, my father convinced me to pick

up the trash in the parking lot and throughout the

landscaping. I would get paid a dollar for every cot -

tage cheese container that I filled up. I learned how humbling this task could be, and how a clean place is paramount in hospitality. This is probably where

my desire for uncompromising levels of cleanliness

comes from, or as I refer to it with our staff, all areas

must be “surgically clean. ” To this day, I still pick up trash everywhere I go throughout the property. At

the restaurant, I went on to dishwashing, food prepa-

ration, and became a busboy and then cook. It was a

true family affair.

A FOUNDATIONAL EXPERIENCE

My first job in the luxury hotel industry was as a serv -

er at The Ritz-Carlton, Phoenix. It was the first time

I internalized the notion that we were all ladies and

gentlemen serving ladies and gentlemen. I was taught

the basics of how to anticipate the needs of guests,

how to provide genuine care, and how to focus on every aspect of the guest experience. I also learned The experience economy is booming and

we need to provide conversational currency to our guests. In other words, access to unique and exclusive experiences found nowhere else.““

76how important all five senses were to delivering that

experience. I find myself today relying on many of

those concepts, standards, and values that I learned

long ago.

CATAL YTIC MOMENTS

After studying communications in college, I took

four months off to travel throughout Europe and

North Africa. It was one of the most amazing and

educational experiences of my life, being exposed to

such diverse foods, cultures, and traditions. Upon re-

turn, I landed the role of assistant manager of room

service at The Ritz-Carlton, Huntington Hotel in Pas -

adena. That was the moment my career launched.

From then on, I continued advancing throughout the

company.

GOOD INTENTIONS ONL Y GO SO FAR

My first leadership role was as a room service super -

visor. It was a humbling experience that I thought

I was ready for. However, one morning, more than

half of my team called off their shifts, and even af -

ter calling a couple of people directly, I couldn’t get anyone to come in. I decided that we would all work

harder and faster to get the job done, and that was a very poor choice. When orders were endlessly back -ing up, I learned that no matter how good you think you and your team may be, you cannot win a war

without soldiers. Good intentions only go so far. You

need a solid team, and from that point on I was never

understaffed.

THE DAIL Y MESSAGE

My daily message is one of the most successful efforts

I’ve instituted to establish clear and candid commu-

nication with all staff. It started when I was general

manager of The Ritz-Carlton, Orlando Grande Lakes,

during the construction phrase and pre-opening to

keep everyone updated and aligned. It was so well-re-ceived that I’ve been doing it ever since.

For nine years here at Wynn and Encore in Las Vegas,

seven nights a week, I wrote a brief daily message

to the whole team to communicate our values, cul-

ture, mission, and how to bring these concepts to life.

Leadership teams are required to begin each shift by discussing the daily message with their colleagues.

The message itself can be directive, informative, mo-

tivational, or inspirational. Sometimes it might just

be a quick shout out, thank you, and a job well done.

I believe this is an essential part of creating an open

dialogue and shaping a culture to drive excellence.

77

79LEARNING WHAT NOT TO DO

Early on in my career I was an assistant manager of

a restaurant. On one particular morning we were

slammed for breakfast. Several people called out

of their shifts and I was the only food and beverage

leader on the property—or so I thought. Just as I was

trying to calm down a very long line of guests waiting to be seated, the food and beverage director came by

and commented about how exceptionally busy we

were. I asked him for help and he simply walked away

without a response, and made absolutely no effort

to call in support. I will always remember that day.

It taught me a lot about being there for your team,

having integrity, and leading by example.

DEMAND PERFECTION

If you ask for excellence, you’ll get a job well done.

But if you demand perfection, you’ll achieve excel-

lence. I have witnessed this time and again, observing and working for very successful leaders that achieve

greatness. Those who demand more get more. You

must set a high bar. It will surprise you how much

a team or an individual can achieve when they are

stretched, encouraged, and have no limits.A TRUE MENTOR

I had the privilege of working for John Toner, who

was then general manager of The Ritz-Carlton, Kapa-

lua in Hawaii. He served as a mentor and truly be-

lieved in my ability to perform, learn, and grow. One

day, after an incredibly busy effort, John summoned

me to his office. There were airline tickets sitting on his desk, which worried me as we were on an island.

He told me to go home, pack up my things with my

wife and daughter, and disappear for the next few

days. The stack of airline papers were round-trip tick -

ets to a nearby resort for three nights plus a bonus check for spending money. I was blown away. Here

was someone who believed in me, invested in me,

and undoubtedly appreciated my contributions.

80MOTIVATE ME

In order to motivate your team, you need to help

them understand why their role is significant to the

success of the overall operation. Simply expressing

your appreciation for something specific goes a very

long way to motivate people, though providing re-

wards and formal recognition are powerful, too. Un-

derstand that everyone is motivated differently. Peo-

ple come from different nationalities, backgrounds,

cultures, and upbringings, and what may be comfort -

able or motivating for one may be off-putting or even

embarrassing for another.LEARN THE ROPES FIRST

Most college students who have just invested four

years or more of their time, effort, and money into

learning the industry want to move directly into a

leadership role upon graduation. This is a big mis -

take and very dangerous in the longterm. It’s vital to have real, practical experience in a line-level hourly

job—or a few of them—to be able to understand and

relate to many of the challenges that your staff face or

will face in the future. You simply cannot lead them

without having their perspective.

81THE FUTURE IS MOBILE

I can’t remember the last time I used a desktop, lap-

top, or even a tablet to do almost anything. I use my

phone for 99 percent of all my online needs, and I

believe most of society has moved or is moving in

the same direction. Therefore, smartphone and mo-

bile technology must be incorporated into the overall

service experience, including a powerful and friendly

mobile website along with a robust application for

reservations, room service, and other needs. That is

a minimum in today’s competitive luxury landscape.SHAKEN, NOT STIRRED

Most luxury hotel brands track preferences, but

what’s more important than just delivering that pref -

erence again and again is ensuring that those prefer -

ences are accurate and genuine. Just because I order

a martini doesn’t necessarily mean I love them or that

it’s a preference of mine. It may be the first time I’ve

ever tried one. If I ask for a dirty Grey Goose marti-

ni straight up, slightly chilled with three olives, that

sounds more like a preference. And if I order that

again tomorrow night, it is definitely a preference. But don’t get caught up in only focusing on prefer -

ences. It is equally important to balance preferences

with exposing guests to new products, services, and

experiences.

THE EXPERIENCE ECONOMY

The luxury travel experience is no longer just about

gourmet food, fine wine, and thread counts. We now

live in the experience economy, in which we need to

provide conversational currency to our guests. We

need to be able to provide access to unique and ex -

clusive experiences. It’s about creating moments that are post-worthy for Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, and

Instagram. We want our guests to be blown away, elated, and so excited that they want to share what

they experienced with others.

JETS AND LIMOS

Unlike any other hotel in the world, we own private

Gulfstream aircraft that have the ability to fly direct

international flights, along with the largest fleet of

stretch Rolls Royce Phantom limousines in the world.

From beginning to end, we focus on the entire jour -

ney. Our 24/7 butler teams have catered to the most demanding, well-travelled guests on the planet. We

do it right, and our guests expect it.

83

Christian A.

Hassing

AREA VICE PRESIDENT

AND GENERAL MANAGER

MANDARIN ORIENT AL, SINGAPORE

(SINGAPORE)

MANDARIN ORIENT AL, KUALA LUMPUR

(AREA RESPONSIBILITIES)

MANDARIN ORIENT AL, JAKART A

(AREA RESPONSIBLITIES)

BORN IN: Vienna, Austria

SELECT GEOGRAPHICAL

EXPERIENCE:

Singapore, Denmark, Norway,

United States, Malaysia, Turkey, Japan

YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY: 45

Photos Courtesy of Mandarin Oriental Singapore

85GROWING UP

I was born in Austria, where my father was assigned

from Denmark to launch Scandinavian Airlines in

the 1950s. With my father’s expanding responsibili-

ties, we subsequently moved to Stockholm and Co-

penhagen. My mother studied languages and became

a certified translator in English and French, while

also speaking German, Russian, Polish, Swedish, and

Danish. As a result of my parents’ international out -

look and skillsets, I gained a more global perspective on life.

The then glamorous airline business allowed us to

travel and explore many exciting destinations, stay at luxury hotels, and dine at gourmet restaurants

throughout Europe. Looking back, this was certainly

a privileged time, and I developed an early interest in

the lifestyle of luxury hospitality.STARTING OUT

I joined the hospitality industry as a bellboy, pro-

gressed to the telephone department, and then to the

reception of the hotel where I was offered two ap-

prenticeships. The first was working in the restaurant

and bar, and the second was in the kitchen. In these

early roles I learned the importance of discipline, ad-

hering to standards, and paying strict attention to de-

tail, how demanding the hotel business was, and how

to consistently meet a variety of high expectations.

PAYING IT FORWARD

I jumped into apprenticeships and readily helped

colleagues in need, thinking that support would be

appreciated and pay long-term dividends. It did. A

fellow apprentice who graduated before me, and who

had since progressed to director of food and bever -Never underestimate the power of a

genuinely caring, curious, and kind human interaction. It is part and parcel of the luxury experience.““

86age, offered me the position of assistant manager of

food and beverage.

THE GOLDEN RULE

As expectations tend to change with new genera-

tions, it is important to anticipate such changes and

to adjust as needed. When I first joined the hospital-

ity industry, guest service was meant to be subser -

vient and restrained. Times have changed. Today’s interactions with guests are friendlier and more so-

ciable. I often encourage colleagues to simply treat

guests the way they wish to be treated.

KEEP YOUR COOL

When leaders outwardly panic or display stress in

challenging situations, this can have a virus-like

effect throughout the organization. When assum-

ing my first general manager role, the stress of the

position made me ill-tempered. Having detected a

growing nervous tension among colleagues during

my property rounds, I commented to my assistant

that staff morale and spirit seemed to be low. She told

me that everyone was concerned about the future of

the hotel because of my worrying and anxious de-

meanor. I didn’t realize that my stressful appearance could impact 800 colleagues. The next few days, I very calmly made my rounds, greeting colleagues with a smile and a sense of care. To my surprise, the

cloud of worry immediately lifted.

A SHIFT IN HIRING

In the past, executives were predominantly focused

on hiring candidates based on their skillsets and ap-

pearance. This is no longer the case. Today, we look

for executives who have the right attitude—individ-

uals with a certain independence, curiosity, and ini-

tiative. We like self-starters who are eager to learn,

contribute, and roll up their sleeves. Shortlisted can-

didates are now invited to complete an online assess -

ment that has been customized to that particular role

and covers issues like problem-solving, service orien-

tation, EQ and IQ capabilities, leadership potential,

as well as cultural fit and alignment with the guiding

principles of the organization.

ROOM TO GROW AND LEAD

It is very important to create a positive and rewarding

work environment that offers high-impact learning

opportunities for colleagues that enable them to grow

professionally. Meaningful growth opportunities

are therefore being reviewed on a regular basis, and could include a fully sponsored MBA certification by

87

88the company. In addition, executives who show lead-

ership potential are also empowered to innovate and

develop their skillset by being assigned to either lead

or join a group of junior managers and others tasked

with improving operations. They then present their

recommendations to the senior management team.LABOR SHORTAGE

The effect of more and more hotels within a given

marketplace tends to result in insufficient labor, ei-

ther due to foreign labor restrictions by local govern -

ments or by the shrinking availability of individuals willing to join a service industry that requires them to

89work evenings and weekends. This is a true challenge

for the industry.

MARKETING FOR A GOOD CAUSE

The most successful marketing effort of the Manda-

rin Oriental has been the “He’s a Fan/She’s a Fan”

campaign. Launched in 2000, the campaign raises

Mandarin Oriental’s brand awareness globally, con-

necting the well-recognized symbol of the fan with

international celebrities who regularly patronize the

property. As an appreciation for their support, the

company makes a donation to the individual celeb-

rity’s charity of choice.

CONCIERGE AS INFLUENCER

The role of the concierge today is not to curate infor -

mation from books, magazines, and online guides,

but to gather first-hand knowledge, allowing them

to tailor guest itineraries in accordance with what

they are looking to experience. Concierges now take

on a more personal and interactive role in the life of

a guest, becoming influencers and all-around desti-

nation experts.

THE HUMAN TOUCH

While automation, applications, and other technolo-

gies have provided new opportunities for the luxury

travel industry to boost efficiency, technology cannot

replace the human touch nor the personal relation-

ships developed between our guests and colleagues.

Never underestimate the power of a genuinely car -

ing, curious, and kind human interaction. It is part and parcel of the luxury experience.

90SURPRISE AND DELIGHT

Our colleagues call most of our guests by name, go-

ing the extra mile to seek out their preferences in

order to provide more personalized services. Guests

do not simply dine at one of our restaurants. They

are presented with custom touches such as a framed

photo or a customized birthday cake. If a guest has an early flight out the next morning, we will provide

them breakfast boxes to go. In the luxury hotel busi-

ness, every detail matters, and every detail will be

remembered.

DISCONNECT, THEN RECONNECT

In a world where everything is digitized and you’re

constantly connected 24/7, going offline is the new

luxury. Now, itineraries, services, and amenities spe-

cifically designed to inspire guests to disconnect and

re-evaluate their relationship with technology are the

most sought after. With this in mind, we have curat -

ed spa packages and encourage guests to sign up for

private yoga lessons by skilled personal instructors

in the hotel’s fitness center.

GOING GREEN

Eco-friendly products and services are increasing-

ly taking center stage and will continue to grow in significance as climate change and related issues are

addressed. We are committed to contributing to the

communities in which we operate, and to responsibly

manage our environmental impacts and social com-

mitments. To this end, we have established a Green

Committee that regularly analyzes how we can op-

erate in a more eco-friendly manner.

THE EPICUREAN EXPERIENCE

Food has always played a role in the luxury hotel

experience, and it has since evolved into even more

fine and experimental cuisine. The most important

thing is to create and deliver a memorable epicurean experience, and the Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group

takes this very seriously. The 2016 Michelin Guide

awarded 16 Michelin stars to eleven of our restau-

rants worldwide, again achieving the most Michelin

stars than any other hotel group on earth.

91

Damien

Bastiat

GENERAL MANAGER,

BALLYFIN DEMESNE(IRELAND)

BORN IN:

Dax, France

SELECT GEOGRAPHICAL

EXPERIENCE:

Ireland, France, United Kingdom

YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY:

20

Photos Courtesy of Ballyfin Ireland

93GROWING UP

I grew up in the southwest of France riding bikes,

enjoying the seaside, and motorcycling on weekends.

From the age of fifteen, I worked at a local restaurant.

My mother instilled in me that hard work and ded-

ication are the keys to success, and to always learn

by doing and that no task is beneath anyone. “Walk

before you run, ” she would say, steering me to start at

the bottom of the ladder and work my way up.

LEADING DIVERSITY

I started my career as a chef de rang in a two-star Mi-

chelin restaurant that was part of the Relais and Cha -

teaux group of hotels. I learned early on that working as a team can be quite challenging when people come

from different generations, backgrounds, and skill-

sets. With different expectations of workloads and work-life balance, different educational backgrounds and different cultures, leading such a diverse group of

people proved challenging. I realized then that hos -

pitality was 100 percent about people, but it was the rapport one has with the guest that drew me further

into the industry.

GETTING IT RIGHT, EVERY TIME

My first management position in the luxury hotel

industry was at Hotel du Palais in Biarritz, France.

The toughest lesson I learned in this role was how

to understand and manage guests’ expectations. We

needed to deliver the highest possible level of service at all times, whether a guest was a world-traveler who

knew exactly what they wanted and were accustomed

to a certain level of luxury, or whether they had saved

up to take a very special trip of a lifetime. The latter,

in fact, may even have higher expectations than the When hiring, I have long realized that an

agreeable, open-minded, caring personality and empathic nature are attributes you either have or you don’t. ““

94former, but we need to be consistent in always exceed-

ing those expectations. There is no room for mistakes.

PROMOTE, BUT DON’T ABANDON

As you build and grow your team, you become in-

creasingly familiar with hiring, managing, and pro-

moting employees. At the same time, I learned that

when you identify a young, promising colleague

ready for advancement, do not simply promote them

and hope for the best. They still need guidance and training to convert them into great managers. It is a

different skillset that must be taught. Do not assume

it comes naturally. If the extra guidance and support

is not given, in-house or otherwise, you are setting

them up for failure.

REINFORCE CORE VALUES

Hospitality is a very transient industry. People move

on or move up on a regular basis. In order to main-

tain core values, culture, and standards, you need

95to institute regular and open communication about

those very topics. You must lead by example and

surround yourself with colleagues to internalize the

essence of your brand, vision, and values. Everyone is

an ambassador of the property, so you must reinforce

that essence with regularity.

LISTEN TO YOUR MENTORS

My restaurant director in France, Loic Glevarec,

pointed me in the right direction and encouraged me

to move to the UK to learn English. Looking back,

that was the best move of my career. I broadened

my horizons abroad, explored many opportunities

to learn and to grow, and there was an atmosphere

there encouraging success. In France, I would have

encountered a sentiment of jealousy in the same pur -

suit. My second mentor, Mourad Ben Tekfa, was the

restaurant director of Le Manoir Aux Quat’ Saisons

in the UK. He taught me that leading and manag-

ing was not about being dictatorial, as I was taught,

but about bringing your team along with you. It was

about being inclusive, empowering, and respectful.

FIRST ONE IN, LAST ONE OUT

During my time at Gildeigh Park in the UK, both Sue

Williams, general manager when I first started, and

Michael Caines MBE, executive head chef, had an enormous impact on my personal and professional

development. I was always curious and ambitious,

and would ask a lot of questions about how things

were done. Being there first in the morning and the

last to leave in the evening allowed me to spend time

with them. They saw that I was eager to learn. They

took me under their wings, coaching me through

operations management and eventually in becoming

general manager.

96why I insist on meeting most applicants, as these attri-

butes are key to the service we want to offer. Naturally,

a chef will need to know basic cooking skills and a

sommelier will need to know the various grape variet -

ies, but their personalities will make the difference in the final selection process. I always ask two questions

when hiring—describe yourself in three words, and

why should I employ you over other candidates?

YOU HAVE IT, OR YOU DONT

I tend to get involved with all recruitment at the hotel,

not because of a tendency to micromanage, but purely

because we mostly recruit for personality over skill.

We believe we can teach people the tasks at hand.

However, I have long realized that an agreeable,

open-minded, caring personality and empathic na-ture are attributes you either have or you don’t. This is

97

98

FORMER GLORY, RESTORED

With authenticity and locality playing ever-more

important roles in hospitality and luxury hotels in

particular, Ballyfin is fortunate in several ways. As an

ancient home restored to its former glory, the finish-

ing and décor across the entire property were done to

reflect how aristocracy would have lived in the 1820s. In addition, sixty-six colleagues of our eighty-five

member team are local staff who attended Ballyfin

when it was a school, between 1928 and 2002. This

very much adds to the guest experience.

LIVING THE LIFE

Adding to the local experience, we promote staying

on property to enjoy the various outdoor pursuits

that include clay pigeon shooting, archery, fishing,

boating, and horseback riding. We even offer dress -

ing up for dinner in period costumes to embrace the 1820s way of life, and have dozens of outfits for both men and women to choose from. We are an expe-

riential property as opposed to a commodity hotel.

DIGITAL ROI

While social media efforts play an important role

in our marketing efforts, we have found that there

is still very much a place for printed materials—

100likely due to the average age of the clientele we attract.

At the same time, I find it very hard to quantify the

exact impact or ROI of social media other than cre-

ating awareness. It is still unclear to me whether that

awareness translates into something tangible. More

broadly, we have enhanced our website to be very mo-

bile friendly. Videos today are a must to invite guests

on a journey and an experience, rather than reciting

the facts and figures of the hotel.

CONCIERGE AS FIL TER

While guests nowadays are a lot more informed and

can conduct their own research about how best to experience a new location, once on property, they

still seek reassurance that the information they found

online is indeed reliable. This is where a concierge

comes into play. Their knowledge of the locality is

unmatched, coupled with local contacts and relation-

ships they have to organize personalized and exclu-

sive excursions.

LUXURY, DISCONNECTED

Our approach to technology has been that of suffi-

ciency with the opportunity to simply switch off. We

are an experiential property, and being able to dis -

connect is itself a luxury. Our televisions are hidden in the rooms. There is no business center on prop-erty. Everything is done to encourage guests not to

think about being connected. While necessary for

some, we certainly do not promote it.

LITTLE DELIGHTS

We meet all of our guests on the front steps of the

property with a glass of champagne and a hot towel

to refresh after their journey. We offer personalized

menus in the dining room. We have water, cookies,

and fruits on display all throughout the property for

guests to help themselves. We also give a turndown

gift every night, whether a scarf, luxury soaps, or a memento from the property as a souvenir. Every ges -

ture and detail makes a difference.

101

George

Cozonis

MANAGING DIRECTOR,

THE PLAZA HOTEL(NEW YORK, UNITED ST ATES)

BORN IN:

Athens, Greece

SELECT GEOGRAPHICAL

EXPERIENCE:

United States

YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY:

34

Photos Courtesy of The Plaza

103GROWING UP

I was born in the heart of Athens, Greece, and spent

my summers by the sea. My father was an avid out -

doorsman and would take our family on frequent hiking, camping, hunting, biking, and road trips. My

parents had a large circle of friends from all walks of

life—academics, entrepreneurs, farmers, and artists.

They were from all over the world. Being exposed

to their cultures, ideas, and insights was one of the

strongest influences in my life growing up. In addi-

tion, we used to travel as a family all over Greece, and my father would sometimes take me on business

trips. Since I was young, I was fascinated by the ho-

tels we visited.KID GLOVES

In between high school and college, I spent a summer

“working” at the Grande Bretagne Hotel in Athens.

At nearly 200 years old, it is still one of the grandest

hotels in the world. I say “working” because the own-

ers were family friends and the staff treated me with

kid gloves. This amounted to everything being ex -

plained to me, without getting my hands dirty. Look -

ing back, the exposure to such a beautiful, well-kept

and historic hotel, where the traditions of old-world

European hospitality were upheld and cherished, so-lidified my interest in the industry. Every last person’s work is not only useful,

but essential. Imagine if there weren’t any clean pillowcases, bed sheets, or dinner napkins? The hotel would come to a complete standstill.““

104NOT SO FAST

After studying hotel management, I truly believed

I would be hired as a general manager upon gradu-

ating. It was a wakeup call when, in my first job as a

management trainee, I could barely keep up answer -

ing telephones at the reception desk.

THE LAUNDRY ROOM

I completed my management training program at

Boston’s Parker House, the oldest continuously op-

erating hotel in America. I was then offered the po-

sition of laundry manager at the same property. This

was a very special unit of the hotel. Not only did it

have a stable and dedicated crew, but it also employed

individuals with developmental disabilities. They had

been there for years and were great at what they did.

This taught me that there is a place for everyone in

our industry and that working in a community such

as a hotel can bring precious and critical value to a person’s life—no matter the role.

Working on the laundry team also made me real-

ize that it isn’t the relatively few glamorous jobs that

make a hotel what it is. Every person’s work is not

only useful, but essential. Imagine if there weren’t

clean pillowcases, bed sheets, or dinner napkins. The hotel would come to a complete standstill.A CUL TURE OF SERVICE

A shared vision, common goals, and a commitment

to serve are at the heart of team culture. In this indus -

try, every colleague must have, in his or her heart, a spirit of service. In practice, this means that the entire

team must consistently adhere to a set of behaviors,

standards, and good habits that serve the guests, the employees, and therefore the organization.

LUXURY EVOLVED

Not long ago, luxury in the context of hotels was

mainly about feather-top mattresses, silver teapots,

and champagne. Today, those are not the only things

that count. Each customer has his or her own set of

customer aspirations, and they have evolved over

time. Therefore, the ideal relationship between guests

and staff is one in which staff are trained to seek out,

learn, and understand what is important for every

guest. They must then have the skill and authority to deliver. I believe the only thing that can make a

customer-staff relationship even more effective is

when a customer actively invests time and energy

into creating a positive rapport with staff. I am sure

that many will regard this as a heretical statement,

but I truly believe in it.

105

106PRESENT OR NOT

The fundamental goal of a leader should be that the

unit, department, or hotel he or she leads should

function equally well in the leader’s absence as when

the leader is present. In other words, a leader’s job is

to build a great team, empower it, trust it, and sup-

port it to deliver. A leader should not micromanage day-to-day operations.

POSITIVE EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCES

I interview every person we hire. I don’t focus on a

person’s skills or experience. Other managers will

have already conducted thorough interviews with the

applicant about experience and credentials. My inter -

views only last three-to-five minutes, during which I focus on how the candidate can make others feel.

Even though we are in the business of creating pos -

itive emotional experiences, most interactions be -

tween staff and guests are brief. It can take less than

three minutes to check into a hotel. It takes sixty sec -

onds to place a breakfast order and minutes to deliver it. Hotel employees don’t have the luxury of a lot of

time in which they can make guests feel good. They

must be able to do so in the span of a few minutes or

even a few seconds. If the candidate cannot make me feel good in less than five minutes, chances are that he or she will not be able to accomplish that with a guest either.

FORMALITY STILL MATTERS

There was a time when one did not need to be taught,

at least in the workplace, that one does not chew gum when working, or that silverware placed in a certain

way on one’s plate signaled that the plate could be

cleared, or that responding to “thank you” with “no

problem” or “sure” just isn’t done. Today, the bar for

formality is much lower, but it still matters in the

luxury space.

A MISMATCH OF INVESTMENT

It has always struck me as odd that the hotel invest -

ment community will think nothing of spending

several hundred thousand dollars on a chandelier

or millions decorating a lobby—and only pennies, by comparison, on training staff. People are our one

irreplaceable resource, and the need for training is

more intense than ever. Some enlightened owners

understand this, but overall the industry is strikingly

behind in keeping up with this need. Every luxury

hotel should have a training department, complete

with classrooms, trainers, educational tools, and a

commensurate payroll spend. I think that we have a

long way to go as an industry in this respect.

FEEL GOOD LUXURY

Luxury is not only about crystal chandeliers, cham-

pagne, and caviar. It is about making guests feel good.

A guest who eats at McDonalds and is made to feel

good is just as appreciative of the experience as a

guest at The Plaza. A boutique hotel is just as much

of a business as an ultra-luxury property. If you’re looking to join the industry, it’s important to find the

market segment that is best suited to your person-

ality and style.

BE COOL, BE DETAILED

There is one common denominator that all luxury

hotels share—drama, and lots of it. Temperament

and ability to manage difficult situations are incred-

ibly important to success. At the same time, so is an

infinite attention to detail. This is something some

people enjoy and others do not. Be honest with your -

self about your skillsets.

A VISION FOR YOUR CAREER

Do not focus on your “next job. ” Instead, focus on a

vision of where you would like to be eventually. Once

you have this in mind, evaluate every career opportu-

nity that comes to you by two criteria: Will you learn

from it? Will it enable you to make a contribution

108

that your employer will value? Always progress pro-

fessionally with a big-picture plan in mind.

TREAT EVERY GUEST EQUALL Y

A high net-worth customer who spends vast amounts

of money in your hotel is very important. You must

pay great attention to this kind of guest. Yet, nev -

er at the expense of the customer who spends a few hundred dollars for one night in the smallest room

available. That customer may have been saving up in

order to celebrate a wedding anniversary in a hotel

as luxurious as the one where you happen to work.

Disappointing them in any way is far more serious, in my view, than disappointing the guest who spends

almost every night of the year in luxury hotels.

AS A GUEST, FEEL AT HOME

Hotels always aspire to be homes away from home.

In order for that to be realized, technology must be

comparable to what a guest has at home. The first

thing that many guests do when they check into a

hotel is connect their devices to the Wi-Fi network.

If cell phone reception in a hotel is weak, it can ruin

a guest’s stay. We have invested heavily in Wi-Fi

and have also installed cell phone signal repeaters for complete coverage. We offer additional features,

such as the ability for guests to connect their devices,

wirelessly, to their guestroom televisions so that they

may play their own content. This is what they do at

home. They must be able to do it here if they are to

feel at home. Moreover, since many people find it more efficient to stay connected via text messaging,

we now offer guests the option of communicating

with us in that way, too.

111

Gerrit

Graef

GENERAL MANAGER,

THE RITZ-CARL TON, RIYADH(KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA)

BORN IN: Rheine, Germany

SELECT GEOGRAPHICAL

EXPERIENCE:

Saudi Arabia, United Arab

Emirates, Qatar, India, Maldives,

Australia, Malaysia, Hong Kong,

Germany, Thailand

YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY:

33

Photos Courtesy of The Ritz-Carlton Riyadh

113GROWING UP

When I was young, I learned to adapt to new en-

vironments quickly. My father was in the military

and we moved eight times growing up. As early as

fourteen, my mother’s love for cooking persuaded me

to become a chef, and I worked in the kitchen of a

small, family-run hotel restaurant. At eighteen, I was

certified as a professional chef. Assigned to the Navy

for military service, I was able to circumnavigate

the world twice, experiencing locales in the United

States, South America, Northern Europe, and both North and West Africa. I learned to appreciate other

cultures, exercise discipline and focus, and develop

basic leadership skills. I have no doubt that these ex -

periences played an important role in my pursuit of a career in the hospitality business.FIRST TIME LEADER

My first leadership role was as a restaurant manager

in a small Relais and Chateaux hotel in Germany. Be-

ing a leader for the first time presents many challeng -

es, as well as a chance to learn, grow, and develop. You need to create a shared vision and set of goals,

understand what motivates each of your colleagues,

value their contributions, and inspire them to be bet -

ter. At this early stage of leadership, I learned to treat every moment as a professional learning experience.

WORK BACKWARDS

Many companies create a strategy first, and then try

to get their team to rally around it. Good-to-great We encourage the ladies and gentlemen

of the hotel to engage our guests if the opportunity presents itself, and to make decisions, craft special moments, and resolve customer issues in any way or form they choose to.““

114

companies require leaders first to know what their

organizations and people are passionate about, what

drives their economic engine, and what they can be

best at in the world. With that insight and vision, you

can craft an inclusive strategy that speaks to everyone,

and one that lays down a long-term path to success.

HUMAN CAPITAL

Great leaders should embody a paradoxical mix of

personal humility and professional will. On one hand,

the humility to realize you cannot succeed alone. And

on the other, the professional will to pursue perfection

given the resources you have. Most importantly, your most valuable resource is your team. You can have

the most luxurious and glamorous hotel in the world,

but if your team doesn’t embody and exude a genuine

sense and spirit of service, you will not be successful.

A SECOND HOME

In a place like Riyadh, where plenty of colleagues

are expats, they consider the workplace their sec -

ond home. Therefore, it is very important that you engage them both personally and professionally,

and that you allow openness and honesty to guide

your relationship. Ask them what you can do from a management perspective to create a better working

environment—and act on it. This will empower your

team to do more and to be better.

SELLING AN EXPERIENCE

We create memorable experiences for our guests to

make them feel like they are staying at their home

away from home. We aren’t selling hotel rooms. We

are selling an experience. If The Ritz-Carlton was

merely a hotel, our guests would find the same prod-

uct for less elsewhere. The experience, however, is

something far beyond the quality of the sheets, food,

spa and pool. It’s the personalized attention, ser -

vice, and genuine care that makes all the difference.

EMPOWER YOUR TEAM

In order to be successful in this business, you need

to unleash the potential of your team by empower -

ing them and giving them the space to deliver. For example, we encourage the ladies and gentlemen

of the hotel to engage our guests if the opportunity

presents itself, and to make decisions, craft special

moments, and resolve customer issues in any way or

form they chose. This is as much a service decision

as it is a business decision. Empowering staff to make

business decisions will increase their ownership in the success of the hotel.

118GENERATION Y

We conduct regular meetings with leadership—man-

agers, directors, and above—to discuss important

strategic and business decisions that affect every -

one. All are encouraged to share their thoughts and insights. We have many millennials in leadership po-

sitions and they are the most vocal about wanting to contribute creatively to the success of the hotel. They

are also the most hungry for training and develop-

ment. My role is to provide them with ample oppor -

tunities to develop their skillsets, as this will build loyalty and trust between them and the company.

If they start feeling like they are in an environment

that’s not conducive to personal and professional

growth, they will leave.

LEADING FROM BEHIND

I see myself more as a coach than a chief executive.

We need strong players to serve as midfielders, strik -

ers, and defenders. Each team member has a very

specific role, and it’s my job to coach them, guide

them, empower them, steer them, and support them

so that we win as a team. THE SECRET TO HIRING

The first question I ask an applicant is what they

expect from leadership. This question allows me to

identify people who are simply satisfied with land-

ing a job and will only do what is required of them

versus people who possess a genuine passion for the

industry and are eager to contribute to the success of the business. A deep passion for hospitality and

service is essential. The second question I ask is what

their dream job would be. This helps me understand

the vision they have for their own career, along with

other deep-seated passions and interests. Knowing

this can help me carve out a career path for their

success as they progress in the role for which they

are applying for.

At The Ritz-Carlton we have a standardized way of

hiring talent, which exposes the applicant to a set of

behavioral and situational scenarios, and allows them

to think deeply as to how they resolve various issues.

PURPOSE CREATES PASSION

Starting a new job is a significant emotional event.

Generally, it is the best time to make a behavioral

change and form new habits. New employees are

excited to join a company and want to be successful. Employees cannot truly be a part of an organization

119takes, and to deliver even better service in the future.

Negative feedback is the breakfast of champions. We

learn and grow from these moments, and it’s our re-

sponsibility to turn every crisis into an opportunity

to do better.

AN AUTHENTIC EXPERIENCE

As one of the city’s most significant tourist attrac -

tions, The Ritz-Carlton Riyadh is designed to provide

a truly authentic experience of Arabic hospitality. The

moment you arrive, we greet you with a cup of care-

fully selected, pounded, and roasted Arabic coffee.

It is prepared with the finest cardamom and saffron, and is complimented with fresh, seasonal dates. The

scents of “Bokhoor, ” or Arabic incense, permeate the

hotel, and as an extra personal touch, you can find an

Arabic calligraphy artist in the lobby who can create

beautiful notes or letters for you. We attach these

writings to local sweets and desserts, which can be

gifted to a loved one.

ONLINE TARGETING

We recently piloted a mobile-only, location-specif -

ic campaign to promote the hotel’s offerings during

Ramadan. Only users browsing on their phone and staying in the vicinity of the hotel would see a special unless they know and internalize both the expec -

tations and values of the organization. We want all

employees to feel as though they are a part of The

Ritz-Carlton Company, and not simply working for

it. This creates purpose for every new employee,

and purpose creates passion. When an employee is

passionate about the work, they will stay longer and

maximize their talent to benefit the company.

ADAPTING TO CHANGE

Guests today are world travelers, seeing and ex -

periencing a range of products and offerings year-

round. An extraordinary service today can be a basic service tomorrow. To address this challenge,

we not only record guest preferences in very so-

phisticated ways across the company, but we also

regularly host roundtables with customers. A

deep dive into a guest’s experience at our proper -

ty and others around the world can serve as a form of market intelligence, and can play an important

role in how we continue to differentiate ourselves

and deliver the very best we can for our guests.

BREAKFAST OF CHAMPIONS

Any kind of complaint must always be treated as an

opportunity for us to adapt, to learn from our mis -

offer during this period. Additionally, we collaborate

with influential people in the Kingdom and the re-

gion to promote the property on social media to their

fans and followers. As a brand, we are focused on de-

veloping our social media assets and online engage-

ment channels to incorporate more guest-generated

content for those who wish to share their Ritz-Carl-

ton experiences online. To experiment even further,

we launched the Foursquare World Concierge pro-

gram to provide expertly curated destination tips for

many global cities.

LOCAL DESIGN, GLOBAL FOOTPRINT

To enhance our brand, and to remain both relevant

and competitive in an increasingly global market -

place, we have completely evolved the design ap-proach to our hotels from an almost cookie-cutter

tactic to a consistently inconsistent model where no

two hotels are the same. Since 2004, all Ritz-Carl -

ton hotels are an example of this new philosophy in action. Local culture and modern aesthetics are

now woven together to design hotels that are casu-

ally elegant, with the occasional classical influence

as appropriate.

Graham

Ledger

MANAGING DIRECTOR,

SINGIT A SERENGETI(SOUTH AFRICA AND ZIMBABWE)

BORN IN:

Eastbourne, United Kingdom

SELECT GEOGRAPHICAL

EXPERIENCE:

United Kingdom, South Africa,

Tanzania, Botswana, Rwanda

YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY:

43

Photos Courtesy of Singita Serengeti

123GROWING UP

I grew up in a tightknit family in Eastbourne, UK.

As a kid, I enjoyed fishing, playing cricket, riding

bikes, and exploring huge open farmlands. My father

worked for a company that ran a chain of cinemas

throughout Southern England, and my mother, after

she raised my siblings and I, became a housekeeper

for the De Vere Hotel Group at the Grand Hotel in

Eastbourne. My first experience in the hospitality in-

dustry was serving desserts off the trolley at lunch-

time on Sunday at a restaurant called Crimples. This provided some extra pocket money, and I discovered

that I really enjoyed the interaction with guests and

the feeling of such a dynamic environment. No two

hours were the same. This variety was a real motivat -

ing factor for me to pursue hospitality.MAKING HISTORY

I rapidly progressed to various leadership positions

at a very young age, working for a variety of hotels in

the UK. My first leadership position was serving as

one of two assistant managers of the Apollo Hotel in

Birmingham, UK. My primary responsibility was to

handle the function room on weekends for weddings.

This role taught me the vital importance of planning

the logistics for an event, because if those back-of-

house tasks are not efficiently managed, the front-of-

house cannot function. I also learned the importance of seemingly disparate roles, all of which are essential

for success. Soon after, at the age of twenty, I became

the youngest ever appointed deputy manager of the

De Vere Hotel Group’s De Montfort Hotel in Ke-

nilworth Midlands, UK.In the coming years, I predict guests will

expect their destinations to act responsibly, ethically, and sustainably, without sacrificing luxury.““

124

A RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

A truly successful working environment needs a va-

riety of elements and attitudes: pursuit of excellence

while being humble; being proactive without being

aggressive; being consultative without being conde-

scending; and being decisive without being arrogant.

Overlaying this formula onto a properly rewarded workforce, with deliverables that are measurable at

all levels, is the recipe for success.

A WELL-EDUCATED TEAM

In the luxury hospitality sector, and in particular the

game lodge and wilderness segment, it is vital that

our staff have a deep knowledge of the area and its

offerings. Guests are very likely to be immersed into

a very foreign environment and need to be reassured

that they are in good hands, and that they are being

professionally cared for at every level.

BEST LAID PLANS

When articulating a broader strategy or specific

guidance, be clear and articulate in your communi-

cations. It may make sense in your own head, but

a lack of specificity can lead to misinterpretation.

When policies and practices are open to interpreta-

tion or imagination, the best laid plans can run amok.

126DIVERSE INTERACTIONS

In remote locations, particularly where we operate,

employees must be able to mix and gel with any and

all cultures that exist on our payroll. At any one time

we can have up to a dozen different cultures and na-

tionalities on staff. If even one person rubs another

the wrong way, it can be very disruptive and have obvious negative consequences. Hire for acceptance

and embrace of diversity, and a high level of cultural

sensitivity and appreciation.

THE 80/20 RULE

After interviews, including a careful background and

reference check of a potential employee, evaluate

their candidacy using the 80/20 rule. The 80 refers to

enthusiasm and cultural fit, while the 20 refers to the

technical side, which can be taught and developed

over time. The 80 portion is the key factor in building

a powerful team that works well together and com-mits to excellence, particularly in times of stress.

A PREMIUM ON VALUES AND RELATIONSHIPS

When interviewing candidates, I ask them about

family values, their school years, achievements, and

friendships. I ask whether they’re still in touch with

old friends, as I believe this shows a commitment to valuing relationships. Depending on the position, I

will also ask a candidate to complete a “suitability”

questionnaire—a third-party psychological and an-

alytical test to gauge whether the candidate would be

compatible with us and our values.

AN INVALUABLE MENTOR

In South Africa, I partnered with a successful busi -

nessman and seasoned entrepreneur ten years my

senior to launch a hotel of our own. A chartered ac -

countant by training, he taught me a great deal about life, tolerance, family, and success. We grew our hotel

business into a group of eight properties over four -

teen years, eventually selling the company to an in-vestment firm that was listed on the Johannesburg

Stock Exchange. This is something I could have never

have achieved without his guidance, vision, and ex -

pertise.

ORIENTATION

When a new employee joins the team, a deep orien-

tation is paramount. A poorly-inducted staff member

will fail spectacularly, and it is completely unfair to

them to not be properly immersed in the company, its

practices, and its values. This process of introduction

ranges from three days to more than three weeks. We

also have new staff tutored in local sensitivities and

127assembly line mentality will prevail, resulting in a

fatal blow. Each and every guest must feel like an in-

dividual, rather than being processed on an assembly

line. This challenge can be overcome with the right

guidance and education. Given that the talent pool in

remote locations is relatively shallow, we developed

a very robust in-house training program, which in-

cludes rigorous identification of potential employ -

ees from all sectors of economic life in and around traditions. A small committee of senior local staff and executives has developed a simple but effective “how

to integrate well” guide, which is vital to maintaining

a level of respect within local communities.

THE ROBOT SYNDROME

We need to constantly refresh our training, expec -

tations, and ways we motivate staff; otherwise, an

128

our communities. We seek enthusiasm, the ability to

speak rudimentary English, and an effort to present

a professional appearance. The rest we can shape by

absorbing these candidates into our way of doing

things and by infusing them with our company DNA

so that they can grow organically.

BE PREPARED TO SACRIFICE

If you’re interested in joining the luxury hospitality

business, be absolutely certain that this is the career

for you. There are some significant sacrifices to make

throughout your journey. It is more of a lifestyle than

a career. The unrelenting commitment involves being on and available 24/7. Importantly, when all others

around you are celebrating, you are the one work -

ing to ensure that celebration is a success, and that can be hard to handle in the beginning. For exam-

ple, working during Christmas and being away from

loved ones.

A PERSONAL TOUCH

Taking special note of a guest’s preferences before

and during their stay is one of the hallmarks of this

industry. If a guest regularly orders a gin and tonic,

we will add this cocktail to their drink box for their guide to share with them during a game drive, or we

may prepare a surprise gin bar during sundown in a

beautiful setting. We also surprise guests by arriving

to an expected location for breakfast, lunch, or din-

ner, as we often setup such experiences in breath-tak -

ing areas. Knowing this is a guest’s first time at our property or that they’re celebrating something special

also allows us the opportunity to respond creatively.

THE EVOLVING TRAVELER

Guests today see travel as a way to bring more bal-

ance to their lives. They view a vacation as a way to

131reflect and make better life choices. They are not

simply looking to sustain their own health but also

looking to immerse themselves in new cultures and

create meaningful memories, including leaving the

location a little better than they found it. Nature also

has a powerful impact on our stress levels. The more

we separate ourselves from it, the more anxious and

stressed we become. With space becoming a luxury

in big, cosmopolitan cities, it is no wonder that Sub

Saharan Africa has had the fastest growth in wellness

tourism since 2007. Guests are coming to Africa in

search of wellness and to reconnect with nature.

A VISIBLE TREND

Sustainability is emerging as one of the most import -

ant trends in our industry. After the financial crisis of

2008, we saw a change in the mindset of our guests,

who started to exhibit a greater desire for personal

connections and enriching experiences with a lighter

footprint. Now there’s evidence, too, to support this observation. Guests are increasingly likely to choose

a destination based on its social or environmen -

tal impact, and they prefer companies that embed eco-friendly practices into their operations. Just as

guests expect free Wi-Fi, they now also expect hotels

and other tourism businesses to behave in a socially

responsible way.

In the coming years, I predict guests will expect their

destinations to act responsibly, ethically, and sustain-

ably, without sacrificing luxury. But the definition of

luxury will continue to evolve; it will become more about the experience than the accommodation. The

new luxury will be clean air, open spaces, and sim-

plicity in design.

THE FUTURE OF FOOD

Good food has not only become a luxury. It has be-

come a necessity. With health, nutrition, and the en-

vironmental footprint you leave behind at the top of

many travelers’ list, documenting food preferences

and accommodating these needs is very important.

Eating natural and being conscious of what you put

into your body is a fast-growing and important trend to follow, as is promoting sustainable diets and food

practices in your establishment. Culinary experi-

ences can now determine whether or not a trip was

successful, so making sure your establishment’s food

is up to scratch with international trends is non-ne-

gotiable.

133

James

Low

GENERAL MANAGER,

COMO UMA PARO (BHUT AN)COMO UMA PUNAKHA (BHUT AN)

BORN IN:

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

SELECT GEOGRAPHICAL

EXPERIENCE:

Bhutan, Thailand, Malaysia,

Singapore, United Kingdom

YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY:

39

Photos Courtesy of COMO Hotel and Resorts

135GROWING UP

I grew up in small towns across Malaysia as a care-

free child immersed in the outdoors. My father was

heading the traffic section of the Malaysian Police

Force and also served in the British Forces for a peri-

od of time. He would counsel young traffic offenders

on the dangers of bad driving instead of just levying

hefty fines. Whenever he was caught in a traffic jam,

he would get out of his car and redirect traffic. He

always led by example and worked with immense

passion. My mother used to work with the Malaysian Rubber Board. At the time, Malaysia was colonized

by the British, and I was always fascinated by the Brit -

ish expatriate lifestyle.AT FIRST SIGHT

On a school fieldtrip to inspect a premier hotel in

Kuala Lumpur, for those curious about a career in

hospitality, I was extremely impressed with what I

saw—posh lobby décor, glamorous restaurants, and

a beautiful ballroom with eclectic curtains. I quietly

told myself that this was the environment I wanted to

be in, pushing aside the original intention of working

in a bank.

BAPTISM BY FIRE

My first position in the industry was with the events

team at the Regent Hotel Kuala Lumpur. At the time, One of the most important elements of

leading a luxury property is to surround yourself with the most talented people you can find. They must be competent, intelligent, resourceful, and willing to go

the extra mile to achieve greatness.““

136

137viding certificates of achievement, celebrating em-

ployees of the month or year, or pinning guest letters

of appreciation to the staff notice board, recognition

is the fuel of job motivation. It builds confidence and

maintains both passion and pride.

20/20 VISION

Without a vision for the organization, one cannot

focus on achievement because there is no north star.

It is the blind leading the blind. A vision must be

articulated with clarity, passion, and confidence. In

addition, you must build in milestones to track and

celebrate all achievements—meeting financial tar -

gets, excellent TripAdvisor comments, and positive

guest surveys, to name a few. During employee orien-

tation, I talk about the vision of the company, shared

goals, my personal career journey, and how I set my

own milestones for success. I also talk about the les -

sons I’ve learned throughout my career. Hopefully, employees can relate to this journey and be encour -

aged with theirs.

A LESSON IN LEADERSHIP

In the world of five-star chain hotels, an employee

hardly ever gets to meet a regional vice president, let alone the president. I had the opportunity to meet

it was an institution that catered to captains of indus -

try, heads of government, and royalty. In this role, I

interacted with and was exposed to chefs, banquet

managers, food and beverage managers, artisans, and

event promoters. I learned the ins and outs of event

planning and protocol. It was baptism by fire into the

expectations and lifestyles of the rich and famous.

A WINDOW INTO BRANDING

My first leadership role was as a sales and market -

ing manager for Faber Merlin, a reputable Malaysian

group of hotels. I was exposed to all-things sales,

marketing, communications, and public relations. I

was also involved in six new hotel openings and in

feasibility studies of new hotel project opportunities.

This position provided me a deep understanding on

the power of brand, and how brand values determine your target audience and market segments. In other

words, this role taught me why guests loyal to Aman

will always prefer them, why guests loyal to Manda-

rin Oriental will always prefer them, and how COMO

Hotels & Resorts distinguishes itself, too, with a loyal

following.

PASSION AND PRIDE

Recognizing colleagues for a job well done is para-

mount to ensuring continued success. Whether pro-

138Bern Chorengel, the former president of Hyatt Inter -

national, during one of his rare hotel visits. He opted

to sit next to me at a hosted dinner instead of beside

the area vice president and my general manager. He

called me by name and said, “I’d rather sit next to

you because I would like to hear what Hyatt means

to you, and how you could add value to our hotel. ”

Empowering me to voice my opinion was a moment

I’ll never forget. He truly made me feel valued both

personally and professionally.THE BUDDY SYSTEM

When a new employee joins the organization, they

are paired in a buddy system for quick and efficient

on-the-job training. For example, a new waiter will

be attached to an experienced waiter who teach-

es and coaches the newcomer about their role and

responsibilities from scratch. This way the new re-

cruit gets trained immediately and the teacher gets

the recognition of their experience and knowledge.

During orientation, new employees are reminded

and encouraged to be humble, sincere, and respect -

ful so that their assigned expert is motivated to teach

them.

SWOT YOUR TEAM

I task my department heads to do a SWOT analy -

sis on every member of their team, and to draw up

training programs for them. I believe it is our duty

as managers to nurture our staff by developing their

strengths and turning their weaknesses into skills so

they can shine as brand ambassadors.

A SMALL TALENT POOL

Reflecting on the labor challenges in Bhutan, the

industry is rather small, and consequently there is

a very small pool of well-trained and experienced

employees who are exposed to luxury clientele. Pro-

motional opportunities are also limited within the

company and resort because the properties are rela-

tively small, and thus staff tends to look for new op-

portunities when new hotels open. When you have

trained your employees to a very high standard to

cater to luxury customers, their experience goes

beyond technical knowledge. They feel confident,

poised, and connected with this client set. New staff tends to get nervous and timid when confronting

discerning guests who are not so forgiving when our

brand delivery is compromised.

A WORLD-CLASS TEAM

One of the most important elements of leading a

luxury property is to surround yourself with the most talented people you can find. They must be

competent, intelligent, resourceful, and willing to go

the extra mile to achieve greatness. At first, I will try

my best to promote from within. If not, I will source

from the local talent pool. Failing that, I will look

for talent from within our COMO Group, and lastly

from international sources.

EMBRACE THE LOCALITY

You must embody the richness of the culture and

tradition at the property in order to distinguish the

travel experience: local musicians and spiced tea to welcome guests; cultural dances over dinner; a

personal invitation to a Bhutanese whiskey tasting;

special turndown gifts including hand-painted shoe

horns or stone paper weights; blessed prayer flags

for hanging; special monk blessings; the lighting of

butter lamps or a bag of dried Bhutanese chillies and

a recipe to take home upon departure. These ideas

all are unique to the location and provide a truly au-

thentic local experience.

A SKY-HIGH OPPORTUNITY

I was once reading that destinations offered helicop-

ter tours in various parts of Africa, Nepal, Myanmar,

and beyond. An opportunity then presented itself

when the Bhutanese government announced it was

launching a helicopter service for emergency airlifts

for remote places, and offered this service for charter when the two aircrafts were not in use. We were the

first resorts to design this service in Bhutan, offer -

ing a six-night package that includes discovering the heart of the Himalayan Kingdom by air. The excur -

sion features one helicopter trip to the Laya Valley and another to the hidden vistas of Punakha, Paro,

and Thimphu valleys.

THE BEAUTY OF SIMPLICITY

Bhutan is a unique destination in the sense that guests

come to experience the country because of its sim-

plicity, spirituality, and pristine environment. They are here to disconnect, focus on their wellbeing, and

reconnect with nature, and perhaps their spirituality.

Of course, we have very good Wi-Fi in case, which

guests appreciate, but the knowledge of it being avail -

able if needed is enough not to worry.

142SAME PREFERENCE, DIFFERENT PLACE

We have two resorts in Bhutan and more often than

not, our guests will choose to stay at both proper -

ties. When the guests arrive in our second property, our employees will already be able to anticipate their

needs: still or sparkling water; their wine or liquor

preference; whether they like the windows open or closed; whether they have any dietary restrictions,

and so on. Documenting preferences as best you can

and as regularly as you can, coupled with a system

that allows information to be shared seamlessly, is

critical to success in luxury hospitality.

SUSTAINABILITY IS HERE TO STAY

Environmentally friendly policies and practices are

gaining traction in our industry, and it is an important

trend that’s here to stay. Small and large companies

can embrace this notion in different ways. For us, we

plant trees twice a year, cut down on our electricity usage by using energy-efficient light bulbs, sort all

of our garbage for recycling, and have reduced our

use of plastic bottles to glass bottles that we simply

refill. Additionally, in our hotel shops, we sell hand-

icrafts including hand-woven textiles, scarfs, and

bags to support the Youth Development Foundation

and RENEW, a women’s foundation. We have always

believed that we have to be socially responsible and connected to communities where we operate our

resorts.

The industry can also lend its support to ethical caus -

es, such as not serving shark fin and procuring sup-

plies and products from ethical companies. Tourism,

if not regulated, often destroys communities and the

surrounding environment, while socially responsible practices promote sustainability of the industry in

the long run.

QUALITY CONTROL

Freshly prepared food is a hallmark of the luxury

travel experience. We offer four main cuisines at our

properties in Bhutan—Bhutanese, Indian, Western,

and our spa-inspired healthy menu, COMO Cuisine.

All of our seafood, beef, and lamb are flown in weekly

from Bangkok, sourced through our sister property,

COMO Metropolitan Bangkok. This ensures fresh-

ness, quality, and variety.

143

Kai

Speth

VICE PRESIDENT ,

OPERATIONS & BUSINESSPERFORMANCE (WMC GROUP)

GENERAL MANAGER

THE REVERIE SAIGON (VIETNAM)

BORN IN:

Bad Kreuznach, Germany

SELECT GEOGRAPHICAL

EXPERIENCE:

Vietnam, Taiwan, South Korea,

Indonesia, Hong Kong, United

States, United Kingdom, France,

Germany

YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY: 36

Photos Courtesy of The Reverie Saigon

145GROWING UP

I grew up in the hospitality business. My family ran

their own traditional Germany coffeehouse and then

some years later opened up a hotel. From an early

age, I would help my parents by working behind the

service bar. I loved the energy of a busy hotel, and

the fact that guests were coming from all over. My

father wanted me to take over the business when I

was older, but I had other plans.

I was influenced by reading hotel magazines that pro-

filed famous German hoteliers around the world, and

it made me want to follow their path. George Schwab

at The Pierre in New York City, or Kurt Wachtveitl of the Mandarin Oriental, Bangkok, were people I looked up to and wanted to emulate. I was only ten

when I knew that I wanted to be a hotelier of a fa-

mous hotel. I wanted to see the world and experience

the glamour of a big city.

A TOUGH INDUSTRY

My first job was as a chef apprentice at the Steigen-

berger Hotel in Bad Kreuznach, Germany. I then

went on to complete my military service before re-

joining the industry as a Commis de Cuisine at the

Landhaus Scherrer, a one-star Michelin restaurant in

Hamburg. I learned very quickly that I didn’t want to One of the most important ways to engage

and empower your colleagues is to let them problem-solve. Often times you will be expected to resolve an issue that was voiced by your team, but the real solution is to push back the challenge: how would you solve it?““

146remain a chef forever, and that running a restaurant

is very demanding. At the same time, back then, the

treatment of young chefs in the kitchen was brutal—

screaming, cursing, and beating were the norm. The

pressure was through the roof, especially in a gour -

met restaurant. I took a job at Palio, a now-closed Italian restaurant in New York City, and was again

beaten and kicked around. I knew then that I wanted

to manage people and change the industry. We need-

ed to treat people as human beings.

MANAGING FOR SUCCESS

In the spring of 1990, I became restaurant manager

at the Polo Restaurant at the Westbury New York in

the heart of Manhattan. I realized then that simply

having a good knowledge of product and being ea-

ger, driven, and ambitious will not alone make you successful. You need to understand how to manage

people. You need to understand how to interact with

people of different abilities and motivations. And you

need to understand how to persuade and inspire peo-

ple to act in a certain way. If you understand people,

you understand leadership.

PROBLEM + SOLUTION

One of the most important ways to engage and em-

power your colleagues is to let them problem-solve. Often times you will be expected to resolve an issue that was voiced by your team, but the real solution is

to push back the challenge: How would you solve it?

Empower your team to not only identify challenges,

but to also propose solutions. When an issue is re-

solved in this way—instead of from top down—there

is a much higher chance of success. I also make it clear

that I cannot be everywhere at all times, and that as

a team we need to communicate and collaborate, re-

solving issues as they arise. It could be related to menu

changes in the dining room, housekeeping proce-

dures, or how the finance department could be more efficient. In many cases, those closest to the problem

will also propose the most appropriate solution.

PATIENCE IS A VIRTUE

Throughout my career, I was always ambitious and

sought the advice of my father and former general

managers I worked under. Never be afraid to ask for

guidance. They told me not to make hasty decisions

and to patiently wait for the right role to present it -

self. You have to think of your career as one of lon-gevity, so be patient until you can really identify with

an opportunity to learn and grow both personally and professionally.

147

148DEALING WITH OWNERS

One of the challenges I’ve seen over the years is the

sometimes tense relationship between hotel owners

and staff. I have seen numerous instances where large

companies are all too eager to sacrifice members on

the leadership team of a property in order to main-

tain a good relationship with owners.

In one such instance, an excellent manager of mine

had met with the owner of a hotel in Asia. The daugh-

ter of the owner pulled me aside because she felt my

manager did not bow deep enough out of respect.

She told me to fire my colleague. After refusing, my superiors ultimately stepped in and transferred this

manager overseas to another property. There have

been similar instances with sales directors, finance

directors, and executive chefs. For some time since,

I decided not to work for large hotel management

companies that blindly follow the orders of their

owners.

INVEST IN THE FUTURE

Today, the finance director seems to have more au-

thority, and this stymies innovation. A true luxury of -

fering cannot be achieved if cost cutting is the norm.

Success can only come from investing in people, new

product offerings, and new service ideas. A shrinking

budget cannot always be used as an excuse not to

improve or innovate. Push to experiment. It is the

only way to remain relevant in a very competitive

industry.

THE MEANING OF LUXURY

Luxury means different things to different people.

Some will associate it with white-glove service, oth-

ers with Egyptian cotton, others still with sleeping in

a tent in the jungle. To each their own. The important

thing is to understand that people have different ex -

pectations, needs, and motivations, and it is your job

as a hotelier to understand those differences, and to

both cater and personalize your service accordingly.

AN INTERESTING STORY

When I served as general manager of the Sofitel Leg-

end Metropole Hanoi in Vietnam, the tremendous

history of the hotel lent itself to an incredible story.

During the renovation of the Bamboo Bar in 2011,

the hotel engineering department rediscovered an

underground bomb shelter that protected people

from air raids during the Vietnam War. This was an accident-on-purpose. Knowing we had to renovate

150

151the bar, I instructed our engineers to dig a little deep-

er. We were looking for this site, and it took us two

years to find it.

The area re-opened just a few years ago, serving as a

memorial. We hired local tour guides, trained them

in the history of the property and the bunker, and

offered this tour exclusively to guests of the hotel. In -

deed, the underground history of the hotel has made

the property a destination unto itself. While this was

a serendipitous discovery, history and heritage can

tell a unique story of your property and its location.

It may even change the reason people visit.

BE THE FIRST

At the Reverie Saigon, we recently received the ap-

propriate local permits to land helicopters for com-

mercial purposes on our rooftop—a unique offering

in all of Southeast Asia, given that we are a city center

high-rise. Once secured and promoted, we began to receive arrival bookings by helicopter, everyone from

business executives to honeymooners. This is a very

competitive industry, and in order to remain rele-

vant, interesting, and capable of providing the very

best to your clientele, you need to go the extra mile.DOING A LOT WITH A LITTLE

Once we had a guest who indicated that they had

walking challenges. With this information we did our

best to anticipate their needs. We assigned a room on

the ground floor, we had a wheelchair and walking

cane ready, a special nightlight by their bedside and

bathroom, and a handlebar by their bed to make it easier for them to get in and out. One of the chal-

lenges we have as an industry is to translate guest

preferences and special requests into a range of an-

ticipatory offerings. Go above and beyond what is

expected. That is how you succeed in this industry.

MEANS TO AN END

Nowadays, the most advanced technology and pro-

grammatic setup can be found in many five-star ho-

tels around the world. In other words, technology

will not be a true differentiator moving forward. It

can, however, enable a higher level of efficiency if implemented with precision. For example, in our

rooms we have a special control unit with two but -

tons—DND and Make Up Room. The latter instantly messages housekeeping staff to attend to the room.

It doesn’t get any more precise.

Krister

Svensson

GENERAL MANAGER,

ST . REGIS HOTEL AND RESIDENCES (BANGKOK, THAILAND)

Recently appointed General Manager of

Sentosa Cove In Singapore

BORN IN: Stockholm, Sweden

SELECT GEOGRAPHICAL

EXPERIENCE:

Thailand, Hong Kong, Philippines,

Guam, Lebanon, United Arab

Emirates, Australia, Indonesia,

China, Malaysia, Sweden

YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY: 35

Photos Courtesy of St Regis Hotel Bangkok

153GROWING UP

I grew up in a small town just outside of Stockholm,

Sweden. When I was nine, my family moved to Thai-

land, as my father had accepted a leadership role for

Scandinavian Airlines based in Bangkok. My broth-

ers and I went to the International School of Bangkok

for several years, so I grew up with a lot of different

cultures and backgrounds, appreciating and respect -

ing difference. And because my father worked for SAS, we were able to travel the world at a young age.

I was enamored with the lifestyle. My mother, too, made a lasting impression on me with her love for

cooking, and it’s the reason I entered the hospitality

industry through the food and beverage side. LEARNING THE ROPES

My first job in hospitality was as a steward in a restau-

rant in Stockholm. Essentially, I worked to maintain

a high level of cleanliness in the dining area and in

the kitchen. I learned early on that starting from the

bottom was incredibly important to understanding

roles you would otherwise be oblivious to later on. I

learned to appreciate that every job was important

and valued, no matter how small it may seem.

EMBRACING DIFFERENCE

I joined the Hyatt Regency in Dubai in 1989 as a

sales executive, long before the glitz and glamor of

today, and later on landed my first leadership posi-If it’s your first time staying at our hotel, we

will try to find you online and document anything of interest in your profile so we can begin to anticipate your requests and potentially harness what we’ve learned to surprise and delight you.““

154

155tion as restaurant manager for Hugos, a fine-dining

establishment at the same property. I was in charge

of twenty staff that hailed from all over the world.

Because of my upbringing around different cultures,

religions and nationalities, I was able to quickly adapt

to and unify the team towards a common under -

standing of our shared vision and goals. Regardless of our differences, we were human, and we needed to

treat each other with respect, dignity, and humility.

NOT A ONE-MAN SHOW

Leading a five-star hotel, or any hotel, is never a one-

man show. You need to build a team you can trust,

and based on that trust, you can delegate and empow -

er. While it’s important to celebrate the achievements of individuals along the way, it is equally important

to celebrate the achievements of the team as a whole. Recognition and empowerment are motivators for

success, and the more responsibility and authority

a colleague feels about his or her role, the more in-

vested they will become in the success of their duties.

AN EARL Y MENTOR

While we lived at the Hyatt in Bangkok, Brian Dee-

son, the general manager at the time, became a close

friend of my father. When I was young, he gave me

the opportunity to learn more about the industry. Thirty-five years later, I climbed the ladder to become

general manager of a luxury hotel. In no small part

was I inspired and motivated by Brian. He exposed

me to the inner-workings of a property, and taught

me that leadership is about respecting and appreci-ating each and every colleague every day.

DIFFERENT ROUTES, SAME PATH

When hiring, I look for a degree in hospitality, but by

no means is this the only path to managerial respon-

156sibilities. I am a firm believer in working your way up

in the industry, whether starting at the front-of-the-

house or the-back-of-the-house, in the kitchen or in

the dining room. Not every luxury hotelier has an

academic background, and not everyone needs one.

In fact, I would advocate for recent graduates to still

begin at the bottom of the industry to gain an appre-

ciation for core business operations. Do not expect

nor seek a managerial role right out of college. Your

rank-and-file staff will know more than you, and you

are bound to fail.

HAPPY STAFF, HAPPY GUESTS

As a general manager, you need to walk the talk.

You need to be visible and approachable, appreci-

ating both visible and invisible roles. The power of

recognition and appreciation cannot be overstated.

For instance, I hold a breakfast with overnight staff

so that we openly and graciously acknowledge their

contribution to taking care of the hotel while the rest

of us are sleeping. Additionally, I organize an after -

noon tea every month with a select group of fifteen to twenty colleagues so they can inform me in a ca-

sual setting what’s working, what’s not working, and where we can improve.FINDING TALENT

One of the biggest challenges we face as an industry is

hiring millennials and managing their expectations.

New, younger hires are not satisfied with entry-level

jobs. They do not pay very well, schedules are odd

hours and can include both evenings and weekends,

and basic tasks become routine and uninteresting. This makes the challenge of hiring that much more

difficult, and that much more important, because

you need to build a service-oriented team that loves

people, loves the industry, and loves to go above and

beyond to ensure a pleasant guest experience. This is

no easy task. As a luxury hotel industry, we need to

be more competitive in our compensation in order to

secure and retain top talent with leadership potential

across every level of the organization.

EVERY IMPRESSION COUNTS

The welcome experience must be perfect. It’s true

what they say; you never get a second chance to make

a first impression. At the same time, the farewell is

just as important, for it is the last memory guests

will have about their experience at your property.

Of course, every impression during their stay is im-

portant, too, but it’s equally imperative to pay special

attention to both the welcome and farewell as mo-

ments they will never forget.

157

158MEASURING SUCCESS

Every team member must have a specific set of goals

they’re aiming towards, as well as other KPIs in place

to evaluate their performance over the long-term.

These indicators of success and effectiveness must

be communicated clearly. They must also be revisited

every month to ensure efforts are aligned, progress is rewarded, and challenges are resolved.A FAMIL Y AFFAIR

One of the most successful marketing campaigns we

devised was an effort tied to family traditions. The

campaign focused on our fifty-one suites, for which

we offered a range of activities for the whole family to

enjoy, as well as babysitting services so that parents

can also enjoy time alone. It was very well received

and brought in new clientele. Families that didn’t

159necessarily think of our property as family-friendly

were suddenly interested in the experience.

A REAL-TIME FUTUREVirtually everyone either searches for or dou -

ble-checks a hotel or restaurant online before visit -

ing. Today’s traveler is only interested in real-time in-

formation—the latest reviews, photos, and insights.

In that context, we have to be fully present on key social channels, telling our story, targeting audienc -

es, reacting to customer feedback, and representing ourselves in a way that reflects the stature and im-

age of our brand. To that end, we’ve implemented an

e-butler system for guests to communicate with us

via WhatsApp because we found that they are much

more comfortable texting than calling. This system

has proven to be incredibly effective.

BUILDING A GUEST PROFILE

Under Marriott International, we track the likes,

dislikes, and preferences of guests across the en-

tire portfolio of 6,000 hotels around the world. In

advance of your stay, we send a pre-arrival email to

capture key information on how best we can serve

you on your upcoming trip, and then during your stay we take every opportunity we can to learn a little

more about you. If it’s your first time staying at our

hotel, we will try to find you online and document

anything of interest in your profile so we can begin to

anticipate your requests and potentially harness what

we’ve learned to surprise and delight you.

OLD VS. NEW

The majority of our travelers are well-heeled mil-

lennials, and they prefer communicating via text,

exploring the city, and booking unique experiences.

On the other hand, older guests are more traditional. They prefer to communicate face-to-face, and they

also prefer to spend more time at the hotel. Under -

standing the needs and interests of different guest segments, particularly in the luxury market, is criti-

cal if you wish to deliver a truly personalized, antic -

ipatory experience.

161

Luc

Delafosse

MANAGING DIRECTOR,

W ALDORF ASTORIA BEVERLY HILLS(UNITED ST ATES)

BORN IN:

Levallois Perret, France

SELECT GEOGRAPHICAL

EXPERIENCE:

United States, France, United

Kingdom, United Arab Emirates,

Monaco

YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY:

30

Photos Courtesy of Waldorf Astoria Beverly Hills

163GROWING UP

I grew up in the suburbs of Paris and in the country -

side where my parents had a summer home. I must

say that our life was quite simple, but over the years

I did dream of one thing—discovering the world.

When I was fifteen, I spent the summer working for

a restaurant, which was my first taste of the busi-

ness. While studying hotel management, I served as

a chef at the one-star Michelin restaurant Auberge

de la Poutre, run by Chef-Owner Denis Moureau.

I learned a great deal under his mentorship, but not

long after, I realized that I really wanted to be on the

service side of hospitality, and not in the kitchen. While serving as a bartender at the Savoy Hotel in

London, I would witness Willy Bauer, the general

manager at the time, walking the floor and interact -ing with both guests and employees. I realized that’s what I wanted to do.

WHEN OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

While leading the stewarding department at the Sa-

voy Hotel in London, I went on vacation to Monaco

and struck up a conversation with the general man-

ager of the Hotel De Paris. An opportunity was pre-

sented—join their hotel as chief steward, and when

a managerial position in food and beverage opened

up, I would be strongly considered. I took the job, and

only after a few months I was promoted to executive

assistant manager of food and beverage. I realized

that hard work pays off, but you must also capitalize

on once-in-a-lifetime opportunities.One of the most basic but incredibly

important principles of leadership is to listen, and listen often. If you don’t listen, you don’t learn, and if you don’t learn, you cannot evolve as a leader.““

164

165A TURNING POINT

Two years after serving as executive assistant man-

ager of food and beverage at Hotel de Paris in Mo-

naco, I received an offer to serve as hotel manager at

the Vista Palace Hotel in Roquebrune-Cap-Martin

in France. That was quite a special offer and one that

would accelerate my career. The hotel was closed for renovations and I was assigned to project manage

all aspects of the effort. Looking back, that was my

first hotel opening, and one in which I was pushed

to grow both personally and professionally. At first,

I was very hesitant, but I realized that challenging

me to lead prompted me to rise to the occasion. To

this day I implement the same philosophy; challenge

colleagues to do more, to be better, and to take on

more responsibilities, and they too are surprised by

how much they can achieve if asked to do so.

SUCCESS FOLLOWS SUCCESS

After learning the ins and outs of renovations and

restorations, I had gained an incredibly valuable and

important skillset in the world of luxury hospitality.

Following a successful overhaul of the Vista Palace

Hotel in France, I was approached by two investors

based in the United Kingdom to be general manager

of a new five-star hotel. It would be named the Grand

Hotel Le Touquet, have 135 rooms and suites, and be built in Northern France. In this role, I deepened

my renovation skills to include how to build a luxury

hotel from scratch. As with any construction project,

there were countless challenges and hiccups along

the way, and often times you need to make very tough

business decisions. But in the end, it was truly fulfill-

ing to see this project to fruition and observing the

experience of both staff and guests alike. You need

to seek out and capitalize on opportunities that will

expand and develop your skillets into new areas, even

areas that you think are too hard to learn. It will all

pay off in the long run.

TRUE HOSPITALITY

Hospitality is the craft of knowing in advance what

guests need and want, and at the heart of this antic -

ipation is the notion of an unforgettable relationship between our colleagues and our guests. This is a re-

lationship that needs to be nurtured before, during,

and after every guest visit. It is also a relationship

built on trust. Every guest entrusts their likes and

dislikes with you, and they expect that information to

not only be held in confidence, but to be acted upon

and used to anticipate future requests.

A LIFELONG JOURNEY

One of the most basic but incredibly important prin-

ciples of leadership is to listen, and listen often. If you

don’t listen, you don’t learn, and if you don’t learn, you

cannot evolve as a leader. A great hotel starts with a

great owner, and I was blessed to have learned from

the best. Whether at the Savoy Hotel in London, the Ritz London, or Hotel de Paris in Monaco, I took the

opportunity to listen to everyone around me. To this

day, I can say that I learned most of what I know on

the job and through interactions with general man-

agers, owners, investors, and other colleagues that I

keenly observed and listened to. Always be open to

new ideas, new ways of thinking, and new ways of

doing business. It’s a lifelong journey.

ON THE FRONTLINES

My style of management is to create a relation-

ship with each and every employee from day one. I walk the floor daily and speak to colleagues across

the property in all positions. I always eat lunch at

the employee restaurant, and spend two hours ev -

ery evening in the lobby. I also spend a bit of time each morning attending line-up meetings with staff

about to start their shift. Being visible, approachable,

and engaged with your team is the only real way to

build positive, trusting relationships rooted in open

167communication. As a general manager, you need not

spend your time in the back office at a computer. You

need to be on the frontlines supporting your team in

every way possible.

A STRATEGIC SHIFT

When I joined this industry thirty years ago, the gen-

eral manager was fully in charge of his or her hotel,

operations, and team. Over this period, however, we

have seen a substantial shift with the involvement of

asset managers, investors, and management compa-

nies. As a result, the vision and key strategic deci -

sions are made at another level, and thus the general manager of today is more of an executor of that direc -

tion than an architect of it. This has also muddled the industry a bit in that it used to be known as the hotel

business, and now it’s more the business of hotels.

Often times what is required to be successful in this

industry is not aligned with the expectations or needs

of owners, which can create friction.

168(NOT) ADDING VALUE

Do not implement a new technological system or

management philosophy unless you are absolutely

sure that it will enhance the employee or guest ex -

perience. We see new ways of doing things all the time, and you must be incredibly discerning before

putting anything new and shiny into practice. These systems—Value Engineering, Optimization Manage-

ment, Total Employee Involvement, Zero Defect, and others—need to be fully evaluated before adopting. I

believe such systems tend to keep managers in their

back offices rather than on the floor, where they are

supposed to be.

TENNIS IN THE SKY

One of the most innovative marketing campaigns I

was involved in was when we were preparing for the

169Dubai Tennis Tournament, and we were conducting

a photo shoot on the helipad of the Burj Al Arab ho-

tel. An idea was born. We approached two very fa-

mous tennis champions staying at the hotel— Roger

Federer and Andre Agassi—with the suggestion of

creating a tennis court on the helipad for them to

play a friendly match. They were both ecstatic and

immediately agreed. It was a breath-taking scene that

CNN broadcasted in near real time to its live, global

audience. To this day, it is fondly remembered as a

stroke of genius.

THE NEW STANDARD

Today, there are a number of practices that have be-

come standard to five-star luxury hotels. At check-in,

guests are offered pressing services, newspapers, and

preferred drinks. Guests are also guaranteed reser -

vations in the restaurant and spa, and turn-down is a full-service offering with amenities refreshed, choc -

olate, night or hand cream, and more. Check-in time is whenever the guest arrives, and a late check-out is

now expected.

CONSTANT CONTACT

The next generation expects new services and offer -

ings mediated by technology. Now, through in-room tablets, guests can order meals, request that their car

be ready at the entrance, and send messages direct -

ly to the concierge team. We’ve also implemented a concierge texting service to all of our guests to stay

connected in real time, wherever they are. These

kinds of communication tools are becoming part of

the hotel experience.

KNOWING THE SOURCE

While gastronomy has always been an important part

of the hotel experience, travelers do not necessarily

want fine dining all the time. The quality of produce

and other ingredients are becoming increasingly important. Today’s chefs must communicate where

they purchase their product because guests are now

very much interested in supporting local farms and

sustainable practices. The standard for quality food

at any time during the day or night has also been el-

evated in recent times. In addition, in the past, chefs

would mostly remain in the kitchen, despite how

much they were celebrated in books and magazines.

Today, customers are interested in meeting the chef

to express their appreciation of his or her talent.

Mahmoud

Skaf

AREA GENERAL MANAGER

THE RITZ-CARL TON, KUALA LUMPUR

(MALA YSIA)

JW MARRIOTT KUALA LUMPUR (MALA YSIA)

THE MAJESTIC HOTEL KUALA LUMPUR

(MALA YSIA)

HOTEL STRIPES KUALA LUMPUR

(MALA YSIA)

THE RITZ-CARL TON, KOH SAMUI

(THAILAND)

BORN IN: Arwad Island, Syria

SELECT GEOGRAPHICAL

EXPERIENCE:

Malaysia, United States,

China, Peru, Greece

YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY: 29

Photos Courtesy of The Ritz-Carlton Kuala Lumpur

171GROWING UP

I grew up on Arward Island in the Mediterranean

Sea. It is the only inhabited island in Syria. I loved to

swim, fish, and most of all eat. I would always plead

with my mother to let me help her in the kitchen

when she cooked our meals. To this day, that remains

one of my favorite memories of childhood—discov -

ering and learning about food, flavors, and prepa-ration. I studied electrical engineering and then

worked part-time in hotels. I fell in love with the en-

vironment and was attracted to the opportunity of meeting people from all over the world. I was eager to

learn about their cultures, languages, and traditions.

I still remember the wise words of my mother from

decades ago: “Do what makes you happy and always

be humble. ”INTERNAL GUESTS

My first leadership role in the industry was as a su-

pervisor in the kitchen. My manager at the time gave

me some very insightful advice—treat your team as

though they were internal guests of the property. This

notion of colleagues as internal guests has stuck with

me ever since. Through that frame, I became a more

effective leader. I listened more. I built individual

relationships with each of my colleagues and tai-

lored their tasks to build on their strengths and turn

around weaknesses. A simple change in perspective can alter your entire management philosophy.

A WIN-WIN SITUATION

As a general manager, you must take time out to

teach and mentor your team. Your colleagues will

look up to you for advice and insight for how to be One of the hallmarks of the luxury

hospitality industry is never saying no to a guest request, no matter how big or small.“ “

172

173better, how to lead a team, and how to progress in

the industry. In such a transient sector, one of the

most important incentives for staff to remain at one

property is professional development and opportu-

nities for advancement. Steering staff up the ranks,

empowering them to make decisions, allowing them

to learn from their mistakes, and rewarding employ -

ees that go above and beyond are essential to building their confidence and keeping them engaged. After

all, staff that are cared for will go the extra mile when

taking care of guests. It’s a true win-win.SETTING EXPECTATIONS

When I first became a senior manager, I sincerely

thought I was ready. I was confident in embracing

the new role, but when I quickly ran into challenges

that I failed to anticipate, it was overwhelming and I

fell short. Following this incident, I was coached by

my immediate supervisor as to what the expectations

were in this role, including what challenges and op-

portunities were on the horizon. I wish I had received

this guidance earlier. Today, I sit with new employees

174and discuss at length the expectations of the position,

what they may or may not face, and how best I can

support them along the way.

ASK FOR HELP

One of the worst things you can do as a leader is to

pretend to know something when you don’t. There’s

nothing shameful about asking for help. In my expe-

rience, younger colleagues are sometimes not willing

to ask for help or say that they don’t know how to do something. If you never ask for help, you will not

succeed. Pride will not get you closer to success. It’s

my job to tell the younger generation that saying “I

don’t know” is not a bad thing. I have witnessed the

downfall of senior managers because their immense

pride prevented them from making sound decisions.

Instead, they made terrible choices that had serious

repercussions. The right course of action was to sim-

ply ask for guidance. The inability to accept the fact

that they did not have all the answers contributed to

their failure.

TECHNOLOGY TRENDS

Our younger travelers are driven by technology, while

we are driven by budgets and the direction set by the

owners. In a world where technology is changing by

the minute, it is very difficult to keep up with the

latest trends and gadgets. Having said that, technol-

ogy needs to be integrated insofar as it enhances the guest experience in a tangible way, rather than simply

chasing the latest trend without understanding how

it helps or hurts. In the end, technology must never

replace the personal interaction that guests need and

expect.

REVIVING THE RITZ

For the relaunch of The Ritz-Carlton, Kuala Lum-

pur in 2016, we devised a campaign that balanced

the classic legacy of the property with the refreshed

and renewed modern design. To draw attention to

this balance, we bought the usage rights to the song “Puttin’ on the Ritz” and re-recorded a contemporary

version. We used the new version in all of our radio

and TV advertising, launch events, and public rela-

tions activities. It was a genuine success.

THE HUMAN TOUCH

In a world dominated by Facebook, Twitter, Insta-

gram, and other social channels, it is incredibly easy

to reach a global audience seamlessly and efficiently,

but doing so on such a mass scale removes the hu-

man touch from the equation. As a leader of a group

of hotels, our people are our most valuable asset. Technology must never replace personal interaction

and personalized service, which is the true core of the

hospitality industry.

NEVER SAY NO

One of the hallmarks of the luxury hospitality indus -

try is never saying no to a guest request, no matter

how big or small. To this end, we will do everything

within our power to fulfil such requests in a timely

and personalized fashion, and we’ve empowered our

staff to take action as they see fit without addition-

al supervision. On one such occasion, there was a Chinese family visiting from Hong Kong. The father

had Alzheimer’s disease and he got lost in a shopping

mall. Our staff quickly embarked on a search for him

and ultimately found him safe in someone’s home in

Shah Alam—a neighborhood approximately 25 km

from the hotel.

177ADAPT TO CHANGE, HIRE YOUNG

To better understand the needs, expectations, and

trends of young travelers, we hire staff of that gen-

eration who are quick to help us as a company to

learn and adapt. These travelers expect not only lux -

ury experiences, but increased efficiency and con-venience in their dealings with the hotel—far more than the older generation. Internalizing their needs allows us to better personalize their stay and service them appropriately. We make this conscientious

effort because it’s incumbent upon us to innovate,

stay relevant, and cater to all guests, each of which

is important.

Marc C.

Brugger

MANAGING DIRECTOR,

ROSEWOOD HONG KONG (HONG KONG)ROSEWOOD BEIJING (CHINA)

BORN IN:

Lausanne, Switzerland

SELECT GEOGRAPHICAL

EXPERIENCE:

Hong Kong, China, Ireland, India,

Malaysia, Mexico, Thailand,

Switzerland

YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY:

23

Photos Courtesy of Rosewood Beijing

179GROWING UP

I grew up in French-speaking Lausanne, Switzerland,

but I spent almost all of my vacation time with my

grandparents and other family members in the small

alpine village of Meiringen, in the German-speaking

part of Switzerland. With relatives scattered as far

away as Zimbabwe, summers often felt like a global

reunion.

Back in 1882, my family founded the first so-called

“graphic arts” company in Switzerland, and for many

years produced a range of advertising material to

promote palaces, five-star hotels, and tourism boards

around the country. When I was young, I started traveling throughout Switzerland with my grandfa-

ther or uncle, accompanying them on business trips

to visit clients. In those days, business was conduct -

ed at a much more personal level, often resulting in overnight stays at these glamorous properties. Expe-riencing legendary establishments such as the Gstaad Palace or the Hotel Barriere Le Normandy undoubt -

edly left some lasting impressions.

DAY ONE

My first job in the hospitality industry was as a waiter

on the terrace of the Royal Savoy Hotel & Spa in Lau-

sanne, Switzerland. It was my first day and I had just

bought brand new shoes with leather soles for the

occasion. Inevitably, I slipped with two plates in my

hand. The first dish ended up exactly as plated, but

on the tablecloth without a plate. The second plate,

with fresh tomato sauce, ended up on the immacu-late white dress of a guest. This was not a great first

day, but I did learn three things: never underestimate

seemingly easy tasks; stay humble; and don’t wear

new shoes on your first day.Today’s travelers are affluential explorers.

Wherever they go, they are curious and constantly looking for inspiring, authentic experiences rich in culture and history.““

180

181A FORK IN THE ROAD

I was debating up until the last minute where I should

pursue my studies—the HEC business school in

Paris or focus on hospitality at Ecole Hoteliere de

Lausanne. I visited both schools, and when I saw the

atmosphere at EHL, suddenly all of my early mem-

ories and emotions came back to me from traveling to glamorous hotels when I was young. I wanted to

join an industry where I could create those memories

for others.

RIGHT PLACE, RIGHT TIME

I had just completed my corporate training program

at a fine dining restaurant that was part of a hotel in

Cancun, Mexico. At the time, a long-time restaurant

manager had departed for another hotel and a new

manager was brought in. He was unable to earn the

respect of the wait staff, who had all been working

there at least twelve years prior, when the restaurant had opened. This bitterness created an unhealthy dy -

namic. Very soon after, he was let go. At this point, it was very difficult to find yet another replacement.

Having earned the trust and respect of the team in

just a few short weeks during my corporate training,

it was the wait staff who suggested to the general manager that I be hired for the role. It’s not every day that the very team you are meant to lead is the one that wants you in charge. As a newcomer to a deep-

ly-knowledgeable team, I realized that regardless of

your position, you very often learn more from your

colleagues than they do from you.

COLLEAGUES AS FRIENDS

Office politics is the worst professional cancer there

is. Although it’s not foolproof, being direct or tact -

fully blunt is often the best way to avoid the politics, even if it cuts both ways at times. An ideal working

environment is where colleagues work together as

friends—respecting, appreciating, and supporting each other to realize a shared vision.

SET THE TONE

Collin Powell, a retired four-star general in the Unit -

ed States Army, once said that if a leader doesn’t

convey passion and intensity, then there will be no

passion and intensity within the organization, and

they’ll start to fall down and get depressed. He is ab-

solutely right. The style of leadership and interaction

among the executive team sets the tone for the rest of

the hotel. It doesn’t mean we have to agree on every

decision, but we need to always be decisive and move forward with purpose and passion.

TRUST YOUR GUT

After conducting literally hundreds of interviews

over the years, I very much rely on my gut instinct.

It’s mostly right. Anyone can rehearse a perfect an-

swer to a range of classic or tricky interview ques -

tions, but the adage is still a very valid principle—hire for attitude and train for skills.

AN UNEXPECTED INTERVIEW

One of the most important questions to ask when

hiring a new colleague is in fact not a question at all.

It relates more to behavior, a set of values, and a sense

of observation. In this industry, you are often react -

ing to the unexpected. You must be quick on your feet, calm in the face of stress, and keenly observant

of guests. When we conducted a mass recruitment

for guest contact associates, we sat them all in a wait -

ing room and asked them to watch a video of a couple ballroom dancing—without telling them why. At the end, we asked them to replicate the dance steps with

the person next to them. This had nothing to do with

whether they could dance, and everything to do with

observing their reaction to a situation they clearly did

not anticipate.

183AN HONEST MISTAKE

As a leader, it’s important to coach and not micro-

manage. Trust and empower your colleagues to make

their own decisions and their own mistakes. We all

make the wrong decision sometimes, but the ques -

tion is whether that mistake was made in good faith. If it’s an honest mistake, it’s not a mistake. It’s a lesson learned. Fortunately for us, an honest mistake is not

the end of the world. We’re in the hospitality busi-

ness, not the nuclear weapons business.

184PERSONALIZED DEVELOPMENT

One of the most important aspects of leadership is

how you invest in and continually develop the skills

of your team. That is a bespoke process, as each indi-

vidual is exactly that—an individual. For some, they

may benefit from exposure to another hotel. Others

may require more one-on-one executive coaching sessions. Others still may benefit from online courses or attending specific seminars or conferences. A tai-

lored path to individual development is good for the

team member and the company. As they develop new

skills and seek professional advancement, you’re able

to groom them into future roles with more respon-

sibility—retaining their talent, passion, and loyalty.

185THE TALENT PIPELINE

In very dynamic and booming markets like Beijing or

Hong Kong, it is difficult to compete with the sheer

number of opportunities available to join the indus -

try. Attracting, selecting, retaining, and developing the right associates to continually reinforce the cul-

ture of the company and hotel is therefore an indus -

try-wide challenge.

AFFLUENTIAL EXPLORERS

Today’s travelers are affluential explorers. Wherever

they go, they are curious and constantly looking for

inspiring, authentic experiences rich in culture and

history. Hotels are no longer just a place to sleep, but

integral to journeys of exploration and self-discovery.

A SENSE OF PLACE

At Rosewood Beijing, the thread of provenance and

history runs throughout, from Mongolian blue stone

used extensively in the hotel’s façade, to stacked tim-ber in the interiors. Reclaimed bricks discovered at

a demolition site on the outskirts of Beijing are fea-

tured in bars and restaurants. Upon arrival, guests

first encounter the imposing, bronze Jiao Tu (Sons

of Dragon) sculptures, which stand on either side of

the entrance and act as the hotel’s guardians. As guests continue into the central lobby, they will

discover the towering paintings inspired by tradition-

al shan shui landscape paintings that have their ori-

gins in the Song dynasty (960-1279). Also, we intend to nurture and support new local talent—artists who

are forging their careers and carving out a name for

themselves in China and around the world.

THE DIGITAL ARENA

Today, especially in China, word-of-mouth via social

media is critical. At Rosewood Beijing, we are very

active on social media platforms, including Weibo

and WeChat. The best way to adapt to social media is to become an active participant. We are grateful to

anyone who takes the time to express a personal re-

view, and we listen carefully to those views on social

media and other forums, responding thoughtfully

and quickly. However, we always remind ourselves

not to be drawn into technology for its own sake.

Hospitality is a people business, and we must never

let technology cause us to lose our humanity.

THE POCKET CONCIERGE

We keep in touch and assist our guests at every stage

of their visit through an e-butler service. Our con-cierge team is available via texting so that guests can

seek advice wherever they are in the city. It’s like car -

rying a concierge with all of his or her knowledge,

resources, and contacts in your pocket. Beijing is a

huge city and it is easy to get lost or confused; having

that link to our butler team is like having a personal

friend you can rely on at all times.

ABOVE AND BEYOND

One of our butlers once passed on information about

his guest’s favorite vodka cocktail and travel prefer -

ences to their next hotel. And it wasn’t even a Rose-wood hotel. When our guest found out, they were

completely in awe of our colleague’s thoughtfulness and attention to detail. For select other guests, we of -

fer embroidered pillow covers with their initials, and sometimes arrange specific books to suit their inter -

ests. Personalization is a hallmark of this industry.

187

Marc

von

Arnim

GENERAL MANAGER,

PARK HYATT SYDNEY(AUSTRALIA)

BORN IN:

Brisbane, Australia

SELECT GEOGRAPHICAL

EXPERIENCE:

Australia, New Zealand, India,

Korea

YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY:

25

Photos Courtesy of Park Hyatt Sydney

189GROWING UP

I grew up on a farm about four hours west of Bris -

bane, Australia. It was an amazing childhood with

lots of freedom and space, but I learned very quickly

that a farm requires both teamwork and hard work to

maintain. My parents had an unstoppable work ethic,

often working seven days a week when I was young.

Of the many lessons they taught me, I learned that

hard work, dedication, and being passionate about

something you love are hallmarks of success. From

a leadership lens, they also taught me to be humble and consult with others when I don’t know some-

thing, and never be afraid to make a decision once

you have all the facts. They sacrificed much for my

sister and me, affording us many opportunities to re-

ceive a great education. AN EARL Y PASSION, A YOUNG LEADER

When I was sixteen, I had my first experience work -

ing for a hotel and realized quickly that I loved the

industry, and that I had a passion for meeting new

people and making them happy. After high school, I

took a job as a banquet waiter for the Hyatt Regency

Coolum in Australia. In my first managerial role as

team leader of housekeeping, I realized that I was

now in a position where my colleagues were relying

on me to give guidance and direction. This was new

to me. I had to be a leader and not a follower, so I stepped up to the plate and learned on the job.Don’t ever ask a colleague to do something

you’re not willing to do yourself. If we are busy in the restaurant, I will happily clear tables, replenish the buffet, and make coffee. If we are busy for a VIP arrival, I will step in to be a porter and deliver bags.““

190

191A PERSONAL CONNECTION

An ideal relationship between our staff and our

guests is one of personal connection. This is the art

of understanding the true preferences of a guest and

delivering an anticipatory service. Achieving this

connection requires interaction, but you need to be

able to build a relationship in a very short period of time. You must be curious, observant, and conversa-

tional about what interests a guest and how best you

can provide for their needs. Only through interaction

will you intuit how best to tailor your service.

ONE TEAM

Don’t ever ask a colleague to do something you’re not

willing to do yourself. If we are busy in the restaurant,

I will happily clear tables, replenish the buffet, and

make coffee. If we are busy for a VIP arrival, I will

step in to be a porter and deliver bags. If our ultimate

goal is to create a memorable, unique, and flawless experience for our guests, everything we do is in ser -

vice of that goal. Therefore, we are all one team work -

ing together with a shared purpose; whether you are

a porter or a general manager, every job is valued and

essential to success.THE MEANING OF LEADERSHIP

As a general manager, you must lead, not dictate. A

leader is someone who will guide and mentor his or

her team, empower them to make decisions, and en-

courage them to grow both personally and profession-

ally. You need to create an environment that is trans -

parent and conducive to sharing what works, what

doesn’t work, and how things could be improved.

At the same time, you need to allow and empower

your team to think and do for themselves—coming

up with solutions to problems they’ve identified and

acting upon them. If you are constantly telling your

team what to do and how to do it, micromanaging

their every move, you will create a very negative en-

vironment that breeds resentment and hostility.

EMBRACING THE OTHER

The hospitality industry is one that embodies a di-

versity of cultures, backgrounds, and ways of life. We must be compassionate and understanding of these

differences, as they will be reflected in our colleagues

and our guests from all over the world. However, this

is not simply about respecting and embracing diver -

sity. Understanding the nuances of different cultures, religions, and nationalities allows us to better person-

alize our service offering to guests, and personaliza-

tion is the hallmark of a luxury hotel.

192FROM THE HEART

When interviewing applicants, I look for people that

speak from the heart and display a level of emotional

intelligence. The luxury hotel industry is about how

we make the customer feel, and therefore part of the

interview process is simply using your intuition when

interacting with an applicant. We can teach skills, but we can’t teach empathy or compassion. At the

same time, the only way to stay ahead of the curve in

this industry is by hiring and developing leaders, not

followers. Sometimes there are individuals that don’t yet realize how much they can really accomplish.

Therefore, it’s very important to identify leadership

potential, invest in professional development, and

empower colleagues to be confident, as this combi-

nation can propel them to new heights.

NEW RECRUITS

On the first day of a new recruit, I attend their orien-

tation to explain more about what we’re looking for, what the expectations are, and what our larger vi-

193sion is for the hotel. I also talk about my own humble

background and early experiences, why I chose this

industry, and how I progressed over the years into

my current role. I try to inspire them the best I can

so that they too can plot their own futures. We then

orient new staff to their new department, which can

take anywhere from two days to two weeks, depend-

ing on the position. Instituting a buddy system has

worked very well to ensure seamless integration and

training. New recruits are paired with experienced

colleagues, who serve as a sounding board while set -

ting the standards of the position in real time.ALWAYS ENGAGE

As a leader, you must engage your team on a dai-

ly basis. Spend time learning about each and every

colleague so that you can connect on a personal level

and ensure they are happy both personally and pro-

fessionally. You cannot have one without the other,

and in the service business, a happy employee makes

a happy guest.

194THE SOUL OF A HOTEL

One of the reasons I continually connect strong lead-

ership and management abilities with how one re-

cruits, appreciates, invests in, and supports employ -

ees, is because some of the biggest drivers of guest loyalty, and therefore profit, are the staff themselves.

The personal relationships they’ve built over time with our guests cannot be overstated. Building a ho-

tel is not hard. All you need is money. The real chal-

lenge is creating the heart and soul of that hotel, and

that can only come from a world-class team.

THE CONCIERGE

Despite guests being able to dig up all kinds of in-

formation about a particular city or location prior

to their visit, there are a number of reasons why the

sheer availability of this information will not replace

the concierge. In fact, today, they are more important

than ever.

First, there is too much information online. It can

be unorganized, inaccurate, out of date, and lay -

ered with mixed reviews. More often than not, this information is solely focused on the most-visited

landmarks and attractions, which is not necessarily

what our guests are interested in. Second, it takes an untold number of hours to sort through every -thing online and even then, you would want a second opinion from our concierge to ensure that what you

discovered is reliable. Third, guests are now looking

for the most authentic local experiences that only

the most knowledgeable of concierges can provide.

And fourth, a concierge can anticipate and propose

experiences and itineraries tailored to your likes and

dislikes. The Internet cannot.

A SIMPLE GESTURE

Anticipatory, personalized service does not need

to be complicated. I am a firm believer in a simple

gesture, such as calling guests on their birthday re-gardless of whether they’re staying with you or not.

If they are a wine or food lover, I would handwrite a

note with a suggestion of a wine they might consid-

er trying or to highlight a restaurant that may have

opened since their last visit. A tailored experience

might also include ensuring their favorite magazines

are in their room to read, or handpicking a local wine

based on their past preferences with a note that ex -

plains why it was chosen. The most important thing is to remember and acknowledge.

195

Mariano

Silvestri

GENERAL MANAGER,

PARK HYATT HADAHAA(MALDIVES)

BORN IN:

San Rafael, Argentina

SELECT GEOGRAPHICAL

EXPERIENCE:

Maldives, China, United Arab

Emirates, Argentina

YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY:

19

Photos Courtesy of Park Hyatt Maldives

197GROWING UP

I grew up as a typical Argentine boy. Football, foot -

ball, and more football. I was very lucky to grow up

in a beautiful, healthy place overlooked by the An-

des Mountains. There was clean air, wide-open space,

and fantastic home cooking. My mother loved our

family fiercely and was a constant source of inspira-

tion. My father taught me the importance of being

persistent. Hailing from a humble family of Italian

immigrants, he became a surgeon through sheer

determination and will. One of the most important lessons my parents taught me was that I’m no better

than anyone else. We are all human. We are all equal.

This was an important guiding philosophy as I went

about my career. As a leader, I always treat colleagues

in housekeeping, engineering, and the kitchen with

the same respect and dignity I would the most hon-

ored hotel guest.A FAMIL Y OF COLLEAGUES

My first job in the hospitality business was as an as -

sistant in the HR department of a ski center in Ar -

gentina. I watched my boss calling the parents of my

colleagues to inform them that their children had lost

their lives while working on the dangerous mountain.

It was a truly intense experience that taught me a

great deal about empathy, compassion, friendship,

and treating colleagues as family.

VALUE EVERY POSITION

I stepped into my first leadership role as housekeep-

ing supervisor at Park Hyatt Mendoza in Argentina.

This position set the tone for my entire career, as I

learned to truly value, respect, and appreciate the

importance of the back-of-the-house operation. I

internalized the fact that every single employee—no As a leader, I always treat colleagues

in housekeeping, engineering, and the kitchen with the same respect and dignity

I would the most honored hotel guest.““

198

A BALANCING ACT

Here at Park Hyatt Maldives Hadahaa, the very na-

ture of our resort means that our guests most cer -

tainly value their privacy. Our secluded location is ideal for those truly wanting to get “off the grid. ” Giv -

ing guests a sense of privacy while still being sensitive to their needs is a fine balance because, after all, no guest wants to feel abandoned, however private they

are. But at the top end of the hotel industry, we have

our techniques. Discretion and sensitivity are key to

making our guests feel comfortable. For example, de -matter which department—was doing essential work

to the success of the hotel.

SETTING THE TONE

One of the most important leadership lessons I’ve

learned is to lead by example. Treat your employ -

ees with a level of care, respect, and appreciation, and that same treatment will translate to other col-

leagues and guests. However, if you disrespect your

team, that too will translate to other colleagues and

guests. In other words, the tone is set from the top.

199HOLISTIC HIRING

The most important quality I look for in potential em-

ployees is whether they have integrity. We can teach

a new recruit to do almost anything, but there are

things we can’t teach—integrity, honesty, and hard

work. The most educated or the most experienced

candidate isn’t always the best fit for the property, either. I approach the recruitment process with a ho-

listic understanding of our needs and circumstances.

Will this person integrate well into our current team?

Are they suited for the particularities of this proper -

ty? Are they aligned with our values and vision?

SUCCESSION PLANNING

Securing a talent pipeline to meet the needs of the

organization now and into the future is one of biggest

challenges facing a general manager. In other words,

succession planning is critical to ensuring continuity

of success. With this in mind, we developed a very organic plan for all levels of the team. Directors are

constantly nurturing and developing their managers

to succeed them, and this process is replicated down

the line and throughout the organization. This kind

of planning and ethos is also an important tool to

retain and promote top talent, as your team will place

a high value on the opportunity to advance.

spite constant requests to fly drones over our resort, we imposed a complete ban on these devices. The

photos would be incredible, but we feel that the pri-

vacy and exclusivity of our guests is more important.

RESPECT IS EARNEDI try to be as visible and approachable as possible. I

take most of my meals in the staff canteen. I make

an effort to learn everyone’s name and a little about

them and their families. I do this because I remember

my time very well at the lower rung of the ladder. A

little friendly interaction can go a long way. If you

want to be respected as a leader, you must give your

colleagues something to respect you for.

FINDING MIDDLE GROUND

Always listen to two or more sides of the story. This is

equally important when dealing with guest requests

or complaints, as it is when dealing with issues within

your own team. Often, the issue is a matter of inter -

pretation or a genuinely different point of view. In ei-ther case, when each side understands the other, both

parties are much more likely to find middle ground.

OPPOSITE ENDS

One of the most important observations one can

make about the luxury hotel industry is the remark -

able shift in perception of luxury by different gener -

ations. Millennials and Baby Boomers are at opposite

ends of the spectrum in terms of what they desire

from their stay. Baby Boomers are normally associ-ated with consumerism and ostentatious displays of

luxury products, while millennials put much more

emphasis on experiences, uniqueness, and authen-

ticity. Parking your car with a valet was once consid-

ered a sign of wealth. Today, that inference does not

apply. Society has changed. What people value has

changed. And the definition of luxury has changed.

FEELING IMPORTANT

When a guest has a genuine grievance, they are

more than happy to see a mistake get corrected or

a problem rectified. Most guests are not out to elicit freebies. My ultimate aim is to anticipate a problem

before it becomes one, but I always thank guests for

bringing their issues to my attention. After all, they

are helping me by voicing their concerns so another

guest doesn’t have to. To engage guests who have had

a past grievance, we invite some of them to partici-

pate in an expert team effort to help us improve our

service.

201

202BEHIND THE CURTAIN

The only way you will survive in this business is if

you truly love your job. This is a lifestyle that will not

love you back—sleepless nights, unsociable hours,

rushed meals, and endless hours on your feet. It can

take a toll on your body and mind. Passion will serve

as your fuel, so make sure it’s in abundance. Also, try to find a partner who understands the industry. If

not, they will have a difficult time understanding why

you missed another birthday or forgot another anni-

versary. Fortunately, my wife is very understanding.A TRUL Y UNIQUE LOCATION

The island of Hadahaa is unique, not just in the Mal-

dives, but in the world. Our 360-degree unspoiled

house reef and proximity to the equator put all kinds

of experiences literally on our guests’ doorstep. They

can step out of their villa and find themselves in an

underwater wonderland within moments, or hop on a boat and experience an equator crossing like no other.

Being so far from the capital of the Maldives and the

inevitable boat and air traffic that it entails, guests can

experience true peace, tranquility, and remoteness.

203

AUTHENTIC INTERACTIONS

We pay a lot of attention to our online presence, par -

ticularly on Facebook, where we have an engaged

following. Nowadays, I feel that authenticity and re-

sponsiveness in digital interactions is the most im-

portant aspect of our online strategy. If your guests

can feel your spirit and philosophy come through their screen and into their home, they are more like-

ly to feel like they know your brand and can hold

you close to their hearts. However, I also believe that

print will always have its place. There’s something about holding a book or magazine that can’t be re-

placed digitally. Also, my wife is a magazine journal-

ist, so it’s part of my wedding vows to believe in print.

A NEW REALITY

With TripAdvisor’s recent shift in ranking and scor -

ing systems—giving the most recent reviews more

“power” than older ones—it has become even more

important to pay special attention to such platforms. One bad review can really knock down your score,

204

but it does keep us on our toes. I think every hote-

lier has had the experience of an undeservedly bad

review, and it can really be crushing. I personally had

a prospective guest, who cancelled last minute, give

a horribly scathing review despite having never even

visited the hotel. Those reviews feel so unfair and

there’s very little one can do about it.

A SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCE

I appreciate the instant feedback of digital review

platforms. As our reviews are overwhelmingly pos -

itive, it is satisfying to see those scores and posi-tive comments stack up on TripAdvisor and other forums. Quite often, though, a score is a very sub-

jective experience. One guest may feel that a great

trip deserves a three stars while another guest with

exactly the same experience may mark it a five. It’s

certainly an imperfect system, but we will contin-

ue to do our best to satisfy guests on the island and

hope that those efforts go rewarded online. One of

my common disappointments is to find out through

an online review a complaint about something that, if

given the chance, I could have rectified immediately.

Michael

Ziemer

GENERAL MANAGER,

MANDARIN ORIENT AL, T AIPEI(T AIW AN)

BORN IN:

New South Wales, Australia

SELECT GEOGRAPHICAL

EXPERIENCE:

Taiwan, Hong Kong, Australia,

Germany, Saudi Arabia, Macau

YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY:

30

Photos Courtesy of Mandarin Oriental Taipei

207GROWING UP

I grew up in a very small town called Tumut in New

South Wales, Australia. As a country boy, I spent

most of my time outdoors, bike riding, swimming,

and exploring. My family migrated from Germany

to Australia only fifteen years after World War II, so

they were very grateful to be given the opportunity

to work hard and pursue a better life. Being raised in

this environment taught me to respect and appre-

ciate the value of hard work. My father was disci-

plined and always had high expectations, while my mother was spirited and very passionate. They both

taught me from a very young age that whatever you

do, never compromise or take shortcuts. Do it right

the first time.COMRADERY

My first job in the industry was as a Banquet Captain

for an outside catering company in Sydney. This was

a part-time job while I studied, and one of the most

striking aspects of my time there was experiencing

the comradery of those who worked in hospitality.

It was the epitome of a team effort, and that was an

early leadership lesson.

MADE FOR THIS

At first, I wanted to be a chef. However, during the in-

terview process, the executive chef who interviewed me suggested that I explore a career in hotel manage-

ment because he was impressed with my communi-

cation skills. I soon turned my attention to becoming

a hotelier, and I haven’t looked back since.When making decisions of consequence,

harness the insights and experience of your team to inform your thinking. Your goal is to make the best possible decision, not the fastest.““

208PLEASE SIGN HERE

My first leadership position in the industry was as

a banquet manager for Noahs Northside Gardens

Hotel in North Sydney. This position taught me very

quickly that the buck stopped with me, and that as a

leader, I needed to take on the responsibility of deliv -

ering on the expectations of customers. I also learned

to make sure that customers signed for the bill before

the event (and drinking) began, ensuring payment

was made for services provided.

BUILDING A TEAM

One of the most important aspects of leadership

is fully understanding and appreciating your own

strengths and weaknesses. We are not good at all

things. Therefore, you must surround yourself with

talented people who, together, bring to the table a set

of distinct and valuable skillsets that compliment and

strengthen each other. In addition, you want thinkers and doers. Surround yourself with people who ask

why. A healthy debate and discussion with different

perspectives always leads to better decisions.CUL TURAL DIFFERENCES MATTER

Having worked in many different environments over

the years, I learned to lead and cater to a very diverse,

culturally rich group of people, who hailed from all

over the world. I learned to respect, understand, and

cater to difference, both on the staff side as well as the

guest side. For example, in Saudi Arabia many of my employees were from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh,

and the Philippines. In Germany, our guests were

normally very wealthy Germans who had a very high

expectation of quality service. In Asia, the service cul-

ture is revered, and I learned to integrate that ethos

into our team to ensure we delivered on expectations.

DON’T RUSH

When making decisions of consequence, take a prop -

er amount of time to think it through, deliberate, and

discuss with others. Harness the insights and expe-

rience of your team to inform your thinking. At the same time, being inclusive of your team is an asset,

not a liability. The younger generation in particu-

lar is eager to voice their feedback and opinion on

how to improve offerings and services. Allow them

to participate in the decision-making process. This

empowers them as employees and encourages them

to stay engaged. Your goal is to make the best possible

decision, not the fastest.

209

NEVER TOO SENIOR

Humbleness is one of the most important qualities

of a successful leader. Roll up your sleeves and help

whenever it is necessary. We are never too senior to

step in and lend a hand. That’s the very definition

of teamwork. After all, everything we do is rooted

in our collective desire to deliver an extraordinary guest experience.

LUXURY ATTRACTS LUXURY

Over the years, I’ve observed that high quality em-

ployees who have a genuine interest and understand-

ing of the luxury sector will always outperform other

colleagues who merely work in luxury hospitality. It

may seem like an insignificant difference, but that

extra bit of interest translates to an even more pas -

sionate employee and a better guest experience.

LEARNING BY EMPOWERING

As a leader, you need to trust and empower your em-

ployees to make decisions—good ones and bad ones.

The only way they will learn and grow is by doing. I

would rather them ask me for forgiveness than for

permission. You learn from your mistakes, and that’s

exactly what I did.

211THREE QUESTIONS

When interviewing a recruit, there are three core

questions I ask: Why do you wish to join this hotel?

What have you heard about us in the market? And

what would you like to get from this experience? I be-

lieve that these three questions, answered honestly,

give you a deep level of insight into the person and whether they are fully committed to the opportunity.BEYOND HUMAN RESOURCES

The most important element of your operations is

your team. Investing in their professional develop-

ment is critical to staff motivation, growth, retention,

and consistently delivering high quality service as the

industry advances. This is not simply a function rele-

gated to human resources. Departmental managers must be actively engaged in their team’s strengths,

212

213A CLASS UNTO ITSELF

We are the most luxurious hotel in Taiwan. Our

guests hear about our hotel from afar and want to

experience it. It’s an attraction unto itself due to the

style, ambience, and at times because of the guests we

attract. One of the toughest challenges in this busi-

ness is consistently maintaining such a high bar of excellence and service.

SOCIAL AMPLIFER

The most powerful form of digital marketing to-

day is when guests share their hotel experience on

Facebook, Line, WeChat, Instagram, and others. The

challenge, or opportunity, is to figure out how best to

participate, support, and encourage that engagement.

HOME AWAY FROM HOME

One of the ways in which we may make a regular

guest feel at home is by having a framed photo of

their family, loved one, or pet in the room when they arrive. We obtain this information from their assis -

tant who booked the room, their partner, friend, or from their Facebook. This makes for a wonderful

surprise.

weaknesses, and plans for the future, charting a per -

sonalized path for growth.

(UN)COMMITTED

When I first entered this industry, I went to school,

decided on a career, and then went for it. I didn’t have

the ambition or wherewithal to explore other careers

later on. In the 1980s, this was simply not done. But

times have changed. Millennials today do not com-

mit to careers early on, so it is becoming difficult to

plan long-term. They want to experience as much

as possible, across industries and positions, before

deciding on what they enjoy the most. This presents a challenge in recruiting and retaining employees.

NOT JUST A JOB

The luxury hospitality industry demands hard work,

discipline, and long hours. It is a lifestyle and not just

a job. You must have a deep passion for working with

people, as you spend much of your time with ho-

tel staff and guests. To be successful, too, you must

always be evaluating who your customers are, what

they’re looking for, and how best to anticipate their

needs. In the end, everything is about the guest ex -

perience.

Nicholas

Yarnell

GENERAL MANAGER,

SIX SENSES DOURO V ALLEY(PORTUGAL)

BORN IN:

New York City, United States

SELECT GEOGRAPHICAL

EXPERIENCE:

Portugal, Morocco, France,

Maldives, Indonesia,

Saudi Arabia, United Kingdom

YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY:

28

Photos Courtesy of Six Senses Hotels Resorts Spa

215GROWING UP

I grew up in New York, Paris, Toronto, Mallorca, and

ultimately London. My mother raised three kids and

looked after the family with love and care, instilling in

me a passion for food and to be kind above all things.

My father worked in the heyday of advertising in the

1960s and, at age twenty-eight, became the youngest

vice president in the history of a famous Madison

Avenue ad agency in New York. He instilled in me the

incredible gift of intellectual curiosity, and taught me

that talent needs room to grow and develop.

While studying at the LSE, I started working odd

jobs in hotels to make ends meet. I thought because I spoke a few different languages and wanted to travel,

this may be a good fit. My first job was at Claridge’s

Hotel in London as an intern, and that’s where it all

started.A DIFFICUL T BOSS

My first real job in the hospitality business was in

one of the kitchens of the Savoy Hotel in London.

At the time, the head chef, while super talented, was

very difficult to work with. I learned a lot about how

far people can be pushed, what kind of environment

is helpful rather than hurtful, and internalized those

warning signs so that I could recognize them in my -

self and others.

MANUAL LABOR

In landing my first leadership position, I served as

front office manager of the Connaught Hotel in Lon-

don. Back then, everything was done manually. We

used a beautiful paper book that held all of our res -

ervations. Learning all aspects of the property-man-I’ve learned to always hire an optimistic

young person with a burning desire to do good work over an experienced professional with years of potentially bad habits and culture to unravel.““

216

agement system in a manual way gave me a profound

understanding of the importance of being precise

and accurate.

THE RIGHT AMOUNT OF TENSION

Hire the right people, give them the proper training

and tools, and ensure you set the bar high enough so

there is room to grow. There also needs be the right

amount of tension in the system—a sense of purpose,

timeliness, unwavering support of each other, and

a culture that continually strives for excellence. Just

like a musical instrument, it’s all in the tuning. To

build such a team, I’ve learned to always hire opti-mistic young people with a burning desire to do good

work, and to avoid experienced professionals with

years of potentially bad habits and culture to unravel.

SUPPORT HIGH PERFORMERS

You must be fair with your team, but not only in the

traditional sense of treating everyone equally with

respect, dignity, and appreciation. You must also pay

special attention to high performers and ensure they

are properly recognized and rewarded. Too many

managers make the fatal error of spending 80 per -

cent of their time on supporting underperformers

and 20 percent on their top-tier employees. It should

218be the other way around. This is tied to the notion of

strength management. Ensure you are putting people

in roles that play to their strengths. Get them to do

more of what they love and not to focus so much on

what they don’t.

MUNDANE INTO MEMORABLE

Ideally, you want your team to be able to execute

the technical aspects of their jobs to such a level of

mastery that they hardly have to think about it. This

would allow their emotional intelligence and intu-

ition to shine so that they can engage with guests and

are able to personalize the experience by turning the mundane into the memorable.

A THOUGHTFUL ACT

One day, a young American woman with a serious

peanut allergy checked in to our hotel. When she

showed up nervously for her first meal in the restau-

rant, the server greeted her and immediately told

her that we were expecting her, and that the chefs

were fully aware of her allergy. She need not worry

about it during her stay. The meal went well, and as

she left the restaurant the server handed her a little

card on which he had written a note in Portuguese. He told her that she need not fear going out to local restaurants. All she had to do was hand this card to the manager and they would understand. That simple

thoughtful act cost nothing, but it brought tears to

her eyes.

RISK VS. REWARD

The most important lesson I learned was in Marrake-

ch, Morocco, when we opened a hotel that was failing

to differentiate itself in a hypercompetitive market.

We woke up and started to create experiences, pop-

up bars and restaurants, and inject a little fun into

what we were doing. It saved us. I learned that we

must experiment and foster risk-taking, which in-volves cycling through mistakes and failures quickly

until you find things that work and that will drive

business and brand loyalty. As a leader, you need to

make sure you encourage others to step out into the

unknown, rather than to always play it safe.

CUL TURE CHANGE IS HARD

When I arrived at one famous hotel, people seemed

to be stuck in a culture of mistrust. They worked in

silos, with information being shared on a need-to-

know basis. It was disastrous. I learned that changing

a poorly created culture, even for one that is intui-tively better, more inclusive, and more open, takes

219longer than you think. You have to be willing to take

a deep dive into process to see how people are actu-

ally spending their time; then you discover real op-

portunities for improvement. While many routines

are essential to create a consistent, measurable, and

efficient operation, eliminate pointless routines that

stifle creativity and constrict thinking.

THE PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE

Stress always accompanies the pursuit of excellence.

The trick is not to allow yourself to be overwhelmed

by stress. It is not stress that makes us ill, but how we

respond to stressful events. Opening hotels teaches

you this. You need incredible reserves of patience and

a “learning” mind-set, because the first few years in a

220

tic with the team, carefully managing the amount of

stress and tension in the system. Too much and peo-

ple will burn out. Too little and they won’t improve

fast enough. The truth is that no matter how much

you’ve prepared and trained prior to an opening, it

takes time for the hotel to be running optimally. You

must make a conscious choice to play the long game.hotel’s existence is a messy, organic business. Turn-

over is typically over 50 percent in an opening year,

and for good reason; openings are hard.

You must absorb lots of frustration and negative

feedback from guests who demand perfection, and at

the same time remain eternally positive and optimis -

A SENSE OF PLACE

When we came to designing the interiors of Six

Senses Douro Valley, a 19th-century manor house,

we invited the family who lived in the house until

the 1980s to explain to us how the house functioned,

and then incorporated many of those elements into

the design. For example, the billiard table is where

the billiard table used to be. Same goes for the open

kitchen. We scoured the countryside for old indus -

trial antiques; thus, all of the art is local, recycled, or upcycled. All the fabrics and materials are from the

area. There are no imported Italian lamps. The net

result is a design that is local, authentic, contempo-

rary, comfortable, and calming.

As you enter the reception you may not notice it im-

mediately, but all of the senses will be addressed and

harmonized. You will see candles, hear water from

the fountains, smell figs from the organic scent dif -fuser, take in the beauty of the valley from the view -

ing platform, and be able to taste a great local wine

or tea. That level of sensory detail has been thought

through at every stage.

DELIGHT AND SURPRISE

We spend a great deal of time and effort crafting expe-

riences that will delight and surprise our guests. Our

unique Earth Lab, for example, is a space dedicated to all questions about sustainability, where guests

can do workshops on how to pickle and dehydrate

food from the organic garden. Other activities may

include tree climbing, stand-up paddle boarding, and

hiking through the vineyards. The Alchemy Bar in

the spa is where we teach how to make scrubs and a

variety of domestic cosmetics. There are also a range

of mindfulness experiences, including a singing bowl

meditation. Our resident artist, Helena Ferreira, who

is a world-renowned azulajo artist, teaches tile paint -

ing. We have more than thirty activities per week,

and all are complimentary.

VIRTUALL Y ZERO

We have reduced our print advertising budget to vir -

tually zero and focused almost exclusively on social

media and other digital storytelling. When you first

open a hotel and have a unique product, the most

powerful lever you have is the press. Be nice to jour -

nalists and make sure you spend time with them. Make sure they experience all the great things you

have to offer. Have a dedicated team to look after

social media, too, and make sure the leadership team

is actively supporting these efforts.

MOST VALUABLE COMMODITY

In a world where time is the most valuable commod-

ity, the role of the concierge will only increase. At Six

Senses Douro Valley, we can hire a helicopter to take

guests up the river to a magical winery closed to the public. There, they will have lunch with the family,

visit their wild and beautiful property, cross a river

in a 4x4, and visit a 25,000-year-old Neolithic World

Heritage site. Only a great concierge can organize

this.

223

Patrizio

Cipollini

GENERAL MANAGER,

FOUR SEASONS HOTEL (FLORENCE, IT ALY)

BORN IN:

Pieve Fosciana, Italy

SELECT GEOGRAPHICAL

EXPERIENCE:

Italy, Germany, United Kingdom,

Switzerland, Australia

YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY:

40

Photos Courtesy of Four Seasons Hotel Florence

225GROWING UP

I grew up in a small village in the Tuscany countryside

in Italy to very loving parents. My mother has always

been a very strong woman. Together with my father,

they educated me about discipline and self-expres -

sion, and these values still influence me today. The most important lesson they taught me was to respect

all people. At the age of fifteen, I started studying

hospitality and began working in the tourism indus -

try. My first job was as a dishwasher in Versilia on the Tuscan coast. The main allure of the industry was that every day was different, and I could meet new

people and learn about different cultures.

IMPORTANCE OF EXPOSURE

Early on in my career I experienced many humble

jobs in hospitality and learned exactly how grueling they could be. This instilled in me the empathy and compassion required to truly acknowledge, appreci-

ate, and respect all staff serving in those positions. In

doing the work myself and working my way up, I now

know exactly how much time you need to prepare a

martini or to clean a pile of dishes, and this insight

makes me more aware for when I ask my employees

to do something. I believe all managers should ex -

pose themselves to as many roles as possible so that they too can support their colleagues in a meaningful

and substantive way when needed.

A TRUE TEAM EFFORT

When I was promoted to restaurant manager for the

first time, I took on a new set of responsibilities and

began directing my team. One of the most important

lessons I learned back then was to reinforce the fact

that we either succeed or fail as a team. Only when Respecting your team means listening to

them, including them in decision-making, asking for their advice and insight, and rewarding them for going above and beyond.““

226

we all contribute and take ownership of our roles will

we come out ahead. We all had a role to play. To keep

the team motivated and engaged, I also celebrated

successes as a team, too. That combination has since

been my philosophy for many years.

THERE WAS NO INTERNET

When I became sales director for the Ciga Hotel in

Costa Smeralda, Italy, I traveled a lot. It was 1988,

and there was no Internet, email, or mobile phones.

We had to meet people directly and secure their busi-

ness. This experience taught me a lot about dealing

with clients and the importance of building relation-ships. Still today, in our hyper-connected world, it

is extremely important to personally interact with

guests.

CREATING A BALANCE

Over the years, I’ve realized that guests are happy

if they feel recognized and acknowledged. In other

words, they want to know that we’re listening and

paying attention to them. Someone once told me that

I have an innate capacity to extend paternal warmth

to the entire team. I believe this attitude sets the

tone of the hotel as one of friendship and welcoming service. This also helps to balance the grandeur that

greets guests inside the hotel.

This balance is fundamental.

We don’t want people to feel

overwhelmed by this histori-

cal palazzo; we want them to

feel at home. This is why our

staff work really hard to create

a warm, friendly, inviting, and

respectful atmosphere.

THE DOMINO EFFECT

One of the most valuable lead-

ership lessons I’ve learned is the importance of building a

culture of respect. Respecting

your team means listening to

them, including them in mak -

ing decisions, asking for their advice and insight, and re-

warding them for going above

and beyond. If you respect and

empathize with your staff, they

in turn will do the same with

guests. Paying attention to peo-ple is a Four Seasons hallmark,

and ultimately if employees are

happy, they will ensure that

guests are happy too.

229

A TRAINING GROUND

Many colleagues who have grown up with me have

moved to other Four Seasons hotels and resorts all

over the world and have been promoted to very se-

nior positions. It is bittersweet when a staff member

decides to move elsewhere to try a new location and

experience, but I am very proud of them and am glad

that their time with us was valued and recognized as

they advanced professionally. We must plan for this

eventuality by ensuring we have a strong pipeline of

talent ready to be empowered to take on additional responsibilities.SHARING IN SUCCESS

Staff members are motivated when they feel as

though they contributed to and were part of a suc -

cessful project. This is why we always share our goals with all staff and get them involved in personalizing

the guest experience. We also share financial results

of the hotel every year, while each department shares

more granular data with their team year-round. We

share in our successes and reward colleagues who

have shown exceptional service.

230TRENDSETTERS

One of the biggest challenges to leading a luxury

hotel is seeing the big picture of the marketplace of

competitors at the local level and the corporate level.

We’re always monitoring them as best we can, look -

ing for ways to improve our own services and offer -

ings. One of the ways we tackle this challenge is by organizing leadership meetings between many Four

Seasons properties to share ideas and insights. This

allows us to grow and learn as a collective. Having

said that, an inspiring idea to better serve our guests

doesn’t necessarily come from our competitors. An

idea might come to me while sipping coffee in the

center of Florence. I must say, however, that most of

the time, we are the trendsetters.

A LIVING MUSEUM

We are in the Cradle of the Renaissance, and we know

that our guests are looking for local experiences. We are very lucky on this point because the hotel is made

of a 15

th-century Palazzo and a 16th-century Villa. In

other words, it is a living museum. To celebrate the history and quality of Florentine manufacturers, one

of the more unique offerings inside the hotel is the

possibility of having your shoes tailor-made.AUTHENTIC EXPERIENCES

Our concierge team has crafted a wide variety of

unique itineraries to experience the city and neigh-

borhood like a local. For example, if guests are inter -

ested in craftsmanship, an itinerary can be proposed based on Florence’s best artisans. If they are car lov -

ers, a vintage car and tasting tour in the Chianti wine region can be arranged. If they love the sea, we can

get them to the Cinque Terre by car, boat, or even helicopter. If they love romantic dinners, we offer a

unique experience on Ponte Vecchio, where we se-

cured exclusive access to the bridge’s only open-air

terrace, tucked above the glittering jewelry boutique

of Dante Cardini. There you can have a four-course

gourmet meal, prepared on-site and designed by

Michelin-starred chef Vito Mollica. Anything is

possible.

231

Pedro

Dias

GENERAL MANAGER,

THE SURREY(NEW YORK, UNITED ST ATES)

BORN IN:

Lagos, Portugal

SELECT GEOGRAPHICAL

EXPERIENCE:

United States, Portugal, Germany

YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY:

38

Photos Courtesy of The Surrey Hotel

233GROWING UP

I grew up on the coastline region of Algarve in south-

ern Portugal, one of the most active tourist destina-

tions for Northern Europeans. When I was young, I

would always be outdoors enjoying the beach or in

the water snorkeling, surfing, diving, or swimming.

My grandparents were farmers. They taught me the

value of hard work and the spirit of sacrifice. My fa-

vorite activities were escaping to the middle of their

fruit orchards and running around with cattle. My

mother raised us and took great care of the family. My father was in the hospitality business. He joined

the luxury hotel industry at age eighteen and retired

as a general manager. He inspired me to embrace this

career early on. The diversity of tourists visiting our

region also intrigued me. Interacting with people

from different cultures and wanting to learn different

languages lured me in even further.STARTING EARL Y

When I was fifteen, my father launched his own

fine-dining restaurant. The day our doors opened,

we were the only two servers. At the time, I knew

nothing about waiting tables, but with him as a guide

and mentor, I built a strong foundation in under -

standing the business of hospitality. I learned about customer service, food and beverage, and operating

the business. All through high school I would work

at the restaurant, including breaks. At age seventeen,

I was entrusted at times to run the restaurant my -

self. Until I officially started my career after college,

I never stopped working in hospitality. I did virtually

every job there is, to further gain experience and rise

through the ranks.I tell my team that if they want to become

a general manager, then they need to think like one today and act like one today. That’s the best way to exercise your brain in pursuit of higher goals.““

234

DETAILS MATTER

The main lessons I learned when working at my

father’s fine-dining restaurant was the importance

of paying attention to even the minutest of details.

They make all the difference, and they conveyed to

our guests that we genuinely cared about them, their

experience, and their comfort.

CASTING CALL

Because of my father’s background in luxury hospi-

tality, I was always exposed to many luxury hotels.

With all the glitz and glamor, to me such hotels were a magical place. It looked like a masterful play, with

staff putting on a show for the guests, where the hotel

itself was the stage. It all felt surreal, and I wanted to

play a part in that extravagant production.

ABLE TO RELATE

Building my career from the ground up was extreme-

ly important. It ultimately made me a better general

manager because I can speak to any of my colleagues

with full knowledge of how things get done. It also

makes me appreciate them much more. My team,

too, appreciates the fact that I can relate to their posi-tions in a meaningful way. From a management lens,

knowing the operational intricacies is also helpful

when dealing with challenges or setting strategy.

236ADAPTABLE AND FLEXIBLE

My first leadership position in the industry, which

came after college, was as an assistant director of

rooms. I learned that you can never approach chal-

lenges with a one-size-fits-all mentality. Every chal-

lenge, guest, and day are different. In that context,

never take anything for granted and do not make decisions without gathering all the facts from all perspectives.

CUL TURAL ELEMENTS

Mutual respect, genuine care, positivity, and appre-

ciation are the most important aspects of a culture

237poised for success. In addition, colleagues are looking

to you to lead by example, as the tone is set from the

top. I’ve found that one of the most effective ways of

creating this culture is by regularly walking the floor.

Check on associates, listen to them, support them,

relate to them, and ask about their families. Treat

them like people, not workers.

AN EMPOWERED WORKFORCE

Through continuous learning, training, coaching,

and mentoring, an empowered workforce can be

critical to success. Empowering staff to make deci-

sions eliminates the need to escalate issues to “high-er management” in a time-consuming, unnecessary

way. This will create a much more streamlined and

effective operation.

NON-TRADITIONAL INTERVIEWS

When hiring new recruits, I tend to stay away from

the typical interview model, which often catches ap-

plicants by surprise. At first, I’ll ask about what mo-

tivates them, what makes them smile, what bothers

them, and what their hobbies or passions are outside

of work. Through these questions, I’m trying to get

to their nature, rather than rehearsed answers. I then ask about their professional journey, and for stories about challenges they overcame, how they motivate their teams, what they appreciate in a leader, and who

they look up to and why.

THINK LIKE A GM

It’s important that colleagues understand your own

professional story and path to leadership. I truly be-

lieve that we all have what it takes to reach our poten-

tial, and I try to make everyone feel as though their

success and growth has no limits. I tell my team that

if they want to become a general manager, then they

need to think like one and act like one. That’s the best

way to exercise your brain in pursuit of higher goals. I also tell them that they have no bigger supporter if

they wish to rise through the ranks.

MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

A career in this business demands a passion for serv -

ing others. This is an industry of long hours and long

days where you’re managing a wide range of expec -

tations on a regular basis—guests, colleagues, boss -

es, investors, friends, and family. One of the ways to

manage such a diverse group of people is to develop a

discipline of prioritization. But ultimately, if you don’t

truly love what you do, you will not be successful.

238

ART EXHIBITS

Today’s travelers are looking to learn about the world,

so integrating a location’s culture and history into the

guest experience is critical to success. A cookie-cutter

approach to design, décor, and service offerings no

longer applies. The Surrey is within a neighborhood

that caters to the art world, with several galleries and museums nearby. One of the ways we blended this

local scene into the hotel was to activate our public

spaces with rotating art installations. We partnered

with a local curator and host seasonal exhibits inside the hotel. This makes for a dynamic guest experience

while also creating news media opportunities.

A POWERFUL PARTNERSHIP

One of the most successful partnerships and mar -

keting campaigns I’ve been a part of was forged

during my time at the St. Regis New York. We part -

nered with Bentley Motors to create the world’s only car-branded suite. It was tremendously successful and resulted in a plethora of public relations events,

239I make is that possessing a database of intelligence

about your customers does not automatically trans -

late into delivering an anticipatory experience. This is because the same guest will have different needs

and wants depending on the nature or purpose of

each one of their travels, known as the trip persona.

Knowing the newspaper, beverage, bed, and other

room preferences allows you to set a better stage for

each guest’s experience. But that alone will not suffice

if each time a regular guest stays with us, their trav -

el purpose has nuances that will be unique to each travel plan.

cross-marketing opportunities, and media coverage. This translated into immediate demand. Ultimately,

the ROI was achieved in a very short period of time.

Today, the St. Regis New York has a number of de-

signer suites, including the Dior Suite, Tiffany Suite,

Milano Suite, and Bentley Suite.

THE TRIP PERSONA

When lecturing New York University students on

customer relationship management, one of the points

240Engaging with guests in a genuine and caring way is

what opens the door to pieces of information that

are unique to that specific travel event. We can ca-

ter to those insights proactively if the right mind-set

and attitude are used by every team member at every

guest interaction.

BEING IN CONTROL VS. BEING PAMPERED

As a luxury hotel industry, we are transitioning from

pampering guests in a classic, white-glove sense, to

one where guests being in full control of their experi-

ence is the new luxury. While the expectation of basic

quality remains true for both older generations and millennial travelers—a very good bed in a comfort -

able setting—the reality is that the very definition of luxury has evolved.

A phone by the bedside is no longer necessary. Slip-

pers, robes, a doorman, and someone to assist them

with their luggage are less important. More import -

ant offerings include a high focus on technology—

ample USB and power sockets near the bed and

sitting area. The configuration of public spaces have

also become increasingly important social hubs as

guests look to spend less time in their rooms. Fine

dining, too, has evolved. It is no longer about table-

cloths, silver, and three sets of glassware. It is more

about the gastronomic journey that connects them to the location in a highly social atmosphere. Jacket and

tie requirements are also gone. The new dress code is

casual at all times, allowing guests to showcase their

own unique style. In other words, the crowd is now

setting the tone of the atmosphere and space of fine

dining and luxury hotels, not the other way around.

AN INDUSTRY CHALLENGE

With the definition of luxury changing from classi-

cal to casual chic, newer, lifestyle boutique hotels are

likely to be more successful than traditional luxury

hotels. Therefore, older properties of this caliber will

have to make investments to catch up with this new era’s minimalistic but high-tech requirements, all the

while maintaining their current base of guests.

241

Peter

Hopgood

GENERAL MANAGER,

OUTRIGGER FIJI BEACH RESORT

(FIJI)

BORN IN:

Toowoomba, Australia

SELECT GEOGRAPHICAL

EXPERIENCE:

Fiji, Australia, Greece, Canada

YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY:

37

Photos Courtesy of Outrigger Fiji Beach Resort

243GROWING UP

I grew up on the Gold Coast in Australia, and all I

ever wanted to do was surf. I was a member of the

North End Board Riders and we won several national

competitions. Our lifestyle growing up was tied to

the water. If we weren’t surfing, we would be fishing,

diving, and swimming. When I was young, however, I

lived on a farm. I got out of bed at four every morning

to chop wood, milk the cows, and complete all my

chores before heading to school. My mother was a

very caring special-needs teacher, and my father was a tough-minded businessman who owned a trucking

company.AN OPEN DOOR POLICY

Our family philosophy growing up was that the door

was always open. We regularly hosted exchange stu-

dents from all over the world, and anyone needing a

meal or a bed could always come around the Hop-

good household. If you didn’t have anywhere to go for

Christmas, you were more than welcome to celebrate

with us. Over the years, we had visitors from Canada,

Japan, and Papa New Guinea stay at our home. I truly

believe that the interaction I had with these guests

fueled my desire to travel and experience other cul-tures. In that sense, I was quite fortunate to visit Ja-

pan as an exchange student when I was only sixteen.

That experience inspired me to travel more.Transitioning from follower to leader is a

make or break moment for many people. They struggle giving direction to others, and are either too harsh or too soft. Being firm but fair is the secret balance.““

244

245need to have the ability to lead and direct teams, de-

liver a wonderful guest experience, and stay on bud-

get. Transitioning from follower to leader is a pivotal

moment for many people. They struggle giving direc -

tion to others, and are either too harsh or too soft. Being firm but fair is the secret balance.

A SIMPLE SURVEY

When I start working at a new resort, I undertake a

very simple survey. I ask staff what are the five best

and five worst things about working at their hotel.

Immediately, you get feedback that allows you to

understand what your staff are thinking, what issues they care about most, and where you should put your

energy as a leader to alleviating bottlenecks to suc -

cess. If you can positively address a number of issues that arise during this process, you will instantly earn

their respect and trust. Making sure your staff is hap-

py should be your number one priority. Staff content -

ment will flow to the guest experience. Similarly, the feeling and attitude of an unhappy staff will also flow

to the guest experience.

A SHIFT IN MANAGEMENT STYLE

At first, I was quite an autocratic leader. But this style

of leadership was challenged head on when I attend-FROM THE GROUND UP

My first job in this industry was as a pot scrubber. My

second job was a public area cleaner. I learned first -

hand what these jobs entailed and how challenging they were to undertake day in and day out. I believe

this lesson has been invaluable to my leadership and

management style. I have undertaken every role in the hotel industry myself as I rose through the ranks,

enabling me to be a strong but compassionate leader.

A PIONEER, A MENTOR

Over the years, I’ve been fortunate to have worked

with some of the true pioneers of tourism in Austra-

lia. A gentleman named Keith Williams, who built

Sea World and Hamilton Island, was my most influ-

ential mentor. He taught me never to compromise

standards and how to build an incredible relationship

with your team. He taught me how to identify all of

the small things that convert a good holiday into a great holiday. I admired his courage and tenacity in

building resorts and theme parks from scratch.

MAKE OR BREAK

My first leadership role in the industry was as a bev -

erage manager at Daydream Island Resort. The tran-

sition from line staff to manager was daunting. You

246ed a three-day Franklin Covey course titled “The 7

Habits of Highly Effective People. ” After attending

this course, I became far more engaging, understand-

ing, and inclusive. It was a real game changer for me.

I became a far more effective general manager.

APPRECIATE YOUR TEAM

It is important to share all positive feedback you

receive from guests to your team, particularly with those staff mentioned. A simple acknowledgement is all that’s required. Staff that are constantly praised by

guests and others should be employees of the month

and be recognized more publically. Indeed, we make

special note of all staff mentioned in reviews online,

which helps us identify whom to recognize. Valuing

your team’s hard work, commitment, and contribu-

tion is one of the cornerstones of leadership.

247A PASSION FOR PEOPLE

Hospitality is all about people. Therefore, when hiring

new colleagues, you need people that love entertain-

ing and telling stories, and are incredibly passionate

about ensuring that guests are having an enjoyable

time. Fijians are naturally hospitable. They are warm

and engaging, and love interacting with guests.THE FIRST DAY

Similar to our guests, we want our new staff to feel

that they are part of a large family. I always make sure

that I meet all new recruits on their first day of work.

I explain to them that it is my role to look after them

and to take care of them. I also advise them that my

door is always open should they wish to speak to me for any reason. Every role is valuable and necessary,

and collectively it’s our goal to ensure each and every

guest has a wonderful experience at our resort.

248HONESTY AND TRANSPARENCY

It is very important to share the results of your hotel

operations with your team. Every quarter, I meet with

my staff of 600 to discuss the financial results of the

resort and the challenges we may be facing, as well

as to solicit their feedback on how best to address

those challenges. By providing the financial results, staff are given a solid perspective of how the business

is doing and why some decisions need to be made,

particularly if you have to cut costs. More generally,

including staff input into key operational and strate-gic decisions shows them that their opinion is valu-

able and important. This empowerment will translate

into employees taking a positive and proactive role in

continually improving the guest experience.

TRAINING GROUND

To encourage internal promotions and to give staff

at all levels the opportunity to progress, any vacancy

that becomes available is first advertised internally. For professional development, we provide regular

249training programs through the buddy system, where

senior staff show junior team members how to under -

take different tasks and also to teach them new skills.

For senior managers, we bring in trainers from over -

seas. As an example, this could take the form of Frank -

lin Covey leadership courses. In addition, we train our

butlers and fine-dine service staff at the Australian Butler School. These efforts cost a lot of money but

have proven to be well worth it. I believe we have the

best management team of any resort in Fiji and our

butlers and fine dining staff are second to none. Our fine dining restaurant Ivi was awarded best restaurant

in the country at the 2017 Fiji tourism awards.

THE LOCAL EXPERIENCE

Architecturally, it is important that your resort em-

braces the local culture. For example, we have tra-

ditional Fijian Bures at our resort. We entertain our

guests with traditional Fijian feasts, dancing, kava

ceremonies, and fire walking demonstrations. We

then provide guests the opportunity to immerse

themselves in the culture. This may include helping

build a classroom for kids, touring a local village, or

attending a church service on Sunday. We also have

three troupes of serenaders who can sing both tra-

ditional and celebratory songs for special occasions.

GIVING BACK

Our community tourism projects to give back to the

local area are very popular on Facebook and Twitter.

Once guests have engaged in such projects, they want

to come back to see how things have progressed, and

if that isn’t possible, they very much enjoy updates on

their efforts through social media.

THE WEDDING PACKAGE

One of our most successful campaigns that has had

a long-term effect on the resort was in 2010 when

we created a simple wedding package. It was all in-

clusive of the wedding ceremony, reception, priest,

photography, hair, makeup, and florist. We did forty

weddings that year. And just three years later, we did

265. Interest has not waivered since. The package was

incredibly successful.

251

Philip

Barnes

REGIONAL VICE PRESIDENT

AND MANAGING DIRECTOR,THE SAVOY HOTEL

(LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM)

BORN IN: Salford, United Kingdom

SELECT GEOGRAPHICAL

EXPERIENCE:

United Kingdom, Canada, United

Arab Emirates, Singapore, New

Zealand, Australia, United States

YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY:

40

Photo on Left Courtesy of Red Photographic for The Savoy Hotel

Photos Courtesy of The Savoy Hotel

253GROWING UP

I was born in Salford in Greater Manchester in the

UK to parents who were both teachers. I had a rel-

atively humble start to life. We moved to Sussex in

the South of England when I was about eleven as a

result of my sister being an asthmatic. My father was

a headmaster and my mother taught English. My

mother introduced me to theatre, poetry, and litera-

ture. They both taught me a set of values that I carry

with me today—honesty, integrity, and respect for

all people.

The teachers I had at boarding school also had a great

influence on me. My house master was a Benedictine monk who is still a friend of mine. This was the 1960s,

and he was in the midst of navigating great change to

the religious order. The year I started Catholic board-

ing school, you were supposed to go to church three

times a week. By the second year, you only had to go on Sunday. The leadership realized that the more they pushed for attendance, the more it would drive

people away. In other words, create an enabling envi -

ronment for people to participate and succeed, rather than telling them what to do.

A DIFFERENT WORLD

My parents didn’t really understand me going into

the hotel business. They had no idea what I did, the

roles I had, or what the business was about. The in-

dustry was alien to their background. They had never

stayed in luxury hotels. Rather, they would rent cot -

tages for family holidays or go to a bed and breakfast.

It just wouldn’t have crossed their minds. Until I be-

came general manager of a Four Seasons hotel, my

mother thought I was going to be a waiter.As the general manager, you set the tone

for everything that goes on at your hotel. If you walk by a problem, then you are the problem.““

254

255THE FIRST SPARK

We used to live near Gatwick Airport and so my first

job in the industry was for an airline catering com-

pany. While in boarding school, I would spend every

summer working in the kitchen, preparing meals for

the airlines. I peeled thousands of eggs and made

thousands of sandwiches. It was very hard work, but it sparked an interest in travel and hospitality.

JACK OF ALL TRADES

My last summer job was in a hotel that had just

opened in a village near where we lived. I joined the

team as a general assistant doing split-shifts every

day for six days a week. Every morning I cleared out

all the bars, took out all the empties, and restocked.

I would put all of the recyclable bottles back in the

crates so they could be taken away. I would do all the

ordering of replacement beers, wines, and spirits to

make sure that the cellars were properly stocked. I would cover for the bartenders while they took their

meal breaks. In the afternoon I would be involved

with setting up rooms or breaking down rooms in the

banquet hall. In the evening I would be cashiering,

answering telephones, and helping out in the restau-

rants. I was on the frontlines every day and would

always learn something different and be involved in

something new. Back then, for example, everything was done by hand.

You were writing out bills for guests in the restaurant

and balancing them out on a spread sheet. At the

end of the day, you’d have to use a calculator to make

sure that the entire sheet balanced out. With such a

high level of responsibility came accountability, and

I learned that attention to detail was what really mat -

tered in the business.

A NEVER-ENDING PROCESS

To build a great team culture, you must start with

transparency and alignment. When you build off

those ideas, you get into issues of empowerment and ownership, and giving people the authority to do

what needs to be done. Everybody must also have the

same level of commitment in taking care of a guest,

collectively working towards a common goal. There’s

no secret to getting it right. It is a continuous, nev -

er-ending process to reinforce core values, align on core objectives, and ensure staff are empowered to

make decisions of consequence.

THE COMPLETE PACKAGE

When weighing literal cost versus benefit, do not base

decisions solely on price. It’s not about sourcing the cheapest product or even the most expensive product.

256It’s about looking at the complete package in order to

make the right decisions with a view to the future.

For example, if you know you need to make a change

to televisions in a hotel over the next three years, ask

yourself: What is the product that I need, and what

is the future need of the guest going to be? What is

it that people are going to be using televisions for in

three years’ time? Don’t automatically lean towards the most cost-effective solution. Address the current need but also take time assessing the future need.

YOU SET THE TONE

As the general manager, you set the tone for every -

thing that goes on. If you walk by a problem, then you

are the problem. You have to address it and realize

257that everyone looks to you as a leader. They see ev -

erything you do and how you do it. When I stay in

my hotel, it’s like being stalked by 600 people. Every -

body knows when I go for breakfast, what I have for breakfast, when I go to the gym, and who I’m having

dinner with. That’s the kind of scrutiny you are under

as a leader, and if you don’t like that, then you’re in

the wrong role.BEING THE MENTEE

When I was general manager of the Shangri-La in

Singapore, I reported to Goh Soo Siah, chairman of

the board. He had a background in property develop-

ment—not hotels. I learned a lot from him about the

business side of the industry given his unique vantage

point. A great mentor is someone who doesn’t just

258help you professionally, but also helps you personally.

They genuinely care about you and your future. And

that doesn’t stop when you stop working with them.

When you move onwards, it’s important to maintain

that relationship.

BEING THE MENTOR

When the tables turn, and you become the mentor

to others, you’re imparting knowledge and insight,

steering colleagues in the right direction. I can think

of around a dozen people in this company who would

undoubtedly describe me as their mentor. They are

extremely important to me, and not just because I’ve worked with them. I’ve watched them grow and

develop, and they’ve become great friends over the

years.

PASSION AND ENTHUSIASM

We’re not in the business of saving lives, nor are we

trying to put a man on the moon. We’re trying to look

after guests in the best possible way, and the one thing

we can’t teach is the right attitude. If they have the

presence, manners, and wherewithal, we can teach

them pretty much anything else. Of course, there are

positions that require a specific skillset such as engi-neering, accounting, and culinary chops. However, outside of those professions, passion and enthusiasm is more important than experience.

FULL RESPONSIBILITY

The whole idea of colleague motivation comes down

to hiring the right people, training them appropriate-ly, and then giving them full responsibility for what

they do. As a baseline, they are already motivated

to succeed. They are also motivated when they see

results. All you need to do is value, appreciate, and

recognize their efforts. One of the struggles leaders

have with giving their colleagues full responsibilities

is the risk that comes with such empowerment. But

in the thirty years since I first became a general man-

ager, I’ve only had to question one individual about

a decision they made to ensure a guest left happy.

Just one. If you hire the right people and train them properly, they will do the right thing.

THE NUMBER ONE CHALLENGE

Without question, the number one challenge to lead -

ing a luxury hotel is recruiting and managing people.

If the team isn’t aligned, if the team doesn’t have a

common goal, if the team doesn’t challenge itself,

that’s where it all comes unstuck. Having the right

people around you and putting them in the right po-

sitions is critical. You can have the most beautiful

259

260

hotel in the world or you can have the ugliest hotel in

the world. If you have the right people, you can make

an ugly hotel successful. At the same time, a beautiful

hotel with the wrong people will fail.

AUTHENTIC HERITAGE

Creating an authentic experience is crucial to our

business, particularly somewhere as iconic as The

Savoy. This hotel is synonymous with London and

with quintessential British hospitality. Guests seek

out this authenticity. Furthermore, the luxury hotel

business is about providing an experience. None of

our guests come to the hotel simply to sleep. They

come to be part of London, and we must constantly

evolve with the city to ensure that we are providing

that experience. Our great advantage is authentic

heritage, and authenticity will always win.

PEOPLE CHANGE

One of the dangers of personalization is that a guest

history only tells you a snapshot of time. It doesn’t

tell you where they are today, so you have to regular -

ly validate certain information that you have about your guest. People’s habits change, their dietary re-

quirements change, their interests evolve. You have

to make an effort to understand who you’re dealing

with in the here and now.

Pinar

Kartal

Timer

GENERAL MANAGER,

PERA PALACE HOTEL JUMEIRAH(IST ANBUL, TURKEY)

Recently appointed General Manager of Jumeirah

Al Qasrand Dar Al Masyaf in Dubai,

United Arab Emirates

BORN IN: Istanbul, Turkey

SELECT GEOGRAPHICAL

EXPERIENCE:

Turkey

YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY:

30

Photos Courtesy of Pera Palace Jumeirah

263GROWING UP

I was born in Istanbul, Turkey, to a big, loving family.

When I was quite young, I split my time between

Anatolia, where my parents and I lived, and Istan-

bul, where my grandparents lived. We lived in a

very humble setting, while my grandparents lived

luxuriously. I learned to adapt and appreciate two extremely different environments. My father was a

military officer with a soft heart. He taught me the

importance of honesty, integrity, fairness, and stand-

ing up for the rights of others. My mother took care

of the family. She was a perfectionist, making sure

we had the healthiest food, the best education, and

the finest outfits.HUMAN ERROR

My first job in hospitality was as a reservation clerk

at the Hilton International Istanbul. At the time, res -

ervations were coming through over telex and fax, not streamlined via the Internet and managed with

sophisticated software. I was filing all such corre -

spondence and by accident I labeled a guest arrival

date 11/05 instead of 05/11. When the guest arrived,

we couldn’t find their reservation. They also claimed

that they had booked an upgraded room for the same

rate. We couldn’t verify this but ended up accepting

their word. We looked unprofessional, lost the op-

portunity to upsell, and my shift leader was extremely The definition of luxury has changed in

recent times. It no longer symbolizes anything material. Today, luxury is the knowledge of hidden places and experiences in any given city, and authentic experiences that simply cannot be organized on your own.““

264

upset. I learned that even in my very junior position,

a small mistake could lead to a major issue.

ROLL UP YOUR SLEEVES

My first leadership position was as a group sales

manager. Although I only had one colleague re-

porting to me, I was in charge of the group’s per -

formance, ensuring that all departments involved were performing optimally. On one occasion, we had

confirmed a block of rooms with seaside view. As a

reminder, in 1990, there were no electronic key cards.

We had heavy keys. In double-checking the keys and

envelopes of this group, I noticed the room numbers were facing the garden—not the seaside. The reserva-

tion agent had made a mistake, and we only had one

hour before everyone arrived. I immediately went to

help housekeeping clean up and re-arrange all the

sea view rooms. In rolling up my sleeves to get the

job done, I earned the respect and trust of my team.

However, I also realized that while you can delegate

duties, you cannot delegate ultimate responsibility.

THE CORE OF CUL TURE

Respect is the bedrock of a successful working envi-

ronment. Respect for yourself and your duties, respect for your colleagues and their positions, and respect

for your clients and guests. Notions of hard work,

empathy, honesty, collaboration, empowerment, and

joy flow once respect is established. Communication,

too, is vital to a healthy operation. I always encourage

my colleagues to seek me out for face-to-face interac -

tions, as this continuously builds rapport.

INTERACTING WITH GUESTS

Guests should be made to feel welcomed, appreciat -

ed, and acknowledged. Hotel employees should be

friendly but not pally, assertive but not rude, kind

but not weak, humble but not timid, and proud but

not arrogant.

SEEK EXCELLENCE, PATIENTL Y

As a perfectionist, good is never enough. It’s not

enough for me and it’s not enough for the luxury ho-

tel business. We must always strive for excellence,

building on our strengths and narrowing our weak -

nesses. At the same time, we need to appreciate how hard our team is working, spend time motivating

them to reach new heights, and give them time to

improve. Continuous learning and development will

not happen overnight.

ATTITUDE, NOT SKILLS

After interviews with human resources and the de-

partment head, I take the opportunity to speak with

each new applicant, regardless of the position they’re

applying for. While I can’t judge whether they’re a

good electrician or housekeeper in twenty minutes,

I can judge whether this person is suitable for our hotel family. I have no hesitation saying that I recruit

for attitude over skills. We can teach virtually every

skill, but changing an attitude can take years, if ever.

THE FULL PICTURE

When new recruits join the team, we have a full day

of training, which involves meeting and hearing from

all department heads personally about what their du-

ties are and how they relate to other units, followed

by detailed house tours and safety guidance. New

department heads spend a week rotating as guests

of other units to understand each operation individ-ually and in relation to others. This immersive expe-

rience is critical to starting off on the right foot. If you

don’t have the full picture, you can’t make the most

effective decisions.

268BUILDING COMMITMENT

There are several strategies to keep your team mo-

tivated, engaged, and committed. Fundamentally,

you must appreciate, recognize, and respect them.

Sometimes just saying “thank you” can go a long way.

Be open to their feedback and be inclusive in your

overall decision-making process. This will create commitment to and ownership of the hotel’s suc -

cess. Similarly, opportunities for professional devel-opment are critical to ensuring guests are motivated. We also organize team activities to have some fun

and to build camaraderie outside the hotel, including

group dinners and bowling tournaments.

ROOM TO GROW

Every team member is different. They could have dif -

ferent aspirations, motivations, or long-term plans

for the future. What’s important is that you tailor a

269professional development program for them based

on their needs and interests. For example, our res -

ervation supervisor had the interest and potential to become a revenue manager. To better understand

that side of the business, he was given the opportuni-

ty to work with the current manager and attend bud-

get meetings to learn more about what that position

entailed. In addition, we offer a variety of cross-expo-

sure opportunities in other Jumeirah hotels.

AN AUTHENTIC, LOCAL EXPERIENCE

One of the ways in which we try to differentiate our -

selves in a competitive market is by moving beyond

being the most historical luxury hotel. Every month,

we host a famous writer for a literary gathering, and

for the past three years we have hosted classical mu-

sic concerts every Saturday morning. In addition,

we had a special interactive theatre play written and

performed exclusively for the hotel, turning the prop-

erty into a stage. The show has been offered for many

months, running twice a week, and tickets are always

sold out.

In addition, we created Black Week Istanbul, an in-

ternational crime writers’ festival. Our first event

was held in 2014 on the occasion of Agatha Christie’s

125

th birthday, at which her grandchild participated.

To celebrate even further, just prior to the festival, we partnered with Belmond Cipriani Hotel Venice and the Orient Express to organize a whodunit themed

dinner in Venice. The second festival was held in

2014 and was organized in honor of George Simo-

nen. And in 2017, the event will take the theme of

James Bond, due to Ian Flemming. Needless to say, all

of these incredible writers were guests of Pera Palace

Hotel Jumeirah.

MEETING EXPECTATIONS

To ensure the highest guest satisfaction, we con-

duct frequent audits and training. Twice a year, a

third-party, private company audits our efforts. Four

times a year we conduct our own internal audits. And

another four times a year we organize a refresh in

training for different levels of staff.

LOVE IT OR HATE IT

If you don’t mind working 24/7, a career in luxury

hospitality is incredibly rewarding. You will have the

chance to meet the most important people in the world. You will have friends from all over the world.

You will have a chance to travel and see the world in

a way few people can. This is an industry that you

either love or hate, and you must absolutely love it

in order to be successful.

270A WARM WELCOME

We welcome every guest with a glass of apple tea

served with a Turkish delight and a hot or cold towel,

depending on the weather. Guests are then escorted

to their rooms in the first electric elevator in Turkey

while a guest relations executive explains the histo-

ry of the hotel. In the room, guests are treated with seasonal dates or a very special chocolate bar from

the neighborhood. As the hotel is a living museum,

all of the historical furniture, rare books on display,

and the Ataturk Museum Room transport guests to

1920s Turkey.

A CHANGING DEFINITION

The definition of luxury has changed in recent times.

It no longer symbolizes anything material. Today,

luxury is the knowledge of hidden places and expe-

riences in any given city, and authentic experienc -

es that simply cannot be organized on your own.

Therefore, tailored services provided by an expert

concierge play an even more important role today

than in the past. Across the industry, experiential ad-

ventures are also in demand, such as cooking with a

celebrity chef, truffle hunting, and deep-sea fishing.A TRUL Y PERSONALIZED STAY

Knowing more and more about your guests enables

increased personalization, which is the future of the

industry. Even if a guest doesn’t share their interests

or preferences in advance, we are becoming experts

in sleuthing some of that information online. A wel-

come amenity would then be based on their profes -

sion.

For example, a writer might receive a box of choc -

olates with their latest novel cover printed on top,

and a musician might receive a plate of treats in the

form of a treble clef. For regular guests, we offer spe-

cial amenities and services on their 5

th, 10th, 15th, and

20th stay, from complimentary transfers to a private

cooking lesson with our executive chef.

271

Ralph

Radtke

REGIONAL DIRECTOR,

KEMPINSKI RESIDENCES (TURKEY)

GENERAL MANAGER,

CIRAGAN PALACE KEMPINSKI(IST ANBUL, TURKEY)

AREA DIRECTOR,

KEMPINSKI HOTELS (IT ALY)

BORN IN: Berlin, Germany

SELECT GEOGRAPHICAL

EXPERIENCE:

Turkey, France, Thailand, Russia,

Cote d’Ivoire, Luxembourg, Israel,

Ukraine, Germany, Austria, Italy

YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY: 45

Photos Courtesy of Ciragan Palace Kempinski

273GROWING UP

I was born in Berlin to hardworking parents who

owned one of the biggest textile factories in Germany

and in all of Europe. As a child, I traveled a lot with

my family and was fortunate to experience a variety

of luxury hotels. Indeed, my father’s passion for cars,

food, and travel rubbed off on me. And because he

regularly hosted soirees and events, I grew up social -

izing and meeting new people. This love for traveling the world, meeting new people from all walks of life,

and discovering new cultures and traditions steered me into the hospitality business. STARTING OUT

In 1972, at the age of twenty, I secured my first per -

manent job in the industry as a room service waiter

and cashier at Le Bristol in Paris. After some time

there, I decided to pursue additional studies in ho-

tel management and food and beverage, graduating

from Glion Hotel School in Switzerland. While in

school, I completed two trainings at Hotel Cipriani

in Venice. I first served as chef de rang, and then as

assistant manager of the restaurant. After graduat -

ing, I became front office secretary at the Ritz Paris,

before serving as personal assistant to Charles Ritz.

Throughout these experiences, enthusiasm, passion,

and honesty stood out as hallmark traits of how to

lead and how to be successful in this industry.Leaders who pay attention to their

employees’ feedback, concerns, and opinions have relationships with their colleagues rooted in trust and respect. That kind of relationship fosters a sense

of loyalty and commitment.““

274

HONESTY AND TRANSPARENCY

In 1985, I served as general manager of Sofitel Thalas -

sa Quiberon in France—one of my first serious lead-

ership positions. In this role, I launched an exten-

sive renovations program, and learned the absolute

importance of being inclusive of team input during

decision making. I also learned to listen carefully to staff needs, and why good leadership demands hon-

esty and transparency—two building blocks of the

leader-follower relationship.

TRUST YOUR TEAM

One of the most important aspects of leadership is

to trust your team to make the right decisions, and

empower them to take action as necessary. Of course,

this is tied to hiring the right people for the right job.

But when the right people are in place, and you trust

them to execute and deliver, you as a general manager

can have more confidence in your own decisions.

LISTEN MORE

Over the years, I’ve realized that when employees say

they want their voices heard, what they’re really say -

ing is that they want to be listened to, included, and respected. A genuine act of listening requires paying

276careful attention. Leaders who pay attention to their

employees’ feedback, concerns, and opinions, have

relationships with their colleagues rooted in trust

and respect. That kind of relationship fosters a sense

of loyalty and commitment.

THE PURPOSE OF TECHNOLOGY

There are times when I notice that technology be-

comes a top priority for some luxury hotels. This can

be a mistake. Technology must be carefully integrated

into the guest experience, but only insofar as it adds

to that experience, rather than becoming an end unto itself. Similarly, the use of technology should not be

a substitute for genuine human interaction, so you

must evaluate such opportunities with this in mind.

The power of human contact cannot be understated,

and it is essential to the luxury hospitality experience.

TRAINING TO PROBLEM SOLVE

At Ciragan Palace Kempinski, we train ourselves to be

efficient problem solvers. We send our colleagues to

other Kempinski Hotels as part of specific task forc -

es and cross-trainings in order to make them more rounded team members that are knowledgeable in

277areas other than their core expertise. This additional

exposure also provides a different kind of inspiration

and motivation to succeed. Moreover, I believe that

continuous engagement with different cultures, life-

styles, and backgrounds is critical to success in our

industry given the diversity of both colleagues and

clientele.

REACT QUICKL Y

Customers share their experiences in near real-time

on digital review platforms and through social me-

dia. In doing so, they become de facto ambassadors of the brand and can impact a brand’s reputation. In

this context, we receive a lot of feedback and com-

ments about a guest’s stay via travel and social plat -

forms. We monitor these platforms regularly and respond immediately. Coupled with our guest expe-

rience tracking software, any issues or concerns can

be noted by staff and made instantly available to oth-

ers, including department heads, for them to resolve.

278

279A LOCAL EXPERIENCE, RICH IN HISTORY

Dating back to the 17th century, Ciragan Palace Kem-

pinski Istanbul is the only Ottoman Palace and hotel

located on the Bosphorus shores. With respect to our

history, we are able to showcase the very best of lo-

cal and traditional cultures to our guests, which are

seen all throughout the property from our decoration

to our design, and foods and beverages like Turkish

baklava, Turkish delights, and Turkish coffee. We

also offer a natural and palatial soap service for our

guests, honoring the tradition of ancient water ther -

apies of the Turkish Hamam. Our guests can enjoy twelve types of pure olive oil handmade soap, from Jasmine to Cedar Tree, sliced in front of them by their

butler. One is for immediate use, and the other is

wrapped in a pouch to take home.

BAKLAVA CHEFS

In addition to catering to all dietary preferences, re-

strictions, and lifestyles, such as offering a full glu-

ten-free menu in our restaurants and via room ser -

vice, we have a very special and traditional baklava we create in-house. We have the best baklava chefs

on staff from Gaziantep, the land of baklava, and they

make everything from scratch. To refresh our offer -

ings, we regularly create new kinds of baklava flavors,

including chestnut, coffee, and rose. A WORLD-FAMOUS SUITE

One of the ways we differentiate ourselves in the lux -

ury category is through our Sultan Suite, which is

one of the most luxurious and iconic suites in the

world. With its colossal and beautiful doors, two dec -

orative fire places, lavish chandeliers, artsy columns, replicas of paintings from the famous palace painter

Fausto Zonaro, floor to ceiling windows (the height

of the room is nearly six meters), and an extraordi-

nary Bosphorus view, this suite combines the best of

contemporary with classical Ottoman architecture to

recreate the splendor of the palace. All the furniture,

including the imperial-style furniture with Ottoman motifs and accessories dating back to the 19th cen-

tury, are made in Turkey.

OLD LUXURY VS. NEW LUXURY

Luxury travel is subjective. It all depends on a guest’s

needs, characteristics, styles, and profiles. A relevant,

personal, and exclusive experience will become even

more crucial than it is today, and it will be the differ -

entiating factor between old and new luxury.

FROM BEGINNING TO END

We think about luxury services in a holistic sense,

and offer opportunities to be pampered even before

guests arrive at our hotel. For example, with the Ci-

ragan Welcome Service, our team greets you at the

gate of the plane or at the door of the plane when

you arrive. Guided by a colleague, guests are whisked

away in a luxury vehicle to the hotel and do not have

to worry about a thing. Whether exchanging cur -

rency, stopping for a moment at the pharmacy, or purchasing a last minute gift, we will assist you with

everything.

THE CHINESE TRAVELER

One of the most important and emerging markets for

luxury travel is China. We should pay special atten-tion to their social media platforms and engage them

strategically. These platforms are a way for travelers

to buy tickets, pay bills, invest their money, send mes -

sages, and socialize. We need to better understand, harness, and partner with these platforms so that we

can stay in better touch with, and enhance, the guest

experience of our Chinese travelers throughout the

world.

281

Sjefke

Jansen

GENERAL MANAGER,

BELMOND GRAND HOTEL EUROPE(ST . PETERSBURG, RUSSIANFEDERATION)

BORN IN:

Heidelberg, Germany

SELECT GEOGRAPHICAL

EXPERIENCE:

Russia, Germany, Australia, South

Africa, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon,

Singapore, Maldives, Mauritius

YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY:

32

Photo on Left Courtesy of A. Lebedev for Bel Grand Hotel

Photos Courtesy of Adrian Houston for Belmond Grand Hotel

283GROWING UP

I grew up in Heidelberg, Germany, to parents who

were in the fashion business. I attended an anthro-

posophy school, which had a significant impact on

my life and continues to inspire me. When I was ten,

my father died tragically, so my mother took care of

my brother and I for many years before I left home.

From a very early age, I learned never to take any -

thing for granted, for life can change in a split second. It was a tough childhood, but I enjoyed the outdoors

as much as I could—rugby, cycling, swimming, and running.

My mother has a very sophisticated natural instinct,

empathizing with others and understanding emo-

tional meaning. I learned a great deal from her about how she treated her staff and us as a family. Today,

EQ serves as my daily guide both personally and pro-

fessionally. It is one of the pillars for successful team-

work. There is an inner ambition, not driven by title or money, which is highly motivating for yourself and

others. And that’s something we all share.

NOT FOR THE FAINT OF HEART

I always wanted to become a lawyer, but that was a

pipe dream. I didn’t really want to study hard, read a

lot of books, or analyze cases. My mother knew this,

so she encouraged me to pursue a culinary career

instead of just hanging around. The first offer that

came up was a three-year chef training program in

Germany. I accepted. I was a bit of a wild child who This industry is no longer about selling

commodities. Today, it’s about connecting emotionally with the audience by telling an authentic story. Facts and figures are becoming less and less relevant. Now it’s purely about the experience.““

284

knew no borders. Working in a kitchen as a trainee

was the opposite. It was hyper-structured and hierar -

chical, but I learned the importance of precision and discipline. At the same time, I learned that working

in a kitchen is not for the faint of heart.

A BROADER HORIZON

My first leadership position in hospitality was as a

restaurant manager at the Cellars-Hohenort Hotel

in Cape Town, South Africa. This experience taught

me a great deal about how diverse our industry could

be. All of a sudden I was exposed to people and ideas

from different backgrounds and cultures. It was in-

spiring, as it taught me to be open-minded. I also

came to realize very quickly that the German ap-

proach does, in fact, only work in Germany. I needed

to learn to be flexible, adaptable, and open to doing things in new ways.

THE KEY

Respect and trust, both earned and not demanded,

are the key to creating a culture of success. Don’t just

hear what your team has to say; show genuine care

and listen carefully to their ideas and feedback, in-

cluding them in decisions. Equally important is to

create an environment free of fear that allows for an

unlimited exchange of ideas from any level of staff.

286THREE FUNDAMENTAL VALUES

One of the most important lessons I’ve learned is that

passion, attitude, and integrity form the backbone of

good leadership. No matter what level of job, having a

passion for service and an optimistic attitude will in-

evitably lead to positive results. Additionally, always

being honest, fair, and ethical will garner the respect and trust of your colleagues.

COMMON SENSE

Hospitality can be very simple if we understand and

appreciate the basics—serving others to make them

genuinely happy. Applied in practice, interactions

between staff and guests should be one of common

sense.

287STREET SMART

Over the years, I studied people and their behavior

in a variety of circumstances and situations, from the

subtle to the extreme. By keenly observing people,

and having not had any mentors, I came to think of

myself as being street smart. Often times you learn

what not to do from managers, rather than how best to act. That kind of insight is equally valuable. I have

worked for many supervisors who managed their de-partments purely through superiority and authority,

and less through respect, trust, and knowledge. They

all had two things in common—they were insecure

and driven by fear. It was always a façade that crum-

bled eventually. I promised myself I would never lead

in such a way if given the opportunity.

COMMUNICATE TO MOTIVATE

One of the most important aspects to motivating

your team and keeping them engaged is open, gen-

uine, informal and formal communication. First and

foremost, you need to be visible and approachable.

Walk the property every day and speak to whomever

you meet on the floor. You will be amazed by what your colleagues tell you if you speak to them in an

informal environment such as the corridor, lobby,

or restaurant. In addition, we hold quarterly all-staff

gatherings and regular one-on-one meetings with

department heads to ensure constant dialogue. As a

last resort, I send emails to the team. Nothing beats

the personal approach.

LEARN TO PROGRESS

I urge everyone on the team to educate themselves

while working to further their career. Whether in

person or online training, I urge them to take ev -

ery opportunity they can to develop professional-

ly. To encourage that ethos, we conduct language

classes, on-the-job training, job-related classes, and

cross-exposure programs where we send staff to sis -

ter properties for a period of time to be exposed to different operations.

289IMPATIENT MILLENNIALS

One of the biggest challenges to leading a luxury

property today is tied to the current and growing cul-

ture of instant gratification. The younger generation

of employees are incredibly impatient. They want

to be recognized immediately, failing to understand

that it takes many years to become successful in this industry. This presents a challenge in recruiting and

retaining young employees who are eager to climb

the ladder, but not eager to put in the work and time

required to progress.

OUR HISTORY IS UNMATCHED

An authentic, local experience is becoming more

crucial than ever. Selling a commodity is not diffi-

cult—offering something authentic is. The Belmond

Grand Hotel Europe is as good as any competitor in

the market, but what we’re really selling is history.

Our property is 141 years old and has always been

a hotel. We opened the first fine-dining restaurant

in Russia. We had the first restaurant with electric

light in Russia. Over the years, we’ve had every pol-

itician, statesman, artist, and celebrity stay with us. Elton John once performed an impromptu concert

in the hotel over dinner. Dostoevsky wrote books in

our hotel. Tchaikovsky composed music in his room

and Pavarotti sang from the balcony to an audience

standing on the street.EXCLUSIVE EXPERIENCES

Built over many years, our relationships throughout

the community are some of the strongest in the city.

For example, we have our own private box, five me-

ters from the stage in Mikhailkovsky Theater. There

are only four seats available, all of which are reserved

for guests. We can also arrange special access to The Hermitage Museum afterhours, when it is closed

to the public, or organize a visit to the restoration

rooms of the Russian Museum, where guests can

see how antiques are being restored. Coupled with

unique partnerships with Dom Perignon and Hen-

nessy, we’re able to offer some of the most exclusive

experiences in the world.

VIRTUAL REALITY

This industry is no longer about selling commodities.

Today, it’s about connecting emotionally with the au-

dience by telling an authentic story. Facts and figures are becoming less relevant. Now it’s purely about the

experience. In this new context, I believe print media

will have little to no future given its limited ability to

form the type of emotional connection that can be

created through digital means. I believe that virtu-

al reality is the future of luxury hospitality. You will

be able to create and experience an entire journey

without ever leaving your living room. The ride from

the airport to the hotel, a welcome message from the

general manager, a tour of the lobby, room, kitchen,

and more. The virtual vacation is where we’re headed.

THE SOCIAL MEDIA CHALLENGE

We are bombarded with images and information

24/7, and filtering what is truly relevant is becoming

increasingly difficult. In most cases, you may read a

headline and glance at some incredible photos. But

the reality is that snippet of attention is insufficient

to create a lasting positive reputation of your brand.

Moreover, Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat, and Insta -

gram have massive, diverse audiences, and it is very

hard to measure which audience specifically is your

target market. In other words, it’s great exposure, but

is there a measurable or tangible return on that effort?

I’m not certain.

Stephen

Ansell

GENERAL MANAGER,

ARARAT PARK HYATT MOSCOW(RUSSIAN FEDERATION)

BORN IN:

London, United Kingdom

SELECT GEOGRAPHICAL

EXPERIENCE:

Russia, United Kingdom, Austria,

Germany, China, Saudi

Arabia, Egypt, Turkey, Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine, United States

YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY:

25

Photos Courtesy of Ararat Park Hyatt Moscow

293GROWING UP

I was born in London but spent my childhood in

Southeast Asia and Europe due to my father and his

work with British Petroleum. My first experience

with Hyatt was when I was six, when my family was

accommodated at the Grand Hyatt Singapore for a

month during a relocation. Apparently, I took a great

interest in helping the housekeeping staff, foreshad-

owing my future. Living in many different countries

and cultures from a very young age instilled in me

a passion for traveling and adventure. I wanted to continue that lifestyle in the form of a career.A TASTE OF THE INDUSTRY

My first job in hospitality was when I was sixteen. I

worked at a small, Austrian family hotel in the Alps.

In the morning, I worked at the reception, then as

a waiter at the swimming pool, and then serving

lunch and dinner. I learned a great deal participating

in and observing a range of operations throughout

the hotel. Nothing beats firsthand experience in an

environment where you’re exposed to all facets of

the business.

WHERE I LEARNED THE MOST

After studying hospitality, I embarked on an inter -

national career by enrolling in a management train-It is important to get to know each

colleague individually, understanding their needs, interests, and future plans. Only then can you tailor your approach of encouragement and development to bring out the very best they have to offer.““

294

ing program with Hilton International in Munich,

Germany. Looking back at all of my early manage-

ment experiences, this is where I learned the most.

The program gave me insight into all aspects of a

hotel, including a six-month position in charge of

stewarding. I was constantly reminded that in our

business, the most important people we work with

every day come from all walks of life, often with dif -

ferent backgrounds and life experiences. This applies to both staff and guests. On this team, we had a truly

cosmopolitan group of people in which diversity and

difference was embraced, respected, and valued.

ADAPTING TO SHOCK

My first leadership position in the industry was as

an assistant restaurant manager at Terminal 4 in

London’s Heathrow Airport. While working there,

the company went into receivership and senior man-

agement departed. The remaining supervisory team

was asked to continue operations, ensuring staff like

myself still received salaries. Suppliers were refusing

to make deliveries and stock was running low. Push-

ing forward required smart negotiations and creative

management. In the face of a seemingly intractable situation, I learned that imaginative problem-solving,

determination, and sheer resolve can, in fact, save a

business.

296DESIGNING A CUL TURE OF SUCCESS

As we say in the world of Hyatt, “a little understand-

ing goes a long way. ” Essentially, this translates into

treating each other with respect, valuing difference

of opinion, being inclusive in your decision-making,

acting with compassion and empathy, walking in the

shoes of others, and listening carefully.

CHARGING THROUGH HEADWINDS

Having been in Russia for the past seven years, vari-

ous geopolitical factors have made the economic en-

vironment, on occasion, somewhat challenging. It is

during these times you learn the most about how to

adapt your strategy to fit the moment. The faster you

react, the better you will fare.

BEING FIRST HAS CHALLENGES

Prior to working in Russia, I was fortunate to open

the Hyatt Regency Kyiv, the first international five-

star hotel in Ukraine. We were covering new ground and thus actively involved in all aspects of the sup-

ply chain, including extensive, and on occasion chal-

lenging, interactions with our suppliers and partners.

Achieving a true sense of luxury is no easy task, par -

ticularly when the system in place to deliver on that promise does not yet exist. A LESSON IN CRISIS MANAGEMENT

While serving as general manager of the Hyatt Re-

gency Bishkek in Kyrgyzstan, a political revolution

gripped the country. This was a very difficult time

and a real-life lesson in crisis management. I learned

once again the value of a trusted, passionate local

team, and how important our close relationships with the community were in seeing us through this

period.

HIRING FOR SUCCESS

The key to success is hiring people who are true to

your values. If we are able to identify a curious person

who is inclusive, honest, empathetic, and joyful, then

the technical components of the job can be learned.

Regardless of a candidate’s experience, we encourage

them to share stories about their successes, failures,

and what they learned in both cases. Are they able

to reflect anew? Our goal is to create an environ -

ment where no one takes themselves too seriously,

where we have fun at work, and where we also get

to know an individual’s interests and ambitions. In

order to ensure we’re all aligned, all applicants get in -

terviewed by human resources, senior management, and then myself.

297

298TAILORED MOTIVATION

Motivation is not only about professional growth and

salary. It is also about being a part of a strong, caring

team, building genuine friendships with colleagues,

and an atmosphere of trust. It is important to get to

know each colleague individually, understanding their

needs, interests, and future plans. Only then can you

tailor your approach of encouragement and develop-

ment to bring out the very best they have to offer.

A GO-TO PERSON

All recruits undergo a specific coaching aimed at

providing a solid understanding of our culture. We

answer a bevy of questions: What is our mission?

How do we work together? Who are my colleagues?

What do I need to do to be successful? After passing

the induction, a personal coach is assigned to you in

your department for the first three months. This is

a critical process, as every new member of the team

has a go-to person to take care of them, answer all

their questions, help them face their first challenge, and ensure they make the right decisions.

299TURNOVER

As general managers, we must also accept the fact

that many members of our workforce may not end

up in long-term careers in the luxury hospitality

business. We should see this as an opportunity, as it

allows us the freedom to recruit from a wide variety

of people with different backgrounds, experiences, and interests. Even short-term colleagues can have

a meaningful impact on our guests, provided they

are motivated and committed to establishing human

connections.

WORK-LIFE BALANCE

One of the most challenging aspects of the industry

today is ensuring that hospitality remains a desirable

career option for young people. We are still fight -

ing our poor reputation in terms of compensation and unsociable working hours. A healthy work-life

balance is becoming the norm, and if we are serious about attracting the best talent, it is our responsibil-

ity to create the right environment. Hyatt has done

much to address this question over the years, and the

industry more generally has made progress.

When I joined this industry twenty-five years ago,

working sixty hours a week was a prerequisite to success. Things have changed. I believe hotels that

implement a reasonable work-life balance policy will increase the desirability of the profession and at the

end of the day will offer a better customer experience.

A CHANCE TO ADVANCE

One of the most rewarding aspects of the job is pro-

viding mentorship and growth opportunities to the

team. I encourage all of our associates to travel ex -

tensively in order to broaden their horizons and ex -

perience different countries. By working for a rapidly

growing international hotel company, such oppor -

tunities are in abundance and perfectly compliment formal training programs.

MARKETING CLASS

One of our most successful collaborations we em-

barked on was with a local university. We invited a

class of marketing students to create a plan to promote

the opening of a new restaurant. It was an incredi-

bly affordable, creative, and worthwhile experience

as we ended up with five very thoughtful proposals

to choose from. The prize for the winning proposal

was a week-long stay at one of our hotels. We ulti-

mately chose a plan that included four teaser emails

commencing one month prior to opening, with each one telling a story of the restaurant, accompanied by

a voucher. Customers who kept all four vouchers were

treated to a three-course menu with wine.

AUTHENTIC ENGAGEMENT

The sheer volume of communication on social media

is rather daunting at times. Of course, the ability to

cost-effectively present our story to a targeted audi-

ence is an important opportunity. At the same time,

the luxury hospitality industry is epitomized by per -

sonal connection and personalized service. I still try to answer all of our TripAdvisor reviews personally,

but the challenge is to stay ahead of the game, bear -

ing in mind the volume of feedback we receive and

our goal of turning every comment or post into an

authentic engagement.

301

Susanne

Hatje

GENERAL MANAGER,

MANDARIN ORIENT AL, NEW YORK (UNITED ST ATES)

BORN IN:

Hamburg, Germany

SELECT GEOGRAPHICAL

EXPERIENCE:

United States, China, Germany,

France

YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY:

29

Photo on Left Courtesy of Robert Stanzione

Photos Courtesy of Mandarin Oriental New York

303GROWING UP

I was born in Hamburg, Germany, to parents who

were both hoteliers, so I literally grew up in the in-

dustry. They were the owner-operators of Hotel Heu -

berg in Hamburg, which is still a family-run business today with my brother in charge. Being immersed in

the industry from day one, I learned how to be an

effective hotelier at an early age. My parents taught

me the importance of care and concern, following

through on your commitments, and appreciating ev -

ery business as though it were your own—whether

you were the owner or an operational colleague.

My grandmother was also in the industry, and was

instrumental in the success of Hotel Heuberg. She

knew every aspect of the business and imparted her

age-old wisdom to the team on things like how best

to get rid of carpet stains.CLOSE TO HOME

My first role outside the family business was as an

apprentice at the five-star Hotel Atlantic Kempinski

in Hamburg in 1988. Not only was it a great oppor -

tunity to learn about luxury hospitality, but it helped that I was able to stay in my home city as I started

out my career—surrounded by family and friends

for support. I started out in the laundry room and

worked my way up. Starting from the bottom and ris -

ing through the ranks is absolutely critical. It teaches you every part of the operation, and you learn to re-spect and admire the work of your colleagues. Only

then do you understand how valuable each individ-

ual’s role is to ensuring the overall success of a hotel.In today’s hospitality environment, balancing

operational needs with the expectation of financial performance, all the while managing key relationships across the property, is both challenging and critical.““

304

A PERFECT OPPORTUNITY

My first leadership position in the industry came in

1992 as director of rooms at The Mark, a five-star ho-

tel in New York City. Sometime after, I was promoted

to assistant manager of the property. It was an in-

credible opportunity to work in one of the most com -

petitive and fastest-growing hospitality markets in

the world. I learned a tremendous amount about the

local dynamics of the industry, the different types of

travelers visiting New York City, and how to pinpoint

the qualities of effective leaders in other management

roles. Most importantly, this experience provided me

with a deeper appreciation and understanding of cul-

tural diversity.

OPEN COMMUNICATION

As general manager, I believe it’s important to con-

stantly have an open dialogue with the team to inspire

innovation, a hunger for excellence, and success. I in-teract with many of my colleagues every day, wheth-

er in the heart-of-house or front-of-house. Whether

greeting staff in the morning or discussing issues with

the whole executive team, being available, approach-

able, and appreciative are essential to success. Often,

guests will comment through satisfaction surveys,

TripAdvisor, or in direct conversation with our team

to acknowledge a specific colleague that made a spe-

306cial mark on their stay. Openly recognize and cele-

brate those that go above and beyond.

PERSONALIZED SERVICE, ON A WHIM

There once was a couple staying with us that decid-

ed they wanted to get married on a whim at Ladies

Pavilion in Central Park. We quickly arranged for a

last-minute justice of the peace, a photographer, and a horse and carriage. Our chief concierge, Kenneth

Abisror, served as the couple’s witness, and kindly

requested that park visitors clear the space just prior

to the wedding, inviting them to look on while the

ceremony took place. Despite the couple not hav -

ing family or friends around them to watch them get married, they were surrounded by a circle of New

Yorkers who took part in celebrating the occasion.

307SLUMBER PARTY

We once had a guest that rented out one of our Sig-

nature Suites for their daughter’s thirteenth birth-

day, where we threw a slumber party for her and

her friends. In addition to sleeping bags and lots

of pillows so they could watch movies all night, we

brought in a popcorn machine and ice cream cart so they could make their own sundaes.THE VAST ROLE OF A GM

As general manager, I must be a part of every facet

of the business—finance, marketing, rooms, and be-

yond. In today’s hospitality environment, balancing

operational needs with the expectation of financial

performance, all the while managing key relation -

ships across the property, is both challenging and

critical. Indeed, we also face a host of external chal-

308

lenges, such as being located in the heart of one of

the most competitive and fastest-growing hospitality

markets anywhere in the world. We also need to take

into consideration changing societal, financial, and

political climates.

A LOCAL EXPERIENCE

Every hotel within the Mandarin Oriental Hotel

Group features nuances that link back to our Orien-

tal heritage, such as the elements of fire and water. In

addition, each property is designed with a feng shui

expert. Most hotels in New York have to create their

sense of place, but given our location and position-ing, our sense of place is showcased at its best simply

by looking out the window onto Central Park. Our

suites contain work from local artists, we include lo-

cal magazines in each of the rooms and suites, and

even our Mandarin Oriental, New York signature fan

was designed by NYC-designer Vivienne Tam. Every

hotel has their own fan that’s also representative of

that destination.

INNOVATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

On the social media front, we recently partnered

with photographer Alice Gao on our MyViewYork campaign, featuring images of both famous and un-

310

311in housekeeping was assigned to his room and while

preparing his items, the guest made a comment

about how he missed a chance to experience a tradi-

tional New York City hot dog. After concluding the

service, our colleague ran down to Central Park and

purchased two hot dogs, delivering them to the room

before he departed. Needless to say, the guest was

blown away and truly touched by how our team paid

such close attention to detail. What started out as

innocent small talk turned into a genuine moment

of delight and surprise.

HOME AWAY FROM HOME

There was one occasion where a guest stayed with

us but, for the first time, was traveling without their

children. Our colleague asked the guest’s spouse for

some family photos and we arranged for them to be

playing on the guest’s TV upon arrival, along with a

warm welcome letter so they could “see” their chil-

dren even though they were not with them. It was

truly a heartfelt moment and the guest was moved

to tears.

HIDDEN GEM

We have one suite available to guests that we don’t

advertise publicly. It is only accessible and bookable expected views of New York City in an effort to in-spire visitors and locals alike to discover the city with

a fresh perspective.

Because New York City is one of the world’s fashion

capitals, we promoted our new suites in partnership

with New York-based designer Joseph Altuzarra,

while also launching our Bedside Reading Program. We featured books that have inspired the collections

for his women’s ready-to-wear brand over the years.

RAISING THE BAR

To keep things interesting and innovative, we have

regular guest chef pop-ups in our signature restau-

rant, Asiate. In early fall 2017, we unveiled the new

Aviary NYC and The Office NYC from Chicago-based

Chef Grant Achatz and his business partner, Nick

Kokonas of The Alinea Group. Like the Chicago flag-

ship location, the menu gives a nod to the New York

City experience, featuring classic cocktails as well. Our state-of-the art restaurant for drinks and lounge,

The Aviary NYC, provides our guests with a truly

unforgettable culinary experience.

HOT DOG DELIVERY

We once had a guest that requested a packing ser -

vice prior to their departure. One of our colleagues

by contacting our sales or reservations teams directly.

The reason we don’t advertise Suite 5000 is because

in addition to wanting to maintain the exclusive air of

the suite, the clientele that stay here tend to be very

private and we want to maintain their privacy.

In addition to the extensive artwork collection, the

three-bedroom suite features elegant design touch-es, including a light-reflecting Swarovski crystal wall,

floor-to-ceiling views of Central Park, the Hudson

River, and the Manhattan skyline, a curated record

collection, an impressive state-of-the-art media cen-

ter, and more.

A DESTINATION AUTHORITY

Some years ago we launched a campaign titled 365

Reasons Why We Love NYC. It showcased the lo-

cal community through a variety of press and social

media efforts, featuring iconic locations through-

out New York City. From stadiums like the Barclays Center and entertainment venues like the Ed Sul-

livan Theater, to iconic eateries like Nathan’s and

world-famous events like Fashion Week, each photo

was posted with a note about what made it so special

to New York City. The campaign was incredibly suc -

cessful, and supported our notion of why it’s essential for a hotel like ours to be a destination authority.

313

Taljinder

Singh

AREA DIRECTOR, MUMBAI HOTELS,

T AJ HOTELS PALACES RESORTSSAFARIS

GENERAL MANAGER,

THE T AJ MAHAL PALACE, MUMBAI (INDIA)

BORN IN:

Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, India

SELECT GEOGRAPHICAL

EXPERIENCE:

India

YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY:

27

Photos Courtesy of Taj Hotels Resorts and Palaces

315GROWING UP

I was born and raised in a small town in the Hima-

layan Mountains named Shimla, in the northern In-

dian state of Himachal Pradesh. Growing up, I loved

to explore the outdoors and discover different forests,

jungles, and streams. Coming from a paramilitary

household, I was disciplined to focus on education,

honesty, integrity, and doing the right thing.

STARTING FROM SCRATCH

I first ventured into hospitality as a management

trainee for The Taj Group. It was a two-year program, and I had absolutely no background in the industry

before I enrolled. My original idea was to gain expe-rience and then move abroad for a postgraduate busi-

ness management degree, but that never happened.

Given my ambitions, and while I continued working

for the company after my training, Taj sponsored a

series of courses at some of the best-known institu-

tions of learning in India and around the world. Their

commitment to my personal and professional growth

taught me the importance of investing in your team.

THE BOSS IS WATCHING

My first job in the industry was as an assistant lobby

manager at the iconic Taj Mahal Hotel in New Del-

hi. At the time, it was the second most important hotel of the company, right behind The Taj Mahal

Palace in Bombay, which was their global flagship. When I started out as an assistant lobby

manager at the Taj Mahal Hotel in New Delhi, there was no technology in place to track the guest experience. I was expected to know the history of the top 250 guests of the hotel, verbatim.““

316

317of the management training program and other front

office managers across The Taj Group to introduce

them to the concept.

Ronnie Lobo, the general manager at the time, also

became an incredibly important mentor to me and

remained so for many years long after he left the

company. One of the most important qualities I gleaned from his leadership and management style

is how he treated people with the utmost respect,

fairness, sincerity, and empathy.

GENUINE CARE

When we hire new recruits, the most important as -

pect we look for is whether they are the right fit from

a values perspective. Are they intrinsically hardwork -

ing? Do they have a high degree of integrity and gra-

ciousness? Do they have a natural willingness to be

of assistance to others? Once hired, on-boarding

new employees is not simply about going through

the motions of an orientation process. It is about

getting them to connect emotionally with the brand

and being immersed in the fabric and culture of the

organization. If that connection is not made, there

will be issues with the delivery of quality and ser -

vice. Artificial care is easily spotted and can do real damage to the guest experience. Instead, genuine

care and concern is appreciated and understood far better than mere lip service.

The leadership team of the company regularly parked themselves at the New Delhi property when meeting

with key business and government leaders, so expec -

tations were extremely high. My first manager was a tough individual with a very demanding work ethic.

When I made the mistake of not knowing where a

particular VIP guest was after having crossed the lob-

by, the manager said I needed to “develop eyes in the

back of my head” if I wanted to be a successful front

office agent and ultimately a hotelier. In those days,

there was no technology to easily track customers.

I was expected to know the history of the top 250 guests of the hotel.

EARL Y MENTORS

When I first started working at The Taj Mahal Hotel

in New Delhi, the resident manager at the time, Patu

Keswani, became my mentor. He constantly pushed

me to do more, to be better, challenging me to take

on new projects and assignments over and above

my duties. His analytical ability and understanding of how to maximize revenue had a great influence on

me. I learned to pay close attention to numbers, and

had awoken to the financial lens of the business—and

just how important it was. Together, we wrote the

first-ever presentation on revenue management in

The Taj Group. Later on, he tasked me with making

that same presentation to young graduating students

318AN INDUSTRY CHALLENGE

The biggest challenge facing the industry today is

high turnover, and finding people with the right at -

titude and disposition to care for others. If you are looking to join the world of luxury hospitality, the

most important advice I can give is that you need

to understand whether your own temperament is geared towards genuine care and assistance or not,

and whether creating memorable experiences for

others is something you aspire to do and something

that brings you joy.

PRINT VS. DIGITAL

Today, digital marketing in all its forms is critical

to reaching relevant consumers around the world.

However, print certainly continues to play a role, par -

ticularly when guests are in-house and begin to touch and feel the properties in which they reside. Addi-

tionally, the sensory experience of flipping through a rich paper or magazine cannot be underestimated.

The digital screen can only appeal to some of our

senses, not all. The backlight of a tablet, too, often

used to show menus at some restaurants, can be a

major irritant to diners.THE AGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Reputation management is becoming increasingly

important, specifically in the context of social media

and a variety of online review platforms. Real-time

responses and engagement that demonstrate empa-

thy, care, and concern can either make or break your

brand. While some reviewers will pen unreasonable and even biased criticism of their particular stay or

of the hotel more generally, handling such reviews

with care and compassion can go a long way towards

protecting your brand. The important thing when re-

acting to digital criticism of any kind is to stay true to

the brand ethos in letter and spirit.

ON CALL, ALL THE TIME

One of the great aspects of real-time digital feedback

is the democratic environment in which it’s received.

Anyone that comes in contact with the brand can

share their experience. This new environment gives every organization a kind of instant diagnosis of their

service and reputation. Therefore, we have an imme-

diate opportunity to course correct if necessary. At

the same time, negative feedback or criticism is often

believed to be true until it is disproven or reacted to.

In other words, the brand in question is guilty until

proven innocent. In the end, this new reality is both

a gift and a curse, with the power to truly defame. As

319

320

321hoteliers, we are brand custodians, and we need to

react in near real-time to be credible, putting us on

call around the clock.

THE NEW CONCIERGE

In the age of information abundance, the luxury con-

cierge must take on the mantle of cultural researcher,

and have the innate ability to connect the dots with

a guest on the basis of sheer perceptiveness. For ex -

ample, a concierge should be able to recommend and deliver a private tour of a vintage car collection in the

city by merely noticing a guest wearing a T-shirt with

a vintage car club logo. Extreme perceptiveness and in-depth knowledge is in more demand than ever. In

addition, extracting and documenting a guest’s pref -

erences, likes, and dislikes can only be done through authentic conversations held by well-informed front -

line associates and other staff at every level of the hotel. All staff must be trained to elicit such insight

in a genuine, unobtrusive way to continually drive

anticipatory service and experience.

TECHNOLOGY CAN HELP, AND HURT

Integrating technology into a guest experience can

be a double-edged sword. Guests are quick to reject cumbersome operating logic of electronics and soft -ware. Simplified technology to enable entertainment options or business solutions will gain the respect of

the traveler. The key is not to integrate technology for

technology’s sake, particularly if it’s difficult to use. It

must be simple and easy to operate, period.

A HYPER-LOCAL EXPERIENCE

Today’s traveler is extremely well-informed about

the traditions and cultures that they would like to

experience. Delivering on those expectations in the

most authentic way possible is critical to success.

In dining, for example, using authentic ingredients

and preparation methods. In health and wellness, authentic offerings tied to the ancient sciences of

ayurveda, the 3000-year old traditional Indian prac -

tice of whole-body healing. Such offerings are not easy to create and deliver, but they are critical to the

local experience. More broadly, culinary excellence in

luxury hotels now includes an expectation of reviving

lost cuisines and recipes of the locality—transporting

guests to a unique and historical dining experience.

Tom

Roelens

GENERAL MANAGER,

FOUR SEASONS RESORTS LANA ’I(HAW AII, UNITED ST ATES)

Recently appointed General Manager of the

Four Seasons Hotel and Residences inKuala Lumpur, Malaysia

BORN IN:

Deinze, Belgium

SELECT GEOGRAPHICAL

EXPERIENCE:

Malaysia, United States,

Belgium, France, United Arab

Emirates, Indonesia, Maldives

YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY:

33

Photos Courtesy of Four Seasons Lanai

323GROWING UP

I was born and raised in Deinze, about one hour

west of Brussels, Belgium. I enjoyed the outdoors

and traveling with my parents. My grandfather used

to run a plantation in the Belgian Congo, and the

many adventure stories he shared of his experience

generated a strong sense of curiosity in me about

other cultures and destinations. I am also extremely

lucky and grateful to have parents who have always

been very supportive of my career aspirations. When

I first announced at a very young age that I wanted to go to hotel school, eyebrows raised, but once my

parents saw my passion for hospitality and for being

of service, they allowed me to flourish. AN EARL Y START

I entered the hospitality industry at the age of four -

teen and never looked back. I started in the kitchen

washing dishes, and then served in a more visible

role in restaurants as a Commis de Rang. Initially, I

started working in one, two, and three-star Michelin

restaurants in Belgium and France. Back then, I was

not allowed to communicate with guests. I was only

allowed to bring out the food and beverage items

and hand them over to the captain or maitre d’ , who

would then engage with customers. I learned early on that no matter what position you’re in, you must be

humble, open to feedback, learn from your mistakes,

and continually strive for excellence.Today’s traveler deeply values experiences

and a sense of place. Increasingly, guests are not content to simply lounge by the resort pool. Instead, they seek authentic activities that provide a real connection to the destination.““

324

325monitor them closely and provide additional training

on a regular basis. When you hire motivated people,

you need to train them to perform in an extraordi-

nary way. We also invite staff members to experience

the property, so as to see it through the eyes of our

guests.

A HIGH BAR, AT MINIMUM

One of the biggest challenges to leading a world-class

hotel or resort is ensuring consistency in the delivery

of service. There are thousands of touchpoints every

single day between guests and employees, as well as

with vendors, the community, and beyond. We set the bar extremely high for ourselves—delivering 100

percent of the service experience 100 percent of the

time. In my mind, that is a minimum. Then you move

onto personalization and how best to customize the

experience for each guest and wow them with intu-

itive service.

A PEOPLE BUSINESS

Ultimately, the luxury hospitality industry is a people

business. You can have the most amazing physical

asset in a beautiful natural surrounding and in an

idyllic location. But it all comes down to people and the service they provide. That’s what makes the dif -A SHIFT TO HOTELS

After studying hospitality and hotel management,

including a postgraduate degree in public relations,

I joined the hotel industry in 1992 at the SAS Royal

Hotel in Brussels. I held various roles in the food and

beverage division, including my first leadership po-

sition as assistant room service manager. It was the first time I worked in such a diverse environment,

where every team member came from a different

background and had very different priorities in life.

It taught me to truly value diversity and difference,

and to play to the strengths of each of my colleagues

in order to build a strong team. In 1996, I joined the

InterContinental Hotel Dubai as assistant director of

catering, before succumbing to the allure of Asia and

the idyllic isle of Bali, Indonesia, where I eventually

became the executive assistant manager of the Nusa

Dua Beach Hotel and Spa.

BE OUR GUEST

All new employees at Four Seasons Resort Lana’i par -

ticipate in a series of on-boarding and training pro-

grams. In Lana’i, it is a two-day affair to ensure that

new recruits learn about the goals and beliefs of our

company and familiarize themselves with the very

unique culture of Hawai’i and the history of Lana’i.

Additionally, once they land in their departments, we

326ference between whether or not guests decide to rave

to their friends and family about the experience. It’s

that simple.

AN AUTHENTIC CONNECTION

Today’s traveler deeply values experiences and a

sense of place. Increasingly, guests are not content

to simply lounge by the resort pool. Instead, they

seek authentic activities that provide a real connec -

tion to the destination. While Four Seasons Resort Lana’i was being overhauled over many months prior

to the relaunch, our staff continued to remain em-

ployed. They worked on cultural and preservation projects, including restoring an ancient Hawaiian

fishpond and clearing land that yielded ancient vil-

lage remains, such as storage facilities and temples.

Guests can now participate on a guided Polaris UTV

tour and learn more about how the people of Lana’i

lived, from guides who have a deep appreciation for

the land and culture.

In addition, we partnered with a local nonprofit—the

Lana’i Culture and Heritage Center—who recently

launched a new mobile app funded by the Hawaiian

Tourism Authority with information about sacred

places on the island, as well as historic photos, maps,

and audio stories.DIGITAL FEEDBACK

Just because someone is now more likely to review us

online shouldn’t change how we think about deliver -

ing a world-class service. We must always be striving for excellence. What’s different is that now we have

more opportunities for feedback. While our goal is

to connect with guests while they’re on property, the reality is that not everyone is comfortable providing

feedback in person or in the moment. Online reviews

allow us to learn more about our guests’ experiences

and still connect with them after the fact, if needed.

COMMITMENT TO IMPROVE

One of the keys to success is being open to all types

of feedback—from both staff and guests. We cannot

be defensive. Whether a guest voices an issue in the

lobby, or makes a specific comment on TripAdvisor,

or takes the time to express a concern through the

survey they receive following their stay, we must understand exactly what happened and resolve to

fix it. This also applies to feedback from employees.

Whether an issue was heard in the hallway, reported

to their supervisor, or brought directly to the atten-

tion of the general manager, it must be welcomed,

understood, and resolved.

327

A BLEND OF ROLES

Today, our Lana’i Ambassadors blend the concierge

and front desk roles seamlessly. To start, they greet

you at the airport in Honolulu prior to your flight to

the island. To enhance the experience, we launched

an exclusive guest lounge at the international airport

in Honolulu. We are the only resort in Hawaii pro-viding such a high-end experience. Guests can check

in, make reservations, grab a bite, charge their elec -

tronics, and visit again on their return trip. Our team will then greet you when you land, escort you to your

room, and answer any and all questions or requests

during your stay.

EVERY OPTION, ANY TIME

True luxury is having all options available at any giv -

en time. In that spirit, we do not require our guests

to reserve a tee time for our magnificent Jack Nick -

laus Signature Manele golf course. They treat the golf

course as their own private escape, and they can walk

on at any moment. We expect them, and are ready.

From personalized amenities in the room, to custom

experiences on-site, to a luxury vehicle at their dis -

posal for off-site activities, we strive to provide the most tailored experience possible.

329AT YOUR SERVICE, 24/7

One of the most successful integrations of technol-

ogy thus far into the guest experience is our text

messaging service, available twenty-four hours a

day. Guests nowadays are more comfortable texting,

rather than picking up a phone. Responding to this

dynamic, and to increase the efficiency and speed in which we respond to a guest request, we instituted a

messaging system for any and all queries. Originally

a pilot in select properties, Four Seasons Chat, which

now includes Facebook Messenger, WeChat, and SMS, is now rolling out across all properties through

2018. Today, guests text us about their wake up calls,

room service orders, and activities they would like

to do while on island. We provide this service to any

guest—past, present, and future—and it has been ex -

tremely well received.

ABOVE AND BEYOND

Intuitive and anticipatory service can mean different

things for different people. It could be remembering

330their favorite food or cocktail, placing a treat or gift

in room for their children, noting if someone gets out

of the bed on the right or left side and placing slippers

there, or simply recalling something they said during

a conversation, perhaps about a desired outing, and

arranging it all for them before they ask.

A HOME AWAY FROM HOME

You have to put yourself in the minds of your guests,

and think about what they look for at home and how

that translates into a home-away-from-home expe-

rience. Despite being away from the hustle and bus -

tle, today’s guests are expecting a very fast Internet

connection to keep up with their social and business

activities. To meet the demand, we offer an incredibly

high-speed, complimentary Wi-Fi service through-

out the resort.

In our rooms, the innovations include wristband keys

with RFID technology, so all you have to do is just wear your waterproof key down to the beach or to

play golf. In room, we have seventy-five-inch TVs,

iPads with resort destination information, dining

menus, and more. There’s a TV in the bathroom

vanity mirror and electronic Toto toilets with heated

seats. We also provide plenty of charging stations in

easy to reach locations, so there’s no need to kneel

by the doorway with your phone.A LOW-KEY ENVIRONMENT

Each guest is different, even the ones that are used to

being in the limelight. Here on Lana’i, our guests are

seeking a low-key environment. We don’t have, nor

do we ever want, throngs of paparazzi milling about

in our small plantation town of just 3,000 residents.

For certain guests, luxury is being able to be incogni-to during their stay. In other locations, they may not

be seeking such privacy and exclusivity.

331

Torsten

van

Dullemen

GENERAL MANAGER,

THE LANDMARK MANDARIN ORIENT AL (HONG KONG)

BORN IN:

The Hague, Netherlands

SELECT GEOGRAPHICAL

EXPERIENCE:

Hong Kong, Netherlands, United

Kingdom, Italy, Antigua, India,

Thailand, The Philippines

YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY:

32

Photos Courtesy of The Landmark Mandarin Oriental Hong Kong

333GROWING UP

I grew up in Maassluis, a small town of less than

20,000 people in the Netherlands. It was in the heart

of agricultural Holland, so we had lots of farms and

greenhouses with vegetables and fruit. In that sense,

it was a very healthy and active childhood. As a kid,

we had no money, cinemas, or entertainment. Most

of the time we would ride our bikes, swim in the lake,

skate around, or play sports. I developed a love for

nature and the outdoors. We were a very close-knit

family and traveled a lot when I was younger. Noth-ing like today, but definitely more than my friends.My mother had Russian roots and my father’s family was mostly from Holland, with a bit of German. My

mother looked after us as a family, making sure we

were in good shape. She cooked, cleaned, shopped,

and everything else, while my father rose, through

the ranks of a company named Esselte, which manu-

factured office products and business supplies. They

grew up in World War II with nothing. They would

go weeks without food. Stability was their salvation.

The only way you achieved that was to work hard

and give as many opportunities you could to your

children to succeed. And that’s exactly what they did.Twenty years ago, guests checked in,

guests checked out, and you focused on service. Today, if you don’t understand the legal aspect, the pace of technology, digital marketing, public affairs, and how to work with owners and shareholders, you cannot run a hotel successfully.““

334

335ON-THE-JOB TRAINING

My first job was in a local bistro, where I helped in ev -

ery way. If they needed me to peel potatoes, I peeled

potatoes. If they needed me to clean the basement, I

cleaned the basement. If they needed me to change

the beer barrels or to manage the bar, then I would

do that too. It was an early lesson in just how many tasks there are to running a restaurant.

From there, I joined a one-star Michelin restaurant

that was more structured, but where I still helped out

as needed. There were only twelve tables and forty

seats, but we were always busy. They paid me in cash

while giving me a crash course in the restaurant busi-ness—how you spend money, how you save money,

how you upsell, and more.

A CAREER LAUNCHPAD

My first position in the luxury hotel industry was as

a reservations agent at The Savoy in London, which

was arguably the best hotel in the city at the time and

had perhaps the most capable front desk anywhere

in the world. I learned to work very hard, how to

plan for guest arrivals and track their preferences,

how to communicate with other departments in the

hotel, and more broadly, how to most effectively run a front desk operation in great detail. The hotel was 90 percent occupied year round, resulting in a very busy front desk, but we were a small and effective

team that got the job done.

The role did not come without challenges. We worked

eighteen-hour days, usually from 12 AM to 6 PM the

following day. It was a very tough work environment,

and my rent was higher than my salary. My wife had to use her savings so we could live. After almost three

years, my career accelerated and everything paid off.

STRAIGHTFORWARD LEADERSHIP

My first leadership position was as chef de brigade at

The Savoy in London, where I was in charge of shifts.

From the very beginning, I was fair, direct, and pro-

tective of my team. They knew I was always there for

them, and I jumped in when they needed my help.

I was the youngest of the team by far, dealing with

some very strong personalities, so I had to develop

the confidence to lead. In the end, a team that re-spects one another and trusts one another is a team

that will pull through together.

EARNING THE RIGHT TO LEAD

I’ve learned that no matter what your title is or how

impressive your qualifications, if people do not get

inspired by you and are not comfortable with you

being their leader, something will always be off. Your

team needs to connect with you, respect you, trust

you, and value your ability to motivate them. You

have to earn this relationship. It does not come au-

tomatically.

LESS IS MORE

Leaders always give themselves too much credit

when things go well, and never take enough blame

when things go wrong. On a daily basis, trees that al-

low more rain and sun to hit the ground underneath

them, are the ones surrounded by the most beautiful

flowers. You need to hire the right person, motivate them and empower them to take action. I will make

sure people know what my expectations are, but I

will never tell them how to do their job. My job is to

make sure they are set up for success, then get out

of the way.

THE NEW RECRUIT

On-boarding a new recruit can take place long before

they arrive to the property. You can send them key

information to read and digest, talk to them about

the colleagues they’re going to be working with, dis -

cuss the cultural differences of this property and lo-

cation as compared to others, and help them with

337

338securing a visa and accommodations. Once they

arrive, there are orientations and regular meetings

with HR and others to ensure things are transitioning

smoothly. However, one of the ways we make sure

a new employee is indeed making an effort them -

selves to integrate is by giving them a questionnaire after the first six weeks. How many hotels are there

in the group? What are our pillars? What is our vi-

sion statement? Who is our CEO? And who are our

most regular guests? If somebody could not provide

that information after six weeks, that person has not

made enough of an effort to settle in.MANAGING, THEN AND NOW

Twenty years ago, guests checked in, guests checked

out, and you focused on service. As long as people

paid their bill, you could successfully run a hotel.

Today, if you don’t understand the legal aspect, the

pace of technology, digital marketing, public affairs, and how to work with owners and shareholders, you

cannot run a hotel successfully. It has become much

more complex, and there is now even more pressure

on a general manager to have a sophisticated man-

agement capability.

339At the same time, a lot of industry changes make our

life much easier in many ways. Our owners support

us. Social media gives us many new ways to reach

target markets. Legislation has made a lot of things

more transparent and competition more honest. Ev -

ery coin has two sides. I think there are not more challenges, just different challenges.

A FOCUS ON LOCAL

Not too long ago, guests wanted every hotel to look

the same. It didn’t matter where in the world you were, you knew that you were at a certain kind of property. Today, the industry has evolved. People

want to soak up part of the culture and have authen-

tic, local experiences, design, and décor built into the

property. Mandarin Oriental is uniquely positioned

for that, and I think, for a very long time, was al-

ready in the business of creating hotels that played an

important role within the society, before it became

fashionable to have cultural influences as a marketing

tool or as a way to attract guests.

340A FRESH PERSPECTIVE

In redesigning our 120 suites at The Landmark, Man-

darin Oriental, we took a very deliberate approach to

understanding every aspect of the effort. We thought

long and hard about who we’re building these rooms

for, where they live, how they communicate, and what

do they really want. We identified travelers for leisure and for business, experienced and inexperienced,

personalizing the details. We pushed ourselves, and

now these rooms are as much a destination as the ho-

tel itself. Designer Joyce Wang became an overnight

celebrity, and now she’s renovating the Mandarin

Oriental, Hyde Park in London, among other places.

CLASSIC HOSPITALITY

Some things will never be out of fashion. It’s always

good to have a really great doorman. It’s always nice

when somebody smiles and uses your name. It’s al-

ways nice to have somebody ask you whether you’re satisfied, then offer you more. It’s always nice for

somebody to thank you, to wish you a good journey,

and to hope you can come back soon. These are very

old-fashioned efforts, but twenty years from now,

they will still be valued.BEYOND THE SPA

I believe wellness will start evolving outside of the

spa. There will be wellness elements in the room,

such as a higher quality mattress, chemical-free

amenities, and 100 percent pure air. There will also

be healthier choices in the minibars. Giving guests

a choice is important, but I think they will naturally lead a more healthy life in the future. Wellness will

no longer be confined to going to the spa for a treat -

ment, but something that is integrated throughout the rooms and hotel at large.

A LITTLE GOES A LONG WAY

If somebody is coughing when they check in, offer

them some tea with honey when you escort them to

the room. If someone seems jetlagged or exhausted,

ask them when their next meeting is, and if they want

to sleep. If so, you are happy to turn on the Do Not

Disturb sign and notify the front desk not to put any calls through. For a tired and frustrated guest, that

kind of empathy and attention to detail is music to

their ears. It doesn’t have to be grand gestures. Even

seemingly small efforts can really touch the heart of

your guest.

341

342

In A Wealth of Insight , more than thirty-five of the world’s best luxury hoteliers

share exactly what it takes to lead and manage some of the most legendary

hotels and resorts. Each executive profile includes bite-size insights, stunning

photography and real-life examples on recruiting, culture, technology, marketing,

branding, personalization, authenticity, anticipation, design, partnerships and

more. Hoteliers also detail the most significant trends impacting the sector today,

and how those trends will shape the future of luxury hospitality. The sheer scale

and scope of this effort—to distill industry wisdom across two dozen countries—

is unprecedented.

For aspiring and current general managers of luxury hotels, for hospitality

executives in search of a practical guide on how best to deliver a world-class guest

experience, and for the modern luxury traveler eager to go behind the scenes, A

Wealth of Insight is the holy grail of five-star leadership and management.

RAHIM B. KANANI is a leadership, luxury, and

travel contributor to a number of global publications

including Forbes Middle East and Black Truffle Club .

Over the years, he has interviewed more than 500 of the

world’s most innovative, influential, and award-winning

executives on leadership, management, and creativity.

Notable interviewees have included billionaires Jeff

Skoll, Michael Bloomberg, Tory Burch and Eli Broad,

world-renowned chefs Eric Ripert, Daniel Humm, José Andrés, and Anthony

Bourdain, musical artists Alicia Keys, Madonna, and Shakira, Hollywood

filmmaker James Cameron, Harvard University President Drew Faust, former

British Prime Minister Tony Blair, and Princess Ameerah Al-Taweel of Saudi

Arabia. During this time, he served as a leadership contributor to Forbes and

Thomson Reuters Foundation , while also authoring or editing articles and

interviews published in Harvard Business Review , CNN Opinion, Financial

Times , Fast Company, Food & Wine, and others.

“ . . . an enlightening read, intelligently written, and comprehensive

in its reflection, culminating in an impressive, long-overdue publication

of this nature and magnitude.”

—Dr. Dimitrios Diamantis, Dean of Graduate Studies,

Les Roches, Global Hospitality Education, Switzerland

BLACK

TRUFFLE

PRESSBUSINESS & ECONOMICS: I ndustries/

Hospitality, Travel & Tourism

$39.95

WWW.BLACKTRUFFLECLUB.COM