



A French Feel in Philadelphia

An Interview with Angela Bauer,
General Manager, Sofitel Philadelphia



A Sofitel Philadelphia suite (left); the lobby (above)

EDITORS' NOTE Angela Bauer has held her current post since December 2014. Prior to this, she was Director of Sales & Marketing for Sofitel Philadelphia since 2000.

PROPERTY BRIEF The sophisticated downtown Sofitel Philadelphia (sofitel-philadelphia.com) is conveniently situated near the Kimmel Center and Rodin Museum. Guests of this pet-friendly hotel will appreciate the stylish accommodations. The hotel's 306 elegant rooms on 14 floors including 68 luxurious suites, all feature Sofitel's luxurious feather-top and duvet sleep system, SoBed. Liberté Urban Chic Lounge is a stylish restaurant and bar that brings back a bygone era with contemporary French-inspired food served in one of the city's loveliest settings.



Angela Bauer

What has made this property work so well and what is the secret to its success?

The secret is the people. We opened 15 years ago and still have a core group of ambassadors who have been here since the beginning. This type of longevity is uncommon in this business, and I feel that this really says a lot.

Every hotel has wonderful beds and beautiful meeting space, but the people at this property truly make the experience. This is our focus every day. We always ask our Ambassadors if they've touched somebody today or created a connection with somebody today. That's the difference. We truly strive to provide service from the heart.

How critical is the investment you make in service training to ensure you maintain the interaction you're known for?

Training is critical to our success. Often, we get busy and our focus is more on the day-to-day operations and on our guest service. However, at day's end, if our Ambassadors aren't learning and improving every day, we're going to lose the impact we have on our guests.

We make sure we schedule training every month because it's vital that we continuously challenge and develop our team.

At 15 years old, this is still a relatively new property. How important has it been to make continual investments to ensure the property stays up to date, and are you happy with the product today?

When they built Sofitel, they built a quality establishment. We have done some renovation, but the quality was already there from the start.

I'm very fortunate that the product is still in great condition. In 2011 we changed our lobby bar to Liberté Lounge. We then upgraded the rooms in 2013. And on top of that, we couldn't have a better location than where we sit.

How do you find the right ingredient for the hotel restaurant and can you really drive revenue through it?

Philadelphia is known for great restaurants and has really taken it up a level over the past 10 years.

Our bar does very well. Liberté is a stylish restaurant and bar that brings back a bygone era with contemporary French-inspired food served in one of the city's loveliest settings. When you enter the hotel, Liberté is situated on the left side of the lobby. It has floor-to-ceiling windows so people can see in from the outside. Like our hotel, Liberté Lounge is looked upon as a leader in its field in the downtown marketplace.

We now serve lunch and dinner in Liberté, and it has been quite successful.

We also see the impact of food and beverage in our banquet area where we incorporate French elegance into our meeting space. This also drives heavy revenue into F&B.

Many of those who have experienced F&B through meetings continue to book events with us because of the quality of our food & beverage offerings.

How critical is your strong suite offering when it comes to driving revenue?

It's critical on weekends. Saturday night is a sellout night every week, and the fact that we have 68 suites for upgrades is a big win for our hotel. We definitely have more suites than anyone in the city and we use this to our advantage.

Is the message about how much Philadelphia offers today getting out?

It's definitely a story that should be told. Philadelphia has transformed over the past 15 years. There are several upcoming convention and tourism initiatives occurring in the city that will shine a national spotlight on Philadelphia. We pride ourselves on being active in the

community and very present in the culture of the city, and we look forward to hosting new and repeat visitors.

As a brand of French origin, is it important to keep some of that French feel and bring it into the Philadelphia environment?

Absolutely. It's another unique identity we have. We are managed by a company that is headquartered in France, and we pride ourselves on our diversity. We are represented by many different cultures among our Ambassadors, which is so important to our brand identity. It's our brand identity that makes us different from other hotels in the city.

How did you end up in this business?

My introduction to the hospitality industry started when I worked at the Philadelphia Convention & Visitors Bureau with the Sports Congress. Shortly thereafter, I started on the hotel side working in sales. From my perspective, it has been a great opportunity for me to learn new skills, build relationships, and achieve my professional goals.

Today, there is more of a financial focus for general managers. Is that a priority for you and how critical is it to prevent that from interfering with the hospitality aspect?

It is certainly more of a focus. A GM has to juggle time among owners, customers, and our Ambassadors, and we have to handle all three well. I firmly believe in taking care of the clients and customer base, but this goes hand in hand with the Ambassadors. We must help the Ambassadors understand their roles. They must want to come to work every day and be challenged and feel valued. In turn, the customers will feel the impact of happy Ambassadors. In the end, the owners will see the financial rewards.

Are there opportunities in hospitality for young women coming out of school and what advice do you give young people who want to lead a quality property like Sofitel Philadelphia?

There are more opportunities than there were years ago. My only advice is to make sure they love the business because they're going to live it everyday. To work in hospitality, one needs to have a certain passion for service and a love of connecting with people. Really, that's what it's all about. In the end, hard work and taking care of one's Ambassadors and clients will produce great results. ●