

All About Service



An Interview with David I. Cohen,
General Manager, Warwick New York Hotel

EDITORS' NOTE David Cohen joined the Warwick International Hotels group in January of 2009 from the position of Regional General Manager for the Amsterdam Hospitality Group in New York City. Prior to this, he served as General Manager for Le Parker Meridien Hotel in New York City, and before that, he held the position of Resident Manager for the RIHGA Royal Hotel, New York, where he served since 1997. He is involved with numerous charitable organizations including Boy Scouts of America, Inside Broadway, and the Parkinson's Foundation. He is also a member of the Screen Actors Guild, Directors Guild of America and the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists which allows him to pursue his acting hobby. He attended the Rochester Institute of Technology and graduated in 1984 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Hotel, Restaurant and Travel Management. He also has degrees from the Centre International de Glion in Switzerland and the University of Hartford.



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PROPERTY BRIEF Built by William Randolph Hearst in 1926, the historic Warwick New York Hotel (www.warwickhotelnyc.com) is located in the heart of midtown Manhattan, featuring 426 elegantly appointed guest rooms and suites, many of which offer spectacular views of the city's skyline from private terraces. Among the hotel's additional attractions are the restaurant Murals on 54, the award-winning Randolph's Bar & Lounge, seven conference and banquet rooms, a business center, and a well-appointed fitness center. Warwick New York Hotel is one of Warwick International Hotels' collection of more than 40 luxury hotels, resorts, and spas worldwide.

As a result of the recession, how much of an impact have you seen on the New York market and on Warwick New York?

The impact is, without question, citywide in New York. But we also have 2,100 new rooms that are coming onto the market between 2009 and 2010, and that also is playing a role. You're going from a couple of years ago where the supply was low and the demand was very high, and now the pendulum is swinging in the complete opposite direction, and once again it's going to

be all about service. Our focus has been to put all the emphasis into service and the quality of the product. Where a lot of my competitors may not be re-investing in their product and may be trimming their services back this year, we've made minimal trimmings in our services and have put all of our energy into retraining our staff and making additional investments in our product. Customers are noticing the difference between Warwick New York and a lot of our competition. Our competitors' luggage tags are showing up at our doorstep, and our only goal is to make sure they stay as the economy improves.

How did you get the emphasis on service across to your people, and did they get onboard quickly?

Without question, they have adapted. Some managers in this industry are concerned about staff members who have been with the hotel for a long period of time being adverse to change, but I get excited about them, because you cannot hire the historical experience they have when it comes to a landmark property like the Warwick. I look at them as a great positive, because what they bring to the operation and to the guests is that history. If you spend time talking to these employees and really listening to them, you gain a historical perspective of the hotel that you can use from a marketing standpoint, and the relationships between a lot of your regular guests are well-established with those employees, which is critical from a service standpoint. In addition, I have learned more about things that are wrong in this hotel from those same employees and have been able to take that information and make corrections and improvements to benefit the guest experience.

You now offer Premier Rooms and Suites. Can you highlight that product, and will there be consistency, or are you looking to offer a varied range of product?

Our hotel is broken down into four categories: our Classic, our Deluxe, our new Premier level – including rooms and suites in each category – and our Signature Suites, of which we have 10 that are extremely spacious and offer unique features like terraces and decorative fireplaces, and each has a unique history behind it. With the new Premium Rooms and Suites categories, we've tried to bring the hotel back to its

origins in 1926 in terms of style and ambience but match it with 21st century technology. This way, whether you're an experienced traveler or a younger hip traveler, you have everything from glamorous tone, color, and detail to flat-screen TVs and wireless communication that delivers the speed and access that you need to operate personally or for business. We just completed a \$1.6 million project to do three floors of the hotel, and are planning to continue that with an additional six floors, making half of our hotel inventory at the Premier level.

Did you know very early on this was an industry you wanted to be in? How did you end up in the business?

I worked part-time as a dishwasher in my first hotel, and I liked the fact that no two days were alike, so it got into my blood early.

I also have a very strong relationship with Broadway theater and the arts, so the entertainment aspect played a role. I use an analogy that hotels are theaters, the managers are actors, the guests are your audience, you put on a good show, they applaud, they come back; you put on a bad show, they don't applaud, you close, you're out of business, and the actors have no jobs. Furniture, dishes, and plates are your props, the engineering department takes care of the lighting and the electric, the stagehands are your housekeepers, and wardrobe is the valet department. I'm probably the only General Manager in New York City that carries a Screen Actors Guild card and enjoys being a part-time actor working in movies and television.

How critical is that relationship between the hotelier and the owner to the success of the property?

Absolutely critical. My owner is continuing to invest in the product where others have chosen not to, because he's of the understanding that when times improve, you're going to have a better product than your competition, and they're going to start to invest in their product, which means there will be less inventory in the marketplace, and we can capture more revenue on the other end. He's built a fabulous company with 43 properties around the world, and he sees, hears, and understands what it's all about, which is rare. He's a very hands-on individual so he comes to visit and he'll point out flaws he sees, like dust on a picture frame – there aren't a lot of owners you can say that about. ●

Premier King Room – City view