



Honor Your Best Resources

An Interview with Wanda Chan,
General Manager, Millennium UN Plaza Hotel New York



EDITORS' NOTE Wanda Chan has worked in some of the top hotels over the past 25 years including Halekulani in Hawaii, Hilton Hotels, Raffles Hotel in Singapore, Rio Las Vegas Hotel & Casino, and The New York Palace Hotel. Chan pioneered a new position as the Director of Quality Standards at the Beverly Hilton while holding top managerial positions in both Food & Beverage and Rooms Division. She was most recently the General Manager of Warwick New York Hotel and assumed her current post in April 2010.



Wanda Chan

PROPERTY BRIEF Situated in midtown Manhattan's trendy East Side, the Millennium UN Plaza Hotel New York (www.millenniumhotels.com) appeals to business travelers and sightseers alike, offering 438 spacious guest rooms and suites with incredible skyline views from every window, a newly renovated fitness center, a full-service health club and indoor swimming pool, and year-round tennis at the only indoor tennis court of any New York City hotel. The property also offers dining at their Ambassador Grill & Lounge, frequented by international dignitaries from the nearby United Nations Headquarters, as well as memorable function space for meetings, events, and social gatherings.

In light of the current recession, how has the Millennium UN Plaza Hotel New York fared and have you seen a recovery?

Although the prospect of our economy remains fragile, we are experiencing a slow but steady recovery and business trends are improving by all indications.

I am confident that the economy will return to growth within the year. We must take a hard look at our current situation with regard to both our product and our services as they relate to guest expectations.

Our business growth opportunities come from solving problems, responding to guest needs, and providing service that exceeds guest expectations.

During slow economic times, customers shop around. They look for brands that provide the highest value in terms of quality, innovation, and emotional content. The brands that are stuck in the middle are the ones that

struggle most during recessionary times. The perception of a brand can change overnight and it depends on the guest experience. The UN Plaza is positioned as a distinctive hotel with an individualistic approach to service.

Our hotel reputation and our image is based on two things: our relationship with the guests and the sum of our actions and behaviors.

For our guest rooms, we are at a critical juncture in defining and delivering a quality guest room product. A new design concept is in progress and renovation is targeted to start in 2011. For services, we need to place immediate emphasis on actions that will take us to a truly competitive position in the field.

The strength and reputation of the Millennium UN Plaza Hotel over the years has been in providing a physical address that is desirable and convenient, especially among the UN community, a price that is reasonable, complemented by the individualized service, care, and security provided by our staff.

In the age of social media networking, customers have a greater voice than ever before and they are able to share their opinions widely, instantaneously. Now more than ever, we must listen to our guests and in new ways. We must respond to our guests' diverse opinions, really listen and understand them.

How valuable is the relationship with your people?

I am grateful to be a part of this winning team. My mottos for continued success include the 3 P's: perseverance, partnership, and passion.

I cannot minimize the impact we have on each other. The way we work together cooperatively and respectfully is very important. It is all about teamwork.

I believe the associates are the most important asset we have in this hotel. My objective is to establish a culture in this hotel where we demonstrate our passion and are prepared to care about our guests and each other. I am committed to foster a work environment where diversity is respected and valued, quality of life is enhanced, individual aspirations are fulfilled, and our hotel reputation is strengthened. It starts with ongoing communication among associates.

Good service is no more complicated than demonstrating a desire to be pleasant, polite, and considerate human beings who use good

judgment and take to heart the welfare of our guests as well as coworkers. Service is cooperation and willingness to help your fellow employees do their jobs and allow them to help you do yours.

Food and beverage is typically a difficult area in which to increase revenue with all the great stand-alone restaurants in New York. What is your outlook for that area going forward?

From 2011 to 2016, we expect to increase food revenue by 30 percent and beverage revenue by 27 percent. The plan is to design the lobby to be the hub for activity and a meet-up location. The location of the lobby and visual presence from the sidewalk will draw pedestrian traffic from outside the hotel. The opening of an additional outlet featuring a coffee and wine bar and providing additional service in the lobby throughout the day will increase revenue.

A diplomatic sales team focusing on increasing UN and UN-affiliated business not only during UN General Assembly but throughout the entire year will also contribute to increased group business for catering.

A new menu has recently been introduced in our restaurant for lunch service catering to a clientele in the neighborhood for casual dining as well as providing a perfect setting for business meeting lunches.

Which goals and strategies are you focused on to encourage continued growth and prosperity?

We are proposing to renovate the West Tower first to feature deluxe rooms and premier suites, which are amenities that the discerning UN clients demand, followed by the renovation of the East Tower to feature superior rooms that appeal to business and international leisure travelers.

We will commence guest room renovation in 2011, including new furniture, new wall coverings, new carpets, and new window treatments. We will also upgrade guest bathrooms, kitchenettes, and in-room technologies including wireless Internet. We will activate the lobby lounge as a social space and create an amenity for the guests and the general public by serving coffee/teas in the afternoon and wine in the evening. Additionally, we will be introducing specialty suites that appeal to an international clientele. ●

East River Views from a Guest Room (left); Exterior (right)