

# Hospitality

## Firm, Fair, and Consistent



The Westin New York Grand Central's Presidential Suite with a view of the East River

An Interview with Edward Maynard,  
General Manager, The Westin New York Grand Central

**EDITORS' NOTE** Edward Maynard was appointed to his current post in September 2012. Maynard has held several general manager positions at notable hotels in New York, including sister Starwood hotels the W New York Union Square and the W New York, where he served most recently. From 2003 to 2006, Maynard worked with Ian Schrager on the development and conversion of the Gramercy Park Hotel. During the hotel's renovation, he assumed the role of General



Edward Maynard

**PROPERTY BRIEF** Nestled between the United Nations and Grand Central Terminal, The Westin New York Grand Central ([www.westinnewyorkgrandcentral.com](http://www.westinnewyorkgrandcentral.com)) is a welcome respite in the heart of midtown Manhattan. Host Hotels purchased the New York Helmsley in 2011 and announced plans for the property to become a Westin, which happened officially in 2012 following a \$75-million renovation. The property offers 774 spacious guest rooms equipped with Westin's signature amenities and more than 12,000 square feet of expanded meeting space with the latest technology.

**What excited you about becoming engaged with the property? How has Westin put their name behind it?**

The property is beautiful. I often refer to old-world properties as having good bones and the infrastructure of the hotel has brought it much success.

Our meeting rooms are as good if not better than most meeting rooms in the city because of our high ceilings, our windows, our spaciousness and the breakout rooms. There are hard walls without dividers – the structure is solid.

We also have an amazing WestinWORKOUT® Fitness Studio, which is one of the best that I've ever been associated with in any hotel. It is 3,000 square feet and offers new state-of-the-art equipment.

At our new restaurant, we have baristas so guests don't have to go to Starbucks. The lobby is a place to greet clients and take them to meetings or guest rooms, which are some of the largest in New York City.

Also, in branding this a Westin, Starwood is addressing a segment of traveler that wants a more traditional product. We don't have a Starwood on the East Side. We have the W, we have the St. Regis, and we have The Westin New York at Times Square on the West Side. So this East Side property has an ideal location providing everything one needs.

**How do you maintain the Westin feel while bringing in the local flavor?**

There should always be a consistent feel because that is part of branding and we want people to have a similar experience at whatever Westin they go to.

But it's just as important to make sure there is a local feel to it so people know where they are, and that they are not in a cookie cutter environment.

Probably the most signature item is our restaurant, which is called The LCL: Bar & Kitchen, NYC – referred to as The Local – with our partner, the Gerber Group. The premise of the restaurant will be small bites and it's focused on fresh, local product.

In some places, you can walk in the door and you know where everything is, but if you look at our façade from the entrance, it's a truly distinctive arrival experience for the guest.

If you're coming from Grand Central or off 42nd Street into our lobby, you have an expansive area, but also the Westin design theme that is calm and soothing, and you're welcomed in the Westin manner.

**How do you offer a luxury experience while catering to that broad price point?**

The one thing I have come to appreciate, especially with Starwood, is our ability to manage and flex our rates based on supply and demand.

In some cases, the rate we charge would put us in a luxury category, but we try to continually market ourselves as a first-class hotel simply because we don't have the high-end rate that we can sustain for long periods of time, and if we did, then we would have to up our levels of service and property offerings.

So we focus on the middle and the consistent theme we try to run throughout is that first-class point.

**How do you offer technology without losing the personal touch?**

From a technology standpoint, we have a broad consumer base, so we have one of the strongest lines coming into a building and we can sell different levels of bandwidth, meaning we can meet the most demanding consumer needs related to Internet service.

At Westin, we have also partnered with a U.K.-based company that provides our Internet service for guests, as well as our pay-per-view services and all of our interactive services online.

It's the most versatile programming that I've seen in the hotel industry and we're the only property in North America that is using this program.

We believe in the value of the technology so much that we're willing to be one of the first in this area because we understand that some of the other companies can't be as flexible with guest demands, like having content in a different language or television stations from the Middle East that can link into our property directly.

**Have you attracted the level of talent you need? How do you teach those service standards?**

When you inherit a property, you also inherit the staff. For many of our staff, their tenure has been as long as the property has been here, 30 years.

So it's referred to as a culture change because Starwood comes in and says, you're going to be Westin, but you don't just become Westin; it's a part of who we are, how we brand, and how we speak. I often talk about how everything communicates who we are – how we send e-mails and how we greet guests.

We also have a back of the house PR campaign that specifically speaks to the core values of who we are as a company. It's about getting the right uniform, the right name tag, and speaking the Westin language.

For leaders, I call it Inspect what you Expect – don't just throw it out there but as a good leader, make sure that you're integrated with the team and you walk the walk.

We have to remember that the culture didn't become what it is overnight so it won't change overnight. It's a strategic shift and everyone needs to be aligned and putting out the same message.

It's also about making sure we're firm, fair, and consistent, and that we are constantly focused on that in all aspects. The way we deal with all of our employees makes it work well. ●