

"I have found out that there ain't no surer way to find out whether you like people or hate them than to travel with them."

— Mark Twain



On the Cover

As those in leadership roles face continuing global economic challenges, it is becoming increasingly clear that they must emphasize and enforce the importance of positive people relationships. It is no longer enough to merely please customers; it is necessary to make their buying experiences highly memorable, and in no business sector is it more critical to fully engage employees in that process than in hospitality. In this issue of LEADERS, we talk with accomplished hospitality executives who recognize the critical importance of having their staff and employees at all levels and in all aspects live and breathe excellence in customer

service. The lessons they offer apply to businesses across industry lines.

J.W. Marriott, Jr. of Marriott International, Inc. represents a universally known hospitality brand. He says that taking care of people is at the core of the company noting, "That connection with our people is what sets us apart from our competitors because we are completely focused on the guest and employee, and we put time and effort into making them both feel they are important."

Crediting the success of her properties with knowing what customers want, Kathleen Taylor of Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts says investing in the recruitment process is key "to ensure that we hire the right people: those for whom hospitality is a genuine personal value and who truly care for our guests."

S. Steven Pan of Regent Hotels & Resorts and Formosa International Hotels Corporation points out how important it is that employees share the brand's Tao: "To serve as we would like to be served."

Taj Hotels Resorts and Palaces is recognized as India's finest hospitality chain, which Raymond Bickson says comes from "the kindness of our employees and the manner in which they go well beyond the call of duty."

Jennifer Fox of Fairmont Hotels & Resorts credits her company's "strong culture" with having drawn her away from a top competitor. In addition to first-rate service training programs for employees, she notes "we're launching a leadership program this year."

Dorchester Collection has an unparalleled reputation in the industry, something Christopher Cowdray says comes from putting their people first: "if we get that element right, we can recruit the best people and motivate them to a very high level."

Of his brand, Reto Wittwer says, "Kempinski as a company places a lot of importance on innovation and recognizes that the best ideas can only flourish and come to life if staff – at all levels – feel empowered and free to share their ideas." To emphasize their investment in top talent, the company has created an executive MBA programme in partnership with the Reims Management School.

Ho Kwon Ping of Banyan Tree Holdings highlights the value in maintaining a sense of equality with his people: "it has to be a culture where our closest associates from the lowest to the highest feel a sense of ownership of Banyan Tree."

And Capella Hotel Group's Horst Schulze notes the value in having employees train employees to carry on the culture: "Each of our department heads is a teacher, so when the interns or new employees come in, the department teaches them; we transfer our product – customer service – to the students."

In exclusive interviews that follow, Marriott (page 12), Taylor (page 14), Pan (page 16), Bickson (page 18), Fox (page 20), Cowdray (page 23), Wittwer (page 24), Ho (page 26), and Schulze (page 30) and several other prominent hospitality leaders remind us that effective training and keeping employees motivated and empowered is an integral element to a company's success. ●

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