



Thinking Creatively

An Interview with
Suzie Mills, General Manager,
Trump International Hotel & Tower New York



*Executive Park View Suite living area (left);
Jean-Georges restaurant (above)*

EDITORS' NOTE Suzie Mills has served on the management team of the award-winning Trump International Hotel & Tower New York since pre-opening in 1996. Mills was promoted to General Manager in 2006, becoming the youngest GM in New York City. Beginning her hospitality career working at her parents' hotel in Wales at the age of 10, she has been honored as one of Crain's New York's prestigious "40 Under 40" and earned her property the AAA Five Diamond Award and the Forbes Travel Guide Five Star Award.



Suzie Mills

PROPERTY BRIEF The premiere property of the Trump Hotel Collection, the iconic Trump International Hotel & Tower New York (www.trumphotelcollection.com/central-park) is the only Forbes Five Star and AAA Five Diamond hotel with a Five-Star, Five-Diamond (and also Michelin Three-Star and New York Times Four-Star) Restaurant, Jean-Georges. Steps from the Time Warner Center and Lincoln Center, the 52-story structure has 176 luxurious guest rooms and suites, complete with European-style kitchens, marble bathrooms, and exceptional views of Central Park and the Manhattan skyline.

Have occupancy and rate both come back for the New York market, and how strong is the market now?

The occupancy has definitely come back as well as the rate, and there doesn't seem to be the rate resistance we had previously.

Guests are looking for value. They were still willing to pay for the luxury product during the tough times, but they wanted to know that they were getting value for money.

Also, the influx of guests has increased, which is wonderful.

How do you show value and is it difficult to convey that high rate can still mean added value?

It's making sure you don't penny pinch the guests when they stay; this annoys them. They don't want to be charged for WiFi. Perhaps it's complimentary pressing upon arrival or making sure you don't charge them for local phone calls. It's little things that go a long way.

Is it challenging to lead this property with so many different components?

In addition to guests, I have hotel unit owners, tower residents, and the restaurant, which is leased space – so it's an exciting challenge. It makes you think in a different way; you have to be more creative with how you're putting special promotions out there and how you handle upgrades.

It also means that you have to educate your team members on how a condo/hotel runs and bring out the creativity of all team members. If something has gone wrong with a guest's stay, they're a little more cre-

ative about how they're going to send an apology amenity to a guest.

Is there a consistent feel among your accommodations or do they vary?

Absolutely consistent. There is no difference. From a guest perspective, they would never know it's a condo/hotel. This seamlessness is the key to our success. Every guest is treated the same.

I speak with all of the owners on a regular basis to keep them updated on what is going on with the property.

Why has your restaurant product worked so well, and is it still a challenging part of the business?

I thank my lucky stars every day that I get to work with Jean-Georges.

He is a genius at what he does and a pleasure to work with. He gets it from a luxury standpoint; he understands how it works from a hotel perspective and some of the challenges we have. Anything I have gone to him with, any new programs we want to implement, he is open to the ideas, which makes my job much easier.

His is consistently rated one of the top restaurants, and he recently received three Michelin stars once again. Because his flagship restaurant is located at our hotel, he's always here on the line unless he's traveling.

This is something you can't say about any other top chef. So the consistency is always at the highest level.

Can it sometimes be a challenge to get into the restaurant even for hotel guests?

It can be a challenge, but we maintain our relationship with the restaurant on a daily basis to ensure that we can get our hotel guests in. We are generally always able to accommodate all of our guests' requests.

Are you happy with where the property is positioned today?

Styles are changing, new hotels are opening and offering different amenities, so it's important to keep your eye on what is going on in the market to make sure you're on top.

It all comes with consistency and making sure you maintain your preventive maintenance program in-house. It's walking those rooms and public guest areas, back-of-house areas, and making sure they're impeccable all the time. It's also keeping ahead of the curve with any kind of room upgrades that should be done.

How do you make sure that you're consistently providing the top-level service that guests expect? How important is it to have a consistent team of employees?

The majority of employees have been here since day one, including me, coming up on 17 years. To have that consistency with the team is quite rare within the hospitality industry.

The key to every hotel's success is continuous training whether you have been here for five days or 17 years.

My training manager does ongoing training and also reviews our standard operating procedures periodically, because business needs change and standards written several years ago aren't necessarily going to work today, as systems obviously evolve over time. We have many more automated systems now, helping make everybody's job quicker by having mobile devices where messages go straight to that person versus paging them and waiting for a call back.

The efficiencies are better than they were and it comes down to consistency of training.

Can demand meet supply in New York, and is there a threat of oversupply?

It's quite challenging when you see the number of new rooms coming into the New York market. You wonder if there is a point of oversupply.

But that is why you have to set yourself apart from other hotels with consistency and personalized service. There are many beautiful hotels out there but guests will come back to us mostly because of the service and personalization they received in the past. ●