

Hospitality Product and Service Excellence



An Interview with Edward V. Staros, Vice President and Managing Director, The Ritz-Carlton, Naples

*The entrance of The Ritz-Carlton, Naples (left);
the sunset from the Gumbo Limbo restaurant (above)*

EDITORS' NOTE Edward Staros served as Vice President of Operations for The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company, L.L.C. from 1992 to 1999. In October 1999, he was appointed to his current position as Vice President and Managing Director for The Ritz-Carlton Resorts of Naples. He has also served as Vice President and General Manager of The Ritz-Carlton, Buckhead (Atlanta); General Manager of The Ritz-Carlton, Atlanta; and Corporate Director of Rooms Operations. Earlier in his career and prior to joining The Ritz-Carlton in 1983, Staros worked for Hyatt Hotels Corporation. He holds a business degree in hotel and restaurant administration from Florida State University.



Edward V. Staros

PROPERTY BRIEF The Ritz-Carlton, Naples (ritzcarlton.com/resortsofnaples), a Forbes Five Star, AAA Five Diamond resort located on Florida's Paradise Coast, offers 450 guest rooms, including 35 suites and 70 Ritz-Carlton Club rooms, all featuring spectacular Gulf of Mexico views. Resort amenities and activities include seven restaurants, a spa with 35 treatment rooms, three miles of pristine white-sand beach on the Gulf of Mexico, two pools, four tennis courts, and a variety of water sports. Just three miles away, The Ritz-Carlton Golf Resort, Naples, features 295 guest rooms, including 38 suites, four additional tennis courts, and two championship Greg Norman-designed golf courses. Amenities at the Golf Resort include two restaurants, a gourmet coffee shop, and an impressive Club-Level lounge with balconies overlooking the 18th hole. Guests staying at either resort are considered registered guests at both resorts and therefore may enjoy the amenities of either resort.

What has made this property so special and how have you kept it so relevant?

I started at the property on October 1, 1999 and my focus was, as it is today, delivering product and service excellence by eliminating defects through consistent and flawless execution. These are the same principles that formed our company in early 1983.

Being that this was one of the flagship hotels in the company (the fourth built), I wanted to make sure this hotel became the learning center for the young talent coming up through the ranks. Since this is one of the larger hotels,

offering more features and amenities, I thought it could and would be an ideal training environment for developing young talent into the next generation of senior leaders

With regard to leadership, I surrounded myself with people who are excellent in their own disciplines. I built the resort's executive leadership committee, which consists of 10 people in addition to myself, and today, that executive committee represents 222 years of Ritz-Carlton service.

We are able maintain our iconic status because we have some of the best senior leaders who have been with the company the longest, and understand our mission within Ritz-Carlton to consistently produce the highest quality product.

What is a true luxury hotel experience today?

We've really listened to our customers and we have been taking copious notes on their likes and dislikes over the years. We have a guest recognition system where we note which guests like fizzy water, or sleeping with a foam pillow, or in a de-feathered bed – the things that make them tick, that really are their creature comforts.

There are so many people today with allergies and dietary restrictions so we also note important facts such as gluten free, salt free diet, etc. When they come back, what they desire is already waiting for them. We have the appropriate menu set out for the guest, we have their spa appointments set if they want, and we try to customize each experience for each of our guests to the best of our ability, which we get better at doing every day.

It is not unusual for us to have guests who have been coming to this resort for over a dozen years. As a result, there are many guests we've gotten to know, and we provide exactly what they want, right down to their favorite room or view. We also take pride in our ability to provide this level of care to our new guests, getting to know them and understanding their unique preferences in order to provide personalized touches.

Can you teach this level of hospitality or does one just have to have a knack for it?

I share what I have learned through the years by being a coach and mentor to the talented employees of today. Down the road, as those

mentored leaders start mentoring their teams, and the process repeats, the entire organization grows and improves.

It is a work in progress; the job is never done, but it has been fun. Over the years, I have seen a great deal of talent graduate from The Ritz-Carlton, Naples to become general managers within the company. It is a good feeling to know that I have assisted them in their careers to become the leaders of today.

How important is it for those coming in to also have that financial acumen?

I am currently working with one of the most talented young men I have ever mentored. He is a real people person. The employees and guests love him; however, I am mentoring him to strengthen his financial acumen. Financial expertise is an important attribute for all senior leaders, if they are going to be successful in this business.

Every day, I read *The Wall Street Journal*. When I get up in the morning, I turn the TV to CNBC for *Squawk Box*, and I watch it as I get ready for my day. I listen to CNBC on Sirius Radio in the car on the way to work. I watch the stock ticker on CNBC as soon as I come into work.

I anticipate the future before the future comes, and I try to teach young talent how to do this. If they just come to work and only look at immediate projects within their own domain, they will never be stars. Today, in order to maximize rate and balance occupancy to increase returns, it is important to think into the future and to understand what is happening throughout the world.

This is the science of revenue management. Anyone who does not understand revenue management will not be successful in this business.

Does it still come back to the hospitality piece?

Everything is still centered on product and service excellence. We have to keep raising the bar in order to keep the integrity of our prices. With that said, I remind my team often that the best hotel has yet to be run; however, if we can get one step closer to it every day, then we will continually grow. If we all can come to work every day focusing on how much better we can be than yesterday, we will stay one step ahead. It does come back to hospitality. We can have the finest facilities and offerings, but the ladies and gentlemen serving our guests are what truly make our guests want to return. ●