

Pennsylvania

The Guest Experience

An Interview with Harry Gorstayn,
General Manager, Four Seasons Hotel Philadelphia



Harry Gorstayn

EDITORS' NOTE Prior to assuming his current post, Harry Gorstayn had been the General Manager of Four Seasons Resort Palm Beach since 1998. A veteran of several Four Seasons hotels, Gorstayn is a graduate of the Institut International de Glion in Montreux, Switzerland.

PROPERTY BRIEF Four Seasons Hotel Philadelphia (www.fourseasons.com/philadelphia) is a 364-guest-room property that includes 96 suites, all of which feature federal-style furnishings, reflecting Philadelphia's rich history. It is close to the financial and commercial districts of Philadelphia and is surrounded by museums, shopping, and history. The hotel's spa provides guests with everything from invigoration to pampering, with its array of body treatments and European skin therapies. Guests also have access to a whirlpool, sauna, indoor pool, and personalized Four Seasons service. The hotel's Fountain Restaurant has been rated the number-one restaurant in Philadelphia by the Zagat Survey. In addition, the hotel offers a variety of meeting and private function spaces.

Have you been happy with the growth of Four Seasons Hotel Philadelphia in recent months? Looking to the coming year, do you see signs of strength in the market?

I've been at the hotel for just over three years, and the economy had been doing very well until around April 2008. In fact, every hotel

in the city was doing very well. Now, a new convention center is being built, due to open in 2010, so we're expecting 2008 and 2009 to be a bit soft. But we hope this will pick up. The property is very close to a lot of cultural establishments, including the Franklin Institute and the Philadelphia Museum of Art. That brings a lot of business in on the weekends. We have a pool, so we get a lot of local families with kids coming in on the weekends too. We're a very kid-friendly hotel. We do kids movies and kids Olympics, and my staff really looks forward to those weekends.

Many talk about the challenges of running a successful hotel restaurant. Have you been happy with that part of the business, from a revenue point of view?

Since day one, our Fountain Restaurant has been the restaurant of choice for many people in Philadelphia. Our Executive Chef, Martin Hamann, has been doing a great job and our numbers increase every year. People come into the restaurant for business breakfasts, lunches, and dinners, and we have a lot of weddings, anniversaries, proposals, and birthdays. It's a 107-seat restaurant that has been AAA-awarded for the past 14 years. We have never considered getting a celebrity chef. At Four Seasons, in general, we tend not to do that, because our chefs are very talented – that's why they're at Four Seasons. We let them operate the restaurant like it's their own.

In a luxury property today, do you need to offer a full spa package? What spa and fitness facilities do you provide?

We recently renovated our spa. It has five rooms and we do a lot of different therapies. It's open from 8:00 AM until 8:00 PM for treatments, and the revenues are going up every day. If you didn't have a bar in a hotel five years ago, you were not going to do well. Now, it's a spa. You need a spa to do well as a hotel. People come to the hotel to relax, especially on the weekend.

On the corporate meeting side of the business, what size events can you accommodate?

We have about 10,000 square feet of meeting and function space, and every weekend we are booked for weddings, bar mitzvahs, and birthday celebrations. We specialize in that. During the week, we have groups of about 125 to 150 guests, who can fit comfortably in the meeting rooms. So we tend to host events that

are not very big but are not very small either. This hotel is pretty unusual, because we have 12 function rooms, including several that have windows and a boardroom setup.

How much of an emphasis does Four Seasons – and this property in particular – place on technology? How do you make sure you don't lose the human touch?

Here, our guests have what they have in their houses, so they feel comfortable when they check into the hotel. But when they come in, they really want to see a staff member – a real person. So we say, "Hello" and take them up to the front desk, and then they go to their rooms. Most of our guests don't use express checkout; they prefer to drop off their keys themselves and say, "We'll see you next time." Four Seasons doesn't want to lose that personal touch. We are into greeting our guests and saying good-bye to them also.

How important is it to be engaged in the local community, both in your role, leading the property, and for your employees?

Each fall, we host the annual Parkway Run/Walk for Children's Cancer Research, and last year, we raised about \$500,000 for cancer research for kids. This is done in every Four Seasons hotel around the world, and it shows you that Four Seasons gives back to the community, in recognition of what the community gives us throughout the year. Each employee of this hotel – and every hotel in the group – is involved in one way or another in this type of event. In addition, Mayor Michael Nutter had a big clean-up day in April, for the city of Philadelphia, and 30 of our employees took their gloves, buckets, and mops and went out to a section of Philadelphia and cleaned it. So our employees really drive this; they want to do it.

What do you think your colleagues would say about your management style?

I hope they'd say that I'm pretty direct, I am very giving, I like to promote people very fast to other departments in the hotel, I ask questions, and I don't make decisions alone.

Your business is truly 24/7. How challenging is it for you to turn it off, and do you ever really get away from it?

The hotel industry is like being on-call 24 hours a day, and it's very hard to turn it off. I work about six days on, and on the seventh day, I try to get to my e-mail. I cannot sit here and say I turn it off – I don't. ●