

All About Attitude

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

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



Harry Gorstayn

PROPERTY BRIEF *Situated close to the financial and commercial districts of Philadelphia, Four Seasons Hotel Philadelphia (www.fourseasons.com/philadelphia)*

is a 364 guest room property that includes 96 suites, all of which feature classic style furnishings, reflecting Philadelphia's rich history. The hotel's spa provides guests with everything from invigoration to pampering, with its variety 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.

Over the past 24 months, did you see a major impact on the industry in Philadelphia and, more specifically, for Four Seasons?

We're no different than any other city in the United States, and Philadelphia was one of the first that got impacted when the economy took a downturn. So we're expecting a recovery faster than any other city in the United States. The first quarter of 2010 looked much better than the first quarter of 2009. We're ahead in both group and transient business. Our business is slowly recovering, and we're hoping for a good year.

How challenging has it been to keep expenses down while maintaining the level of service that Four Seasons is known for?

We shared our employees across properties. So the managers who wanted to move on and help, for instance, when it was busy in Hawaii last January, February, and March, went there, so we didn't layoff as many as other companies might have. Our staff is used to moving around – that is what excites them and it is the pride of Four Seasons.

Obviously, we had to let go of some employees, but our front of the house services

weren't touched at all, and in terms of back of the house, our job was to make certain we remained the best employer we could in Philadelphia.

Four Seasons is a brand known to always be investing in itself to keep up-to-date. Are you happy with where the property is today, and do you foresee any changes or renovations on the horizon?

We will begin renovations on our new ballroom, which will be ready in January 2011; we refinished our guest rooms about four years ago, so they'll be done again in two and a half or three years; we have Internet access in most of our rooms; our spa got new spa treatment rooms; and our meeting rooms were done in January 2009. Basically, we increased our services in the rooms: we've added turn-down service and some small amenities like chocolate and fruit, which gives more value than before, and we're trying to keep those values for the future.

You offer a mix of very luxurious suites and guest rooms. Is there a common feel within the accommodations, or is there a different layout and look from room to room or suite to suite?

We have moderate rooms and we have some superior suites – 96 of them; we call them the Four Seasons Executive Suites, and those mainly face the fountain outside in Logan Square. We have a Presidential Suite on the seventh floor which has a pool table and a baby grand piano in it; we have the Royal Suite; and we have 12 Liberty Suites, which are one-bedroom suites.

How critical is it in the luxury segment to offer the full spa experience for your guests?

Having a spa is a must these days. Today, people are looking for a spa with masseuses or therapists who are educated and have been with the spa for a long time, so they get to know the guests and their needs as they come back year after year. We also have a swimming pool in the spa, so we can use the swimming area for a greenroom while the guests are experiencing great spa treatments.

Fountain Restaurant is very well-known and has won many awards. In a city like Philadelphia, with so many good stand-

alone restaurants, how challenging is it to offer a successful dining experience in the hotel?

The staff of the restaurant has been here on average 15 to 18 years, so the consistent standards and service are there. The restaurant chef has been here 15 years. We just got a new executive chef who used to be in Vancouver and, before that, at The Pierre in New York City. In addition, we just received the Forbes Five-Star Award. In this day and age, during this economy, to achieve five stars says a lot by itself. We are also still five-diamond and we are on the 2010 *Conde Nast Traveler* Gold List. We have all the culinary awards that one can get.

Philadelphia is a city that seems to have reinvented itself over the years, and has a tremendous amount to offer with a number of leading companies and universities. Is that fact well understood?

We touch all the guests from New York, Washington, D.C., and Philadelphia, and this is getting to be a very popular area for the weekends. We have a lot of exhibits here, so people come in on the weekends to visit. We have more than 200 restaurants that compete with those in New York, Washington, D.C., or Baltimore, but which are smaller, more reasonable, and very different. So Philadelphia is the place to be.

With the hotel being such a key part of the community, how are your employees and your leadership team involved in the community?

We are very involved. For instance, in the past five years, we have raised over \$2.2 million for The Cancer Center at The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. We're the leading organization in their fund-raising events, and are proud to host the Parkway Run every September.

In an industry with fairly high turnover, what is it about the culture of Four Seasons that has made it so effective at retaining staff?

Our culture says that you have to believe in the people that you hire. We believe in attitude versus skills. You can teach anybody any skill you want, but you can't teach attitude. We don't have scripts – we teach people what to do but not how to do it. In addition, there is a loyalty, because they feel they get treated right. ●