

In the Heart of Times Square

**An Interview with Atif N. Youssef,
General Manager, Millennium Broadway Hotel, Times Square, New York**

EDITORS' NOTE For 27 years, Atif Youssef has been a highly respected hospitality leader in New York City. Beginning in 1984 at the Waldorf=Astoria's Bull and Bear dining room, he steadily took on positions of increasing responsibility at such iconic properties as the Helmsley Park Lane, The Plaza where he was Executive Director of Food and Beverage, and Starwood's Sheraton hotels in Manhattan. He managed the Hudson and Empire hotels before joining Millennium in 2010. Over the course of a fascinating career, he has had the privilege of managing New York events for celebrities and heads of state ranging from Frank Sinatra, Barbra Streisand and Bruce Springsteen to Presidents Reagan, Clinton, and Bush Sr., to the King of Morocco and the Queen of Thailand. Throughout his career in tourism, airlines, finance and hospitality, Youssef's passion for his chosen field is "what wakes me up every morning looking for new challenges, opportunities, and laughter."



Atif N. Youssef

We've seen a major change in the volume of business for our hotel in 2011. Our biggest success for the first half of the year has been group business. Consortia and FIT business have also increased dramatically. In fact, we've enjoyed overall growth in virtually all segments of business. We see a positive year over year booking trend for the second half of 2011 and into 2012, as well. So we're steadily coming out of the recession towards a great 2011 year end.

How do you define the profile of your guest?

We are very fortunate that our hotel attracts both leisure and corporate travel, with guests from all over the U.S. and around the world. Our location in Times Square is ideal for vacationers throughout the year. But what makes our 750-room hotel unique is the 110,000 square feet of banquet/meeting space with 43 rooms of different sizes.

Our beautifully restored, historic Hudson Theatre provides a true NYC setting unlike any other hotel for business galas, charity events, and weddings. So a big part of our success is group business and high profile events.

Do you look at it as two hotels in one?

We operate and communicate about the Millennium Broadway as one hotel. We are a leisure, business, and conference hotel, all in one. All of our rooms have excellent facilities and service, yet The Premier has its own unique environment – it's more private and quiet, with its own entrance and lobby concierge. It also has a private lounge where you can enjoy daily breakfast and a 5:00 PM reception. Premier elevators and facilities must be accessed with the room key for privacy and security.

Is it challenging for a hotel to be successful in the food and beverage area and what product are you offering?

It's not challenging, because guests and visitors to the Times Square area have so many choices of restaurants that they are attracted to the neighborhood for dining as well as entertainment. We have a superb executive chef who has created menus for conferences, weddings, and gala events that provide the high quality and gourmet cuisine that New Yorkers and visitors to our city expect. The Millennium Broadway and our lobby Restaurant Charlotte are well known and popular. We are currently finalizing the restaurant's renovation and know that it will be unique to our hotel guests and the area around us.

Does your meeting space comprise all sizes for all types of meetings?

Our rooms accommodate meetings from two to 700. We have a total of 43 different types of meeting rooms over seven conference floors. We have one floor that can accommodate up to 450 people with a separate welcome area. Our Hudson Theatre accommodates up to 700 people – 450 for receptions and 350 for banquets.

Is it challenging to retain staff in a business with such high turnover and how have you built the right management team?

It is always challenging to retain good staff in a competitive industry. However, we want our hotel associates to feel like part of our hotel family and committed to making each guest's stay a wonderful experience. The success of a hotel is based on the passion and expertise of our people, and this starts with communicating with our hotel associates. We provide regular staff training on service standards and conduct monthly staff roundtable discussions, which increases staff morale and productivity. Two TV screens in the staff dining room provide our Millennium "One Voice, One Vision" daily news programming that includes the day's occupancy, VIPs, and in-house groups, as well as morale building internal news, promotions, congratulations and, of course, our "See It, Own It, Resolve It" slogan.

Do you foresee additional changes to the property?

You always look out for new trends, watch your competition, and prepare to go to the next level. We have several projects on the way, starting with the restaurant renovation and enhancement of the public space to provide a more compelling sense of arrival. In addition, we are planning to renovate all 125 rooms in The Premier tower.

How critical is it for a GM to have an open relationship and a common vision with the property owners?

Throughout Millennium Hotels and Resorts, we communicate openly and regularly regarding all aspects of our hotel and its businesspeople, product, service, and profits. Our Chairman, based in Singapore, visits the hotel several times a year and our SVP of Operations/VP of Sales and Marketing for North America visits each month to meet with our hotel management team. This open relationship and communication builds a common vision not only with hotel management but with everyone who is involved with making the Millennium Broadway one of the best and most successful hotels in New York City. ●

PROPERTY BRIEF The Millennium Broadway Hotel, Times Square, New York (www.millenniumhotelnyc.com) is located in the heart of the theater district and Restaurant Row. It features 750 rooms and suites with a choice of Standard, Superior, or Premier accommodations. Millennium Premier rooms are located in a private tower and include special amenities and guest benefits. The hotel also features a 24-hour fitness center and Restaurant Charlotte. The Millennium Broadway is best known for having one of the largest and finest on-site conference centers in Manhattan, the only hotel conference center in New York City accredited by International Association of Conference Centers Theater. The 43 function spaces span seven floors and provide 110,000 square feet of meeting space.

Has business picked up for Millennium Broadway and how is travel and tourism in general faring in New York City?

Have you walked through Times Square recently? By the crowds I see outside our door each day, I surmise that travel to New York has been very strong. As far as hotels in the Times Square area, an increased capacity has lowered occupancies slightly but ADR and demand are up by over six percent, with particular strength in business travel, consortia business, and groups.