



## Genuine Care

An Interview with Ashish Verma,  
General Manager, The Lowell



**EDITORS' NOTE** Ashish Verma is a dynamic hotelier with an accomplished background in luxury hospitality. He has previously held positions with Orient-Express Hotels, Millennium Hotels and Resorts, Hyatt International Corporation, and Oberoi Hotels & Resorts International in Asia, Europe, and North America. Verma was born in the Punjab, India and received a B.A. with honors in political science and economics from Punjab University, Chandigarh, India; a graduate degree in Hospitality Administration from the Oberoi School of Hotel Management, New Delhi, India; and a Master of Business Administration from IMHI Cornell-ESSEC in Paris, France. In addition to his numerous professional successes, Verma has been committed to several social, educational, and environmental causes and serves on boards of various nonprofit organizations. Verma's diverse interests include sports, yoga, philosophy, languages, travel, and the guitar.



Ashish Verma

**PROPERTY BRIEF** The Lowell, a 1927 landmark building, is situated off Madison Avenue in New York's exclusive Upper East Side. The hotel ([www.lowellhotel.com](http://www.lowellhotel.com)) dotes upon its guests with uniquely personalized service and attention to detail, maintaining 49 individually appointed suites and 23 deluxe rooms. Guests will appreciate complimentary beverages upon arrival, Voss water at turndown, and a selection of Bulgari amenities, and most suites have wood-burning fireplaces, some have terraces, and almost all have fully equipped kitchens.

### What is it about the property that has drawn repeat clientele?

It starts with our owners. We have been continuously owned and managed by the company for nearly 30 years because they have deeply vested interest in this property – they both own and care for it.

They have created a culture of genuine care. As caretakers of this property, each one of us is committed to making sure every guest who arrives at The Lowell feels at home.

Within that philosophy, we have a professional environment where we sincerely care for our employees' well-being and training – we are like a tight-knit family. Our employees' length of service averages more than 15 years. So the recognition a guest ultimately gets with us

directly translates into them feeling comfortable and like they're returning home.

**How important is your commitment to offer the highest quality product and is that a common vision you share with the property's owners?**

There is a level of comfort and trust that comes from having owners who are in it for the long haul. I personally manage a hotel with a feeling of ownership, so it's very close to me.

Each decision we make is with the long-term perspective in mind and quality is never compromised. For example, when we invest in a renovation, we put our heads together to help maximize the results. It's not a question of just changing the carpets or upholsteries; we look at the configuration of the space, the needs of the guests, the number of keys and ratio of suites to rooms we have, etc. – ultimately, at always what works best for the guests.

**Sometimes longevity of employees can lead to complacency. How do you make sure you don't lose your edge?**

Over the past four years, we have recognized that constant training is paramount. You need to be committed to refreshing skills consistently. We are also very discerning in our hiring. Thereby, we have reinvigorated and actually improved our services considerably.

First, we created 'The Lowell University', which is our internal structured training program. This program is above and beyond routine departmental training carried out all year round. Each quarter, we have an executive committee member conduct training on a topic in line with his/her expertise. All the employees are expected to attend and they earn credits. After attending a certain number of quarterly training programs and earning a prescribed number of credits, the employees are expected to graduate from The Lowell University. This illustrates our belief that training, like education, is an accumulative and progressive discipline.

Second, we hire very carefully – even interns and management trainees all go through me for their final interview, because they're an investment and we want them to return to us ideally upon completing their hotel school programs.

Overall, it's a combination of retraining, refreshing the skills, hiring selectively, and keeping our employees at their very best.

**Is there an effective understanding of the dining atmosphere The Pembroke Room offers?**

It's important that we always remember that we are a specialized hotel. If we forget who we are, then we're in trouble.

We offer dining both to locals and to in-house guests, and the key word for us is exclusive. We do not advertise The Pembroke Room and look to compete with other stand-alone restaurants or popular tea rooms, because our exclusivity would be lost.

To that extent, we are not blindly following numbers; what we're driving is quality. If you dine in The Pembroke, you are bound to say it's one of the best breakfasts in town; and our afternoon tea is one of the best in the world and the pre-theater dinner is simply exquisite.

So our focus is on getting it right with the highest standards and specialized details in dining, while keeping in mind the growing focus on dining healthy. Our chef even grows his own herbs on our rooftop terrace garden and uses them in his seasonal menus and preparations.

So we are a very good F&B operation for our hotel guests and the discerning locals who desire an exclusive dining experience.

**You've run both large and small properties and thrived in both. Does one type of property fit your style better than the other?**

My background is in luxury hospitality. My focus is always on standards, details, and personalization. In larger hotels, those might be harder to achieve, but it can be done and I have accomplished that.

In a smaller hotel, it is easier because the size affords more direct interaction with guests and employees. I'm also fortunate with the guidance and support of the owners and their understanding of luxury hospitality, along with my brilliant team committed to excellence. The Lowell definitely has been more suitable to my style.

**How do you attract and retain top talent?**

Good employees are hard to find; however, there are bright and talented individuals out there. Simultaneously, we have to be equally discerning in selecting them. We have to distinguish ourselves from others by providing an environment where we look after their needs. If we have genuine care for their development, they are most likely to benefit our organization and that's a win-win. ●

Junior Suite bedroom (left); The Lowell's 63rd Street location (right)