



The People Business

An Interview with Amy Commans,
General Manager, Luxe Sunset Boulevard Hotel



A Luxe Sunset Boulevard guest room (left);
the hotel's serene outdoor area (above)

EDITORS' NOTE Amy Commans assumed her current post in 2012. Commans was voted "Manager of the Year" by the San Fernando Valley Business Journal and "Woman of the Year" by the Greater Conejo Valley Chamber of Commerce in 2003. Among Commans' many professional alliances, she is an active member of the Network of Executive Women in Hospitality (NEWH) and sits on the boards of Support for the Kids, Pepperdine University, and Los Robles Hospital. Commans formerly served a 22-year tenure as the General Manager of the Westlake Village Inn in California. She has also held leadership roles at Marriott Hotels in Century City and in Woodland Hills, California.



Amy Commans

PROPERTY BRIEF Located where Bel Air meets Brentwood, the Luxe Sunset Boulevard Hotel (www.luxesunset.com) offers guests a quiet urban enclave in striking distance from the famed Getty Center, Bel Air, Hollywood, and Southern California beaches. The property's seven-acre spread serves as an ideal "home base" for those wishing to partake in the quintessential Los Angeles experience, while its 162 guest rooms and suites boast spacious layouts, up to 45 percent larger than the national average for standard accommodations. The first of two Luxe-branded hotels corporately owned by veteran hotelier, Efreem Harkham, the Luxe Sunset Boulevard Hotel is hallmarked by service personalized to the individual needs of each guest.

What has made this property work so effectively?

We have a phenomenal location, nestled just below the Getty. We have the luxury of being a Los Angeles-based hotel, but you would never know it because we're so secluded in the seven botanical acres of Brentwood and Bel Air.

Our corporate clientele thrive on the environment, which is soothing and timeless, and yet has all of the comforts they're looking for in a premier hospitality environment.

How challenging is it to differentiate in this market?

The fact that we are a unique boutique property sets us apart. We have also tried to approach what we do for a living with excellence that comes from within the hearts of our phenomenal Luxe team members. Our approach has been that we work with one another as well as working for the

client – every man, woman, and child that walks through that front door is who we are here to serve with the kindest, most authentic, and humble style of service, separating us from the "big box," stereotypical brands. We're not looking to be like those brands – we're looking to be better.

You have a strong suite offering. Is there a consistent feel throughout?

They're all unique – we're 50 percent suites and spread out on two property levels: the spa level, which looks up to the iconic Getty Museum, houses a beautiful spa, and is surrounded by the cabana-laced pool. Our lobby level, retains the remaining 50 percent of our rooms and spacious suites, along with a lobby lounge and restaurant.

There is a genuine continuity to the overall look, feel, and design of the property. However, since our rooms are 45 percent larger than a typical guest room, there is a more residential feel than other hotels with a cookie-cutter layout.

How have you developed a loyal following within the food and beverage arena?

It's evolving just like every other industry. Within food and beverage, you have the wine industry and the foodies, and your culinary cuisine has to be sparked.

The executive chef frequents the local farmer's markets, and picks out the fruits and vegetables that inspire him. We also cultivate a herb garden on the property. We try to bring in something unique and fresh each day for our à la carte diners and loyal corporate guests. We have a great reputation as the ideal venue for a power breakfast and lunch, and a growing clientele for dinner. Our unique winemaker dinners have been a tremendous success.

Is it important in a location like yours to offer a full spa?

It has been an added value that our clients really appreciate. When you arrive on property, there is an expectation because of the beautiful botanical setting we have and the Zen-like feel throughout the grounds, which is not austere or arrogant; it's understated. We have all-suite spa offerings so you can have a massage or a treatment in your room or suite; or you can find a small place of respite within our treatment rooms and add that to your corporate week. It is one of the most sought after amenities.

When hiring is the culture fit most important?

Culture trumps everything. Attracting and retaining good employees is always a critical component. We invest a great deal into our training program: refining the content to keep it fresh and pertinent to today's issues. But you can't train someone to care.

This is what we focus on. It starts with hiring really good people, focusing on their development, and creating a foundation of upward mobility and success for each employee.

Why haven't we seen more women at upper levels in this industry?

It's a challenge for everyone out there, male or female. But because of the 24/7 flexibility of hospitality, it comes down to the drive of wanting to have it all. Never before has there been a time when women can have it all, but it begins from within: being disciplined and creating a successful balance among career, family, and philanthropy. I think and believe women should embrace their femininity and bring it to the boardroom. Trust me ladies, follow your instincts and success will follow.

Did you always know this was the right industry for you?

The industry found me, and I fell in love with it. I'm so blessed. I love the industry I'm in and the property I lead. I treasure the influence I have over other women as I try to mentor them, and foster the spirit of my existing employees while championing their ideas and concepts.

I got into the industry because I was asked to lead a few symposiums. The general manager at that time of the property I was working with made me an offer I could not refuse. So I left for twice the hours and half the pay, but found my way into an industry I love.

Do you ever take the time to reflect on and appreciate your career?

If you're a visionary, you're always looking at what you haven't achieved. But it's important to reflect, to lead with humility, and to celebrate the little victories every day, like recognizing someone for their good work.

It's important to embrace the day and have fun in the daily mundane tasks, and to embrace the community in the process. At day's end, we're in the people business, and we have to stop and make eye contact, and treat others as we would like to be treated. I make a point to talk to strangers. They might just need a kind word or thoughtful acknowledgement. At the end of the day, kindness is what hospitality is all about. ●