



The Ritz-Carlton, Macau

A Bespoke Experience

An Interview with
**Hervé Humler, President and Chief
 Operations Officer, The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company**



The Ritz-Carlton, Abu Dhabi

EDITORS' NOTE Hervé Humler was named President and Chief Operations Officer of The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company, L.L.C. in August 2010. He started as an apprentice in the industry, learning every aspect of the hotel business from housekeeping to food preparation. In 1983, he became employee number four at the newly established Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company. Along with his small group of co-founders, Humler was instrumental in the creation of the mission statement and credo for which The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company has been known for 30 years. For much of his career at The Ritz-Carlton, he was responsible for the development of the brand's growing group of international hotels from Barcelona to Bali and Shanghai to Santiago. Humler earned a baccalaureate degree on Africa's Ivory Coast where he was raised.



Hervé Humler

COMPANY BRIEF Established in 1983 with the purchase of The Ritz-Carlton, Boston and the rights to the name Ritz-Carlton, The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company (ritzcarlton.com) has grown from one hotel to 91, and 39 branded Ritz-Carlton Clubs & Residences worldwide employing 40,000 ladies and gentlemen. The management company has plans to further expand in Europe, Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and the Americas. The Ritz-Carlton also offers its Leadership Center as a resource for leading organizations interested in benchmarking the business practices that led to The Ritz-Carlton becoming a two-time recipient of the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award.

What has made Ritz-Carlton so successful and has allowed the brand to stay relevant over the years?

Over the past decade, the brand has continued to evolve to stay relevant. Significant changes made have seen positive corresponding shifts in key brand metrics. Everything from the brand's design strategy, the locations selected to open new hotels, the service style, grooming standards, and the removal of the formal dining experience have all been redesigned, reinvented, or replaced. There is evidence to suggest that by identifying shifts and leading change, the brand had, and has, the potential to continue to benefit today just like it has in the past.

At its inception, The Ritz-Carlton was known exclusively as a hotel company. Today, The Ritz-Carlton has developed several very successful brand

extensions, which include Residences, Destination Clubs, Ritz-Carlton Reserve, a Leadership Center, Retail, Golf Clubs, and a philanthropic foundation, Community Footprints. We are not only the largest provider of luxury spas in the United States, but one of the largest providers of luxury meeting and conference space around the world.

Instead of viewing legacy as something that brands inherit, The Ritz-Carlton believes the more powerful form of legacy is one that is written by brands in the present; the ones writing history, not just reading from it every day. The purpose and the values of the brand have not changed, and we still strive every day to create precious memories and to meet the tastes of a new generation of consumers.

Would you highlight your plans for growth and the key markets for expansion?

The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company currently operates 91 hotels in the Americas, Europe, Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and the Caribbean with more than 40 hotel and residential projects under development around the globe. The Ritz-Carlton is on target for 100 hotels by the end of 2016 and for the first time now has more hotels outside of the U.S. than within it. Increasing demand for authenticity, new experiences, and exclusivity will boost interest in places reflecting the culture and traditions of local communities.

Also exciting for the brand is the continued expansion of The Ritz-Carlton Reserve brand.

How do you define a true luxury hotel experience today?

Luxury travelers now place more emphasis on service, personalization, and authentic and enriching travel experiences than the mere physical trappings of luxury. The need for personalization continues to impact luxury travel, leading to the creation of enduring personal relationships based on trust between luxury travel providers and travelers. This trend is amplified by the use of ever-advancing technology, and especially by the phenomenal growth of the digital space and social media.

At The Ritz-Carlton, we create an effortless bespoke experience. Luxury travelers have long welcomed personalized services that make logistics a little bit more manageable, or make unfamiliar experiences more relatable. At the same time, technology has made travelers increasingly expectant of a certain level of personalization, from hotel recommendations to endlessly customizable leisure packages.

Would you highlight Ritz-Carlton's investment in technology and the impact that technology has had on the business?

Over the past year, one of the exciting investments in technology is our digital app, version 2, which allows mobile check in and check out. The Ritz-Carlton has launched real-time service requests, food and beverage ordering, The Ritz-Carlton Rewards account review, folio review, and access to exclusive local content, concierge tips, and offers at all hotels.

Also, for Luxury Meetings, we launched ((Chime)), which is The Ritz-Carlton Meeting Planner app that allows meeting planners to interface with their conference concierge using an online menu of options on their mobile devices. Guests may request service attention, in-room temperature change, set up changes, and a variety of other options using a simple touch activated app.

This is all to ensure that our brand remains relevant to the consumer – and that we reach them in the ways they have told us they would like to be reached. The sophisticated customer of today turns to the Internet for travel information and inspiration.

As a brand, we are focused on developing our social media assets and online engagement channels to incorporate more user-generated content for our guests who wish to share their Ritz-Carlton experiences and memories in the digital space.

The culture of Ritz-Carlton allows its employees responsibility and autonomy in dealing with the guest. How critical is this to the culture of the brand and how do you incorporate this as part of your training programs?

Our credo, service basics, employee promise, and motto – our “Gold Standards” are the guiding principles of our service commitment to our guests. It empowers our Ladies and Gentlemen to anticipate and fulfill even the unexpressed wishes and needs of our guests. Even though the brand has evolved, our service commitment to our guests remains the same, as it has from the beginning.

How do you maintain such consistent service standards and how critical is it to offer personalized service for your guests?

Every day, our 40,000 Ladies and Gentlemen around the world attend line ups, in which they train on the service value of the day, share wow stories, and review guest arrivals and guest preferences. It empowers our Ladies and Gentlemen to provide extraordinary, personalized service to our guests, which is key in creating guest engagement and building brand loyalty. ●