

Hospitality

An Ultimate and Grand Experience

An Interview with Becky Hubbard,
General Manager, Lotte New York Palace



The Jewel Suite by Martin Katz living area (left); the Villard Courtyard (above)

EDITORS' NOTE Prior to her current post, Becky Hubbard was Executive Assistant Manager at Trump SoHo Hotel; Assistant Rooms Executive at The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company LLC; the Front House Director for The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company LLC; the Director of Reception for Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide, Inc.; and Assistant Director of Reception for Sheraton. She received her Bachelor of Science in Hospitality from the State University of New York at Plattsburgh.



Becky Hubbard

PROPERTY BRIEF Lotte New York Palace (lottenypalace.com), a legendary New York City luxury hotel, underwent a thorough transformation from a historic Madison Avenue gem to Midtown's premier modern hotel. The hotel features 909 spacious rooms and suites, including 176 exclusive Towers accommodations, which provide the perfect setting for relaxation and inspired stays in New York City. Unique dining venues such as Pomme Palais offer everything from imaginative breakfast dishes to signature pastries and sandwiches. Villard restaurant offers a New American menu comprised of "farm house" breakfast and brunch fare. Lotte New York Palace's collection of versatile meeting and event spaces is ideal for weddings, corporate events, and special occasions. The hotel's famed Villard Mansion, built in 1882, is recognized as a New York City landmark and gracefully blends with a contemporary 55-story tower. The Madison Avenue courtyard provides a dramatic entryway to the hotel's grand lobby.

What has been the secret to how well Lotte New York Palace has done in the current market?

We started with an extremely high goal. Where everyone else had looked at the market and set their budget to what the market was doing, we did the opposite. Our owners wanted to set our budget to our standards.

This gave us an incredible goal to work towards, and then we created a culture of finding business where we never thought to find it before. We brought our service up to a level it had never been before and we added value and inspired our team to sell a product they're proud of.

Do you focus more on rate or occupancy?

We are always looking at RevPAR because that is what goes to the bottom line. We have figured out how to position ourselves so we can compete against everyone in the city because, with the different booking engines today, we don't just compete against our neighborhood; we compete against the entire market.

We had to position ourselves as who we are, which is one of the largest luxury hotels in New York. We don't chase occupancy, but we also don't ignore it. We try to price ourselves so that both work out.

Do you position this as one property or as two products within one?

It is two products within one. We have the Towers, which is the ultimate experience, and the Palace, which is the grand experience. Walking through the doors of Lotte New York Palace is an incredible experience – we have the coffee shop, the restaurant and different watering holes throughout. Everywhere there are amazing views. Then there are the Towers, which are extraordinary. We do try to separate that experience, because there are more services there – we have maître d'etage service, private check-in and private concierge, and there is more of a suite component there.

As the booking windows get shorter, what does it mean to forecast today?

It is difficult to forecast, but finding a base in other areas like corporate and travel helps us forecast better.

This property has gone through a few food and beverage concepts. Where does this stand today?

We have finally found our stride in restaurants. We offer Pomme Palais, which serves as a café where guests can get coffee and breakfast easily and quickly.

With the Villard restaurant, we chose just to open for breakfast and for brunch on the weekends because that is the most important thing for our guests. This was a good decision for us because we can create demand and volume in our outlet for breakfast. It is an extraordinary way to wake up in the morning because you are dining in a historic landmarked building.

You have a broad range of lounges for guests. Have you been happy with that part of the business?

We have small groups who have wanted to use these venues for events. We get the happy hour crowd from the businesses that are around Tavern on 51. Trouble's Trust and the lobby lounge do incredibly well. This year, we added music to the lounge and we offer live jazz on Mondays and Tuesdays, which does very well.

Rarities is also a great private area where customers can seek our interesting offerings.

How critical is it to have such a broad suite offering?

That is part of the joy of this property – anyone can find what they need here. For those who are looking to stay long term or for those who want to bring in their families, there is an array of choices and there isn't just one type of suite.

The Tower Corner suites are as large as some presidential suites in the city but, because of the lower price point, they provide great value for our guests.

If one is looking for a slightly smaller, yet still roomy suite, we have the Towers Executive suites, which have incredible views and two separate rooms.

What do you do to keep the intimate feel in such a large hotel?

We make sure that when guests walk in, they see someone who works here. Our guest service ambassadors are there with the front desk agents, doormen and bellmen to greet guests.

It is very important to touch base with guests who are in the hotel every day. I make sure I call many guests to make sure they know who I am, so they don't feel they will never get to know the GM because this property is too big.

How important has it been to have an open relationship with the owners of the property?

They are just as excited as we are to make this hotel successful and were so proud to purchase it that they continue to invest money into it. For instance, we will be renovating our spa in 2018 to make it larger. It will be expanded to include eight treatment rooms and a fantastic gym facility, and our locker rooms will also be updated.

Are leadership opportunities available to young women entering the industry?

I never felt that I have been held back from doing anything based on my gender. When I am interviewing people for jobs, they are happy to find a woman in this role and this makes me proud. ●