



## A True New York Story

An Interview with Brett Blass,  
Chief Operating Officer, Triumph Hotels



A suite at Hotel Edison (left); Triomphe restaurant at The Iroquois New York Hotel (above); the lobby of Hotel Belleclaire (below)

**EDITORS' NOTE** Brett Blass is a seasoned veteran with 30 years of hospitality experience. Prior to joining Triumph Hotels, he was a Founding Partner and Chief Operating Officer for Journal Hotels. He was also Senior Vice President of Operations at Thompson & Commune Hotels where he started as General Manager. Blass also held positions for over a decade with InterContinental Hotels Group in three countries.



Brett Blass

**COMPANY BRIEF** Triumph Hotels ([triumphhotels.com](http://triumphhotels.com)) operates six hotels as diverse and distinct as the city surrounding them. From traditional luxury to graceful elegance to downtown chic, each of their six boutique hotels in New York City delivers a unique experience inspired by the personality, history and character of its neighborhood.

**What excited you about the opportunity with Triumph Hotels and what did you feel could be done with the brand?**

I was intrigued by the earnest operating approach and the curated investment being made by its owners.

Their strategy of building meaningful hotels while fostering their people to best serve their customers was extremely compelling to me.

Based on my industry experience and human nature, I felt it was going to be a strong match.

In a cluttered New York City hotel space, we would focus on doing something quite special. An inherent difference at Triumph is a true New York City story and the associated huge pride that goes with that story. It's a New York story that has been largely written and lived by New York people. As a collective, the Triumph team will make our beautifully designed hotels more special by adding thoughtful NYC experiences for our guests.

**Were you able to get the existing staff onboard with this vision or did you need to bring in new talent?**

Our people are, in large part, what attracted me to Triumph, so the idea of bringing in a new team was not the growth plan. The way forward was absolutely a collaboration with the existing team while adding new top talent where needed. I felt that my job in the early stages was to build on what we had and a good way to do that was understanding what the existing team felt and thought. I wanted to hear from them what added ingredients

would make the special Triumph soup taste and look even better. Inclusion and communication were the best ways to build the team's trust, purpose and clarity about strategic direction. In the end, the best thing for developing a business is developing the stakeholders along with it. When this happens, everything from the customer experience to investor profits lifts in a pretty harmonious way.

**Is your primary focus on building individual hotel brand awareness or is it more about the Triumph brand?**

The brand is a collection of hotels steeped in history, neighborhood, architecture, design and experience, so our brand story will always resonate around the collection of hotels themselves. I believe that our guests care most about the hotels themselves. The hotels should be designed and calibrated to serve our customer experience. There is and will be more connective Triumph tissue between our hotels linking them together as a family of hotels, but their individualities will reign through.



**Have you found that there is value in having common characteristics among the properties to distinguish them as Triumph hotels?**

It is most important for employees to feel connected by process, common goals and strategies. This will assure a proper and consistent customer experience that is in keeping with Triumph fundamental ideals. How we demonstrate service standards and offerings are a common trait between hotels. The notion that our teams fully understand "why" we do things a certain way is a common trait. Conveying our identity through our people is critical and building brand messaging is important for the teams who are interacting with customers.

Another example – how we style a property may differ by space, but the intent to style well and emphasize design beauty is a common characteristic amongst our properties.

**What is the secret behind being successful in the food and beverage space?**

First and foremost is picking a partner that has similar stylistic, service and cultural DNA. It is important that the restaurant and bar operations are part of the hotel but add cache and excitement.

Our expectations in the food and beverage partnerships are really high. We at times will sacrifice short-term gains in order to partner with the right people. We're aiming to get something that not only burns bright, but also burns long.

We're choosing people who "get" us and are excited about where we are going. They want to be a part of the journey and then it's up to those teams to deliver.

Further, our venues speak to the design, the neighborhood, and the quality of the product. Many of them are run by celebrated New York City restaurateurs, which is another Triumph engagement trait.

**Are you focused on continuing to enhance the existing properties in New York City or are you looking to expand to new markets?**

We will continue to improve and grow in New York City and we're also looking to expand outside of New York in cities such as Miami and LA, but only if the property is the right fit. We are very close to being ready to take on new markets.

**Are you able to enjoy the wins you've experienced along the way or are you always looking ahead?**

The wins feed my enthusiasm, fill my batteries, and keep me strongly committed to my purpose and team. I believe in celebrating wins, and I believe we learn vitally important lessons from our losses. Understanding and clearly interpreting to the team the lessons found in both wins and losses keeps the organization's momentum moving forward.

This business is about service, and we're committed to enhancing our guests' experiences so we can earn their loyalty and bring them back again and again.

So, in a way, I'm doing both – looking ahead but enjoying the journey as we evolve. I am very proud of our product evolution and people development. Very good and exciting things are ahead. ●