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LOUIS T COLLECTION

Q&A with Akira Park GM of Louis T's first hotel

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Akira Park

Why did you want to enter the hospitality?

I was born in Tokyo, Japan. From there we moved to Korea and finally to the USA where I spent most of my time. I believe my journey of growing up in different countries created a sense of acceptance of other cultures. I guess as a result, I became very curious about everything. So whenever I have a chance to learn something new, I jump at the opportunity.

The hospitality industry has provided me with a chance for new discovery everyday through guest interactions. Not many industries can give me the opportunity to talk with a neurosurgeon, electronic dance music DJ, independent wildlife photographer and greeting card artist in the same day.

How did you get started in the hotel business?

After graduating from college, I wasn't 100% sure what I wanted to do. So one day I picked the largest building in San Diego. I said, "hey.... I should work there." Which happened to be the largest convention hotel on the west coast. I first started out as an intern in food & beverage (F&B) so I could learn the groundwork. And as it turns out, I didn't get fired and people said I was doing a good job. So I kept at it, then 10 years later here I am still working in the hotel business.

Why did you want to be a part of the Louis T Collection?

I think I was born too late to explore the seas, and born too early to explore the stars. For an adventurous person, this world is very boring. A simple Google search will give you 95% of the answers to most questions. When I was working at a big hotel chain, I felt like the sense of discovery was not there. Everything was laid out in front



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of me with a safe passage. I wanted something more. That's when Louis T Collection came in and provided me with the "unknown" factor. For the first time in longest time, I felt a sense of risk and excitement. I love the fact that Louis T Collection is giving me the chance to create my own epic quest.

What do you bring to the group?

I am not a hotelier. I am an entrepreneur playing the part of hotelier. My background is marketing, computer science and finance. Now if you add in the fact that I am an adrenaline junkie (with many broken bones to prove it) you start to see who I am. I love gadgets and technology, so naturally I am an early adapter. I consider Neil DeGrasse Tyson (astrophysicist) to be my role model. And I don't think many hoteliers can say that. So I guess I am the agent of change. Someone who is comfortable with risk and someone who is not afraid to ask "why?"

How do you view your role within the company?

If I do my job well, I should be invisible. My personal belief is that great leaders play a similar role to engine oil. Yes, oil is boring and not as flashy as pistons, crankshaft, camshaft, etc. But without oil, even the strongest engine will breakdown. The primary role of engine oil is to make sure that all the parts are lubricated and work together without friction. So, that is my role. I make sure all my key players work together with minimum friction.

Can you tell us a little bit about your plans for rebranding the Mantra Samui Resort?

To me it is very simple. I treat owners, guests and employees with the same integrity. Many companies do the first two well, but then only spend a minimum amount of time and effort on employees. Just ask any GM what KPI they look at everyday. I am sure the answer is RevPar, ADR, Occupancy %, Average Check, GOP, etc. But not many will say employee happiness. I want our staff to smile because they are happy, not because managers tell them that they need to smile.

If you want to build a sustainable business, your key should be talent management. Once you have talented people, everything else will work itself out. As I go forward, I am planning to hire the right people for the right job. But to do that, I first need to have working conditions that exceed expectations, so that I can recruit and keep a quality staff. I have already started to update the employee rest area, office equipment, and benefit package. Once the foundation is set and ready, then I will move on to front of the house. My approach to business has always been an inside out method.



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How do you check on employee satisfaction?

Since I do most of my work through my iPhone, I just walk-around. Sounds straightforward but you would be surprised how much you can learn by just visiting different areas of a hotel. Whenever I get a chance, I spark up random conversations to see what's going on. The conversation doesn't have to be about work. In fact, I prefer to talk about anything except work.

If you do this often enough, people will start to trust you and start to share all kinds of information. Statistically, this is similar to getting random samples. It becomes easy to read the overall mood of employees once you have enough conversations.

The more formal method is an employee survey, but I find these to be not as effective because many staff feel pressured to answer in a positive way. People always have ways to find out who answered negatively and that person always gets singled out. It also creates a fake environment where managers try to buy their votes by throwing lavish parties before the survey.

How will Louis T's first property embody Louis T Leonowens?

A sense of discovery is what Louis T Leonowens craved. I believe this resonates with many guests who will come visit our hotels. I want our guests to be surprised and intrigued at what we offer. Guests will feel that hotel is familiar in some ways regarding modern amenities offered, but how we do it will be little different. For example, we do not offer "standard" amenities like fruits baskets and wines. Instead, you will find something unique in each of our hotel locations. And when guests realize this difference that is when they will feel the sense of discovery.

Will this Louis T touch be similar throughout all the Louis T hotels?

Our goal is to make sure people feel there's something unique about each of our hotel locations. Again, going back to this sense of discovery idea. The cookie cutter method is a concept we will never use.