

2024

Top Women in TRAVEL & HOSPITALITY



WELCOME!

Dear Women Leading Travel & Hospitality community,

We're honored and excited to share our fourth annual Top Women in Travel & Hospitality report. The fact there continues to be women in leadership positions (not to mention who are accomplishing incredible things) exemplifies that we're continuing on a path toward positive change. However, that doesn't mean we'll slow down in our commitment for a more inclusive, equitable and diverse industry and world.

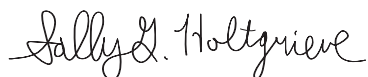
We are grateful to Allianz Partners for sponsoring this report once again.

"It's a privilege for Allianz Partners to support and celebrate the remarkable women who continue to inspire others through their voice, vision and demonstrated leadership," says Emily Hartman, Chief, Business Teams, USA, Allianz Partners. "We find it important to spotlight their personal stories and insights as their journeys undoubtedly serve as a positive and powerful influence on the future of the travel and hospitality industry."

The 2024 honorees represent sectors from across the travel and hospitality industry, including hotel, airline, airport, rail, cruise, tourism, online travel agencies, car rental, shared economies, and more. We're so pleased that many of this year's honorees have already committed to joining us for our second annual national Summit, taking place in Charlotte, NC June 10-12.

We hope we'll see you at the Summit as well, and perhaps in a future edition of this report!

Best,



Sally Holtgrieve

Senior Editor

Women Leading Travel & Hospitality

"The 2024 honorees represent sectors from across the travel and hospitality industry, including hotel, airline, airport, rail, cruise, tourism, online travel agencies, car rental, shared economies, and more."



GILDA PEREZ-ALVARADO

CEO, Orient Express

Chief Strategy Officer, Accor Group

How do you define and communicate your long-term vision for both your personal leadership journey and the success of your organization?

Success requires teamwork, and teamwork requires trust. At the end of the day, you need to have a solid foundation of trust in your organization to achieve optimal results. Passion is equally indispensable. Pursuing what you're truly passionate about intertwines your professional and personal successes. Collaborating with individuals who share this passion creates a powerful force, making it significantly easier to articulate and communicate a long-term vision. By remaining true to the broader goals and core values of an organization, leaders can foster a unified approach which resonates with and inspires those responsible for executing ambitious strategies.

Describe a situation where you encouraged innovation or took a calculated risk in your leadership role.

Once again, trust forms the foundation. The last time I took a risk was starting my new job after 19 years with a previous employer. I decided it was important to change, to evolve and to grow, and how better to do it than to come to Paris and join the dynamic team at Accor.

Share an example of a successful cross-functional partnership you led. How do you build and sustain effective relationships with peers and stakeholders across the organization?

Everything I work on is cross-functional. I firmly believe in adopting a team-of-teams structure – assembling a group of experts across the various disciplines who not only share a common work ethic but also exhibit an attitude of excellence.

What steps do you take to champion diversity and inclusion within your organization, and how do you ensure that your leadership team reflects a broad range of perspectives and backgrounds? How do you measure those efforts?

I've always stressed the importance of diversity in any organization, particularly in terms of background. The greater the diversity in backgrounds, the stronger the team becomes. Respecting your teammates and being open to everyone's ideas and feedback is essential. There's no such thing as a bad question, only the one that's not asked. Ultimately, teams work well if they have the same set of goals and values. At Accor, diversity is not only a crucial part of the company's DNA, but also a central pillar of its wider vision for hospitality and ambition to act as a positive social elevator. Accor is firmly committed to ensuring diversity throughout the organization. With gender diversity, for example, Accor has set a target of ensuring 40 percent female participation on its executive committee, and 45 percent at the management committee level by 2025. The group also regularly measures and reports on progress against these targets to uphold accountability and transparency.

“At Accor, diversity is not only a crucial part of the company's DNA, but also a central pillar of its wider vision for hospitality and ambition to act as a positive social elevator.”



JULIE ARROWSMITH

President and CEO, G6 Hospitality

Can you share a specific instance where you successfully navigated a major change or challenge, highlighting the key lessons learned and how they shaped your leadership approach?

Our company recently transitioned from an organization that owned and managed hotels while also operating a robust franchise business, to one solely focused on a franchise growth strategy. This was an enormous undertaking and affected every aspect of our enterprise. I've found that with these large organizational and business strategy shifts, we as leaders can easily underestimate the time and amount of communication needed to bring along our team members on the journey. People respond to change in so many ways, based on many factors, including their own past experiences with similar changes. While sometimes 100 percent transparency isn't possible, I've learned you simply cannot overcommunicate on the things you can share. Share early and often, while remembering that you and your executive team have probably had a lot more time to digest the change than everyone else. Therefore, plan for the time to bring your people along — win hearts and minds — and always be people focused.

How have mentorship and sponsorship played a role in your professional development, and how do you actively engage in cultivating talent within your organization?

I've been so fortunate in my career to have had advocates along the way. Some were true mentors to me, sharing their experiences and pulling me into projects that would help me develop. However, oftentimes the advocacy takes place behind the scenes based on shared work experiences. I think one of the most important steps as you progress in your career is to get away from your desk and build relationships around the organization. Pick up the phone and have a conversation with a colleague across the country or walk down the hall instead of emailing. Volunteer for committees

and projects. Volunteer in your community. You need to connect with your colleagues and peers and show them who you are.

At G6, we've utilized a mix of formal and informal mentoring programs over the years, and I think the process is invaluable for everyone involved. Our culture is inclusive, collaborative, energetic and provides opportunities to be a part of many business initiatives. This has contributed to a great deal of team member development and career progression with each of us invested in the success of others. In addition to extended mentoring relationships, I've found that micro moments of mentorship where I've provided or received guidance and support on a day-to-day basis are just as valuable as formal programs.

We also have a mix of leadership development programs that range from desktop learning to offsite/multiday courses that focus on new leaders, high-performing teams, influencing people, creating a culture of accountability, and much more.

How do you maintain a healthy work-life harmony, and what strategies do you employ to prioritize your well-being amidst high-level responsibilities? How do you ensure your team does the same?

"Harmony" is a great word, as I don't think "balance" captures the ebb and flow that really happens as you navigate your personal and professional life. I'm very grateful to have worked for a company with a culture that respects the demands of caregiving, community interests, or other commitments outside of work while also providing enormous professional growth. As an executive, I value the opportunity to recharge my batteries with family time, hobbies and exercise in order to be my best when in work mode.

We made the decision post-COVID to be in the office three days a week. This allows flexibility for team members to have time back during the days they don't have to commute and



take advantage of some heads-down quiet time to get things done. I also avoid emails on the weekends unless there's something happening that my team and I have discussed in advance or other urgent matters.

How do you stay informed about industry trends and emerging technologies, and what role does continuous learning play in your ongoing personal and professional development?

I read the usual suspects that a CFO turned CEO probably reads: The Wall Street Journal, Bloomberg. I like to read both CNN, Fox News and BBC to get a varied perspective on the day's news. Of course the hospitality and franchise trades keep me up-to-date on competitors and trends. I really enjoy attending industry conferences and the networking groups with which I'm involved. I find so much value in face-to-face learning and interaction. And, most importantly, my executive committee keeps me updated — there's no way I could keep up with technology trends, HR, operations, etc., at the same level that they do.

I've always been a curious learner, and I think that's contributed to some of my success. I like questions, expect active discussion and desire clarity so that everyone can understand and align on direction. Big, new projects are fun, challenging and drive growth, but you also have to continually evaluate if current processes and strategies are still relevant or need updating. Technology, guest expectations and behaviors, and our operating environment are always evolving, so we have to keep moving, too.



“Our culture is inclusive, collaborative, energetic and provides opportunities to be a part of many business initiatives.”



FAYE ASHBY

*Senior Vice President, Chief Accounting Officer
Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings*

Can you share a specific instance where you successfully navigated a major change or challenge, highlighting the key lessons learned and how they shaped your leadership approach?

In 2020, the cruise industry faced an unparalleled shutdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic, leaving our company without revenue for approximately 500 days as passenger sailings came to a halt. This presented significant financial and operational challenges.

Financial Challenges: Initiating multiple debt and equity capital financings became imperative to secure the company's liquidity and sustain operations. In addition, we implemented salary reductions across the workforce, a difficult but essential step to safeguard the company's financial stability.

Operational Challenges: Transitioning to a remote work environment presented operational hurdles, requiring a reimagining of processes such as closing the books, processing payroll, issuing customer refunds, and managing vendor payments as well as supporting the periodic filing requirements for 10-Qs/10-Ks as a publicly traded entity.

Key lessons learned:

- **Resilience and adaptability:** The team exhibited remarkable resilience and adaptability, emphasizing the importance of fostering a culture that thrives in times of adversity.
- **Empathy and consideration:** Understanding team members' personal challenges and offering support not only boosted morale, but also reinforced a sense of unity and shared purpose.
- **Flexibility in leadership approach:** Embracing flexibility enabled more effective decision making and problem solving in the face of rapid change.
- **Communication is paramount:** Keeping the team informed and engaged fosters trust.

How have mentorship and sponsorship played a role in your professional development, and how do you actively engage in cultivating talent within your organization?

Mentorships and sponsorships have been pivotal in my development. Early in my career, I benefited from the guidance of experienced mentors who provided valuable insights, shared their experiences, and offered constructive feedback. These mentorship relationships not only helped me navigate challenges but also accelerated my learning and skills development.

Likewise, sponsorship played a crucial role in advancing my career. Having advocates who actively supported my professional growth, vouched for my capabilities, and provided opportunities for visibility and advancement significantly contributed to my success.

Recognizing the impact on my own journey, I'm committed to actively cultivating talent within my organization. I participate in mentorship programs as well as engage in informal interactions with junior colleagues offering guidance and advice. Additionally, I advocate for sponsorship initiatives, identifying and supporting individuals with high potential and ensuring they have the visibility and opportunities needed for career advancement.

How do you maintain a healthy work-life harmony, and what strategies do you employ to prioritize your well-being amidst high-level responsibilities? How do you ensure your team does the same?

Maintaining work-life harmony as an executive is vital. I proactively plan and schedule vacations to spend quality time with family and friends. My passion for the spa is well-known to my team, and engaging in wellness activities is integral to setting a positive example. I actively encourage my team to



*“Maintaining
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use their paid time off and personal days. The company’s cruise benefits provide a unique opportunity for the team to unwind. I advocate for the use of these benefits to promote relaxation and well-being as well as provide an opportunity to experience our quality product. My goal is to have an environment where the team feels supported in maintaining a healthy balance between work and personal life.

How do you stay informed about industry trends and emerging technologies, and what role does continuous learning play in your ongoing personal and professional development?

As a CPA, staying current with new developments and accounting standards is a professional requirement that I prioritize. In addition, I actively engage in continuous learning to stay informed about industry trends and emerging technologies, fostering both my personal and professional development. Networking with peers within the hospitality industry is a key aspect of my strategy, providing valuable insights and perspectives.

Attending industry-related events allows me to immerse myself in the latest trends and advancements. Moreover, regular meetings with management across my company and external partners provide opportunities to discuss and share knowledge about evolving industry and technology landscapes.

By combining these efforts, I ensure that I’m well-equipped with the latest information, enabling me to make informed decisions, contribute effectively to my organization, and maintain a proactive approach to my own professional growth.





ASHLY BALDING

Chief Sales Officer, ALHI

Can you share a specific instance where you successfully navigated a major change or challenge, highlighting the key lessons learned and how they shaped your leadership approach?

There are many instances; however, the most recent was on Oct. 26, 2023. An angel told me I needed to see a cardiologist. On Nov. 8, 2023, I discovered that I had a severe leak in my heart. Over 60 percent of my blood flow was regurgitating back into my heart, making it work much harder while providing my body with only 40 percent of new oxygen flow. The flaps of my mitral valve were not closing properly, causing a backward blood flow to my heart. As a result, I was experiencing extreme fatigue and migraines — symptoms I had long been fighting — but I had no idea it was a cardiac issue.

Miraculously, I was able to get in with one of the top cardiologists and underwent open heart surgery on Dec. 20, 2023. There were a few additional challenges after the procedure that kept me in the hospital for 23 days until finally getting a pacemaker on Jan. 10 to get my heart on a normal rhythm. The experience has been life changing and certainly broadened my perspective as I'm grateful for one more day.

My priorities are faith, family and career, in that order, and I encourage the team to have the same priorities in that order. I've learned that we're too blessed to be stressed; life is too precious. Each one of our situations may be different, and we all experience hardships, but you must embrace the hard as there's purpose in the pain. A few key lessons learned through this experience include:

- Gratefulness will help you overcome adversity. Lean into gratefulness.

- Every leader struggles, every leader loses perspective. However, if you remind yourself that leadership is influence — nothing more, nothing less — and if you're determined to be authentic, honest, kind and bold, you will be an influential leader.

- Don't underestimate a woman who has gained a clarity of strength.

- Leadership is powerful, however, to me the most important power I can possess is unseen. Power is integrity, honesty, boundaries, discipline, kindness, and wielding influence like a genuine human, not a boss.

- Now everything I do I want to be about legacy, asking myself, "What is the bigger contribution that I'm making?" This will force me to stay out of ego, urgency and worry.

How have mentorship and sponsorship played a role in your professional development, and how do you actively engage in cultivating talent within your organization?

Having robust mentor/mentee relationships is important to your own self-development. I've been working as a mentor to a young lady from San Diego State University for a little over a year now and previously with Gina Vina for two years through the same program. The ladies taught me that mentorships are a two-way street and if we remove our titles and our "rank" and approach each conversation with the intention of learning how to continue to be better people and learn from each other, we can grow together.

For our organization, time is the best gift you can give as a leader. Spending quality one-to-one time with the team and listening differently to them opens up collaborative dialogue as to how they define success. I love to watch people on our team grow and act as a mentor to help encourage others to get outside their comfort zone and challenge them to think differently and take on additional roles and responsibilities.

"Leadership is powerful, however, to me the most important power I can possess is unseen. Power is integrity, honesty, boundaries, discipline, kindness, and wielding influence like a genuine human, not a boss."

How do you maintain a healthy work-life harmony, and what strategies do you employ to prioritize your well-being amidst high-level responsibilities? How do you ensure your team does the same?

To maintain a healthy work-life balance, it's critical to rely on my priorities: faith, family and career. ALHI, our team, our members and our clients are all things that I'm passionate about, and I take my responsibilities very seriously, but faith and family will always take precedence. I find this has been easier to do throughout the years as I continue to learn to clearly communicate boundaries and expectations. If you're unclear, you're unkind. I remind my team of this often; they too should approach their career with a similar mindset.

Under no scenario should anyone on my team be missing anything family related because of something with work. Thankfully, our president and CEO is just as passionate and clear on this as well. Flexing my schedule has also been very helpful for this as well, as my day-to-day doesn't always follow a traditional eight-to-five schedule. I will often work outside of normal business hours if there are personal appointments or something for my girls that I need to participate in during the middle of the day.

Having come out of my health journey, I will now commit to promoting women's health. Women need to be seen and heard. Aging is such a gift and a phenomenal experience. Let's take menopause out of the closet! We need to be our own advocate. Therefore, how do we encourage our fellow female peers to advocate for themselves and educate others to bring this more to light? I will channel my influence to affect change and I will be committed to leaving a legacy and bringing women's needs, concerns and priorities to the forefront.

How do you stay informed about industry trends and emerging technologies, and what role does continuous learning play in your ongoing personal and professional development?

We're extremely blessed at ALHI to have Mike Dominguez as our president and CEO. Mike is very well respected in our community for his insight, industry knowledge and leadership. He's extremely intelligent and able to articulate clearly and simply what's happening around industry trends and technologies. Personally, I'm a lover of learning. I consciously choose to surround myself with people who are wiser than I and enjoy engaging with them to continue my own self-growth. As a leader you must constantly practice, practice, practice to continue to improve for yourself. When I have the time, I enjoy reading new books, taking advantage of online learning platforms, doing yoga, and tuning in to my weekly podcasts covering a variety of topics.

“We need to be our own advocate. Therefore, how do we encourage our fellow female peers to advocate for themselves and educate others to bring this more to light? I will channel my influence to affect change and I will be committed to leaving a legacy and bringing women's needs, concerns and priorities to the forefront.”



RENE BANGLESDORF
Founder, The Aviation Collective

Can you share a specific instance where you successfully navigated a major change or challenge, highlighting the key lessons learned and how they shaped your leadership approach?

One of the challenges I faced was having to fire a friend. We knew each other before she started working for me, and I think there were some unspoken expectations on both sides. It was painful. What I learned is that I need to be extremely clear with people who work for me — e.g., developing KPIs, setting boundaries, having a regular cadence for two-way feedback that addresses problems before they become a petri dish for drama and hurt feelings. This sets all of us up for success.

How have mentorship and sponsorship played a role in your professional development, and how do you actively engage in cultivating talent within your organization?

Mentorship and sponsorship have been critical to my success as a leader (probably No. 2 behind failure, which always seems to be the best teacher). Sponsors have played a major role in inviting me to the table. My mentorship relationships have mostly been peer-to-peer, which is incredibly valuable. I've also embraced coaching as a professional development tool. In fact, I became a business coach because of the impact coaching had on my leadership.

How do you maintain a healthy work-life harmony, and what strategies do you employ to prioritize your well-being amidst high-level responsibilities? How do you ensure your team does the same?

Routines work as a type of infrastructure for my day/week/month and keep me from getting lost or overwhelmed. If I can revert back to the next task in the routine, I usually can get myself on track — personally or professionally.

Reflection really helps me keep things in perspective. I use a form of after-action review at the end of every week and after any project. Keeping that gratitude practice keeps me from harping on what I could have done differently and missing the victories that were embedded.

Both of these practices give my team structure and encouragement, and I find it brings out the best in all of us.

How do you stay informed about industry trends and emerging technologies, and what role does continuous learning play in your ongoing personal and professional development?

I go to a lot of in-person events. Some are industry events, some are not. I keep up-to-date on industry news and emerging trends at both. I pull from my journalism background and ask lots of questions. I believe if we aren't growing, we're atrophying, so I'm always trying to learn something new!





LAURA HODGES BETHGE

President, Celebrity Cruises

How do you define and communicate your long-term vision for both your personal leadership journey and the success of your organization?

I'm a big believer in the importance of articulating a clear and compelling vision. This involves defining the strategic objectives and core values that will guide the efforts, alongside my leadership team. Communication is key, and I strive to ensure that our collective vision is not only understood but also embraced by the entire brand. Then, I use every avenue — team meetings, town halls, one-on-one discussions — to reinforce a sense of shared purpose and

direction to ensure we're staying aligned and on-track. This is a team sport, and doing it together is what makes all the difference.

Describe a situation where you encouraged innovation or took a calculated risk in your leadership role.

We're constantly innovating at Celebrity Cruises and are currently in development for the final ship in our Edge Series, Xcel. In that process, we use consumer insights and our guest feedback to guide our way. The challenge is to deliver on all our guests' passion points, and then to take it a step further and elevate those passion points to a level that they couldn't dream up themselves. We're in the midst of that now with our exemplary product development team and are rewarding them every step of the way for pushing the boundaries and reaching out of their comfort zone to deliver another game changer for the brand.

I lead by example, sharing instances where I've taken calculated risks and learned from the outcomes. I strive to foster a culture that embraces creativity and risk by recognizing and rewarding innovative ideas that are rooted in consumer insights, providing resources for experimentation, and creating a space where team members feel empowered to share and implement their creative solutions.

Share an example of a successful cross-functional collaboration you led. How do you build and sustain effective relationships with peers and stakeholders across the organization?

I recently boarded a Celebrity Cruises ship for a week-long sailing with my entire management team where we experienced every aspect of the ship together from both the guest and crew perspective. We were servers, cleaners, concierges, bar servers, room attendants, hotel management,



and guests of all ages. We worked and played in new ways on the ship, and then, back at the office, we used our shared experiences to set a course for both improving the guest and crew experience and dreaming about new experiences we could create that our guests would covet and love. Building and sustaining effective relationships with colleagues at all levels is really important for cross-functional success. You have to be able to actively listen, understand perspectives, find common ground, and then propel the work forward together.

What steps do you take to champion diversity and inclusion within your organization, and how do you ensure that your leadership team reflects a broad range of perspectives and backgrounds? How do you measure those efforts?

Diversity and inclusion are in our DNA at the Royal Caribbean Group. We employ more than 100,000 people from 60-plus nationalities. And then, of course, we welcome aboard guests from all around the world, too. Starting from a base of great diversity, we're able to carry this through all aspects of our operations. I'm especially proud of the efforts our company has taken to bring more women into our marine engineering and operations. We actively champion these principles through inclusive hiring practices, creating welcoming work environments, and supporting affinity groups within the organization. We have a mantra of continuous improvement throughout every aspect of our business and we regularly review, refine and enhance our work to remain a leader in this area.





BETH BUTZLAFF

*Senior Vice President, Partner Relations,
Ensemble*

How do you define and communicate your long-term vision for both your personal leadership journey and the success of your organization?

The long-term vision of my personal leadership involves setting clear direction, guiding others, and fostering an environment of growth and adaptability to achieve sustained success over time. During my career, my leadership style has evolved into what I describe as a “guide” philosophy. This style emphasizes supporting team members rather than dictating tasks. I’ve found that this approach nurtures confidence, promotes a collaborative environment, and creates a sense of shared responsibility within the team. As a guide leader, I focus on helping the team navigate challenges, develop skills and achieve success rather than simply giving directions. On occasion, the journey to success is a straight line from point A to point B, however, in most cases success is a path that includes peaks, valleys, twists and turns. My contribution to this success and long-term vision is to simply guide the team to summit success together.

Describe a situation where you encouraged innovation or took a calculated risk in your leadership role.

Innovation and creation are core elements to who I am personally and professionally. Original methods of thinking and

imaginative ideation have always been an integral part of how I approach my leadership roles. The “don’t fix what isn’t broken” mentality can create predictable and safe outcomes, but these outcomes aren’t necessarily the best outcomes. In an industry that can, at times, be referred to as a “sea of sameness,” it’s essential to create an environment that tests the boundaries and breaks the norms. That’s why when I challenged my team to generate unique and outside-the-standard solutions, I knew I had to establish a workplace that wasn’t just about success but also about failure. We can’t succeed without failing, and to win, failures and unfavorable outcomes are to be expected. The key is to fail fast, learn quickly and pivot effectively. In this way, the perception of “failure” shifts into badges of honor that include courage and grit. I’m proud to say, as a team, we continue to gather these badges and continue to achieve new successful milestones.

Share an example of a successful cross-functional collaboration you led. How do you build and sustain effective relationships with peers and stakeholders across the organization?

Cross-functional collaboration should be standard practice in all organizations as it’s crucial for a company to accumulate diverse skills and expertise from different points of view. I don’t think a day goes by within our organization that there isn’t collaboration between departments and/or stakeholders.





The partnership of sales and marketing teams is a perfect example of the importance of syncing efforts. Sales and marketing traditionally have always been considered a symbiotic relationship; marketing generates interest and awareness, creating a foundation for sales to capitalize on. Without cross-functional collaboration, sales wouldn't be able to provide critical feedback to refine marketing strategies and marketing would create products in a vacuum. The success of sales and marketing are dependent upon each other. But in order to break barriers and silos while creating a cross-functional environment, it's essential to establish a foundation of trust. Trust ensures stakeholders that needs are being met and each other's contributions are equally essential to success. Trust is the key to collaboration, which builds bridges across departments and interests.

What steps do you take to champion diversity and inclusion within your organization, and how do you ensure that your leadership team reflects a broad range of perspectives and backgrounds? How do you measure those efforts?

“We can’t succeed without failing, and to win, failures and unfavorable outcomes are to be expected. The key is to fail fast, learn quickly and pivot effectively.”

Diversity and inclusion are the most important initiatives in today's work community. All efforts to create a safe and diverse environment within the workplace should be prioritized and honored. Some of the steps I commit to in diversity and inclusion include the following:

- 1. Setting the tone:** Leading by example, demonstrating a commitment to diversity and inclusion in all aspects of work.
- 2. Education and training:** Uphold extensive annual mandatory training to enhance diversity and inclusion awareness.
- 3. Open communication:** Foster an environment where employees feel comfortable expressing diverse perspectives
- 4. Continuous improvement:** Staying committed to ongoing efforts by adapting strategies based on feedback and changes in the organization's dynamics
- 5. Diverse hiring practices:** Ensure that all new positions have a wide and diverse pool of applicants to provide fair representation at all levels.

Measuring efforts of diversity awareness is multifaceted and includes annual diversity training, quarterly anonymous employee surveys, and introspectively evaluating a team's diverse representation and communication.



TORI CHIVERS, CMP

*Vice President, Meetings and Events,
MGM Resorts International*

Can you share a specific instance where you successfully navigated a major change or challenge, highlighting the key lessons learned and how they shaped your leadership approach?

This past November, Las Vegas hosted the inaugural Formula 1 Las Vegas Grand Prix, and our team had the pleasure of opening The Bellagio Fountain Club, a one-of-a-kind, exclusive and elevated experience for our top customers. Within a very limited timeframe and footprint, the venue had to be designed, constructed and opened. The space was multifaceted with several internal and external partners, with a quick turnaround that limited our planning process when delivering a live and seamless experience for over 2,000 guests.

I quickly learned the importance of assembling a high-performing team of diverse talent, hand-selected for their unique strengths and skills with an emphasis on empowering them to make their own decisions. Intentional placement ensured each team member was positioned where their abilities aligned seamlessly with the demands of their role. This deliberate approach enhanced satisfaction and cultivated a collaborative environment.

Watching the success of the team increased my commitment to focusing on their individual strengths and strategic placement. Giving true autonomy to the team fostered open communication and opportunities for coaching that I've ingrained into my leadership approach, along with building and nurturing the right team and cultivating a culture of excellence, innovation and mutual success.

How have mentorship and sponsorship played a role in your professional development, and how do you actively engage in cultivating talent within your organization?

Mentors and sponsors are incredibly beneficial. I believe it's important to have a diverse group of mentors/sponsors that play different roles and provide different viewpoints. I've been fortunate to be part of a company that emphasizes the importance of sponsorship, allowing me the opportunity to participate in programs that connect me with key leaders of our organization.

Beyond this, I've been incredibly grateful to build a network of organic mentors who have taken an unbiased interest in developing my potential and furthering my career, pushing my skillset beyond my own beliefs and nurturing my confidence. They've encouraged and coached me to take on opportunities outside of my day-to-day duties that have allowed me to grow into the position I am today. I'm also proud to have a trusted mentor that while building me up, also provides unfiltered feedback — allowing the opportunity to continually self-reflect and grow.

I actively engage in cultivating talent by creating a supportive environment where mentees feel empowered to seek advice. I intentionally make myself available to share my experiences, discuss industry nuances, and develop career road maps. Beyond our company, I participate in mentorship programs within our community to seek and develop future hospitality talent.

How do you maintain a healthy work-life harmony, and what strategies do you employ to prioritize your well-being amidst high-level responsibilities? How do you ensure your team does the same?

In my role, maintaining harmony is a major factor, and understanding how to toggle priorities is how I find that harmony. If you recognize that a day or week may be heavily focused on work due to a large project, there needs to be





space and time for re-energizing yourself. How you re-energize needs to be authentic to you, not necessarily what you read in a book or find in the latest trend. Spending time understanding what reboots you is pertinent to a healthy work-life balance. For some, they may find peace by reading, yoga or forest bathing, while for others it's by walking down 5th Avenue in New York City. Whatever it is, it needs to truly fuel YOU.

Servant leadership and grace are two strategies I employ. Servant leadership focuses on being supportive of needs vs. being in control of them. My goal is to provide my team with responsibilities and growth opportunities while being available to listen, empathize and coach. This creates a healthy environment for both the team and me. My other philosophy is to practice having grace with myself and others, understanding through servant leadership when those around me need support. Lastly, I always try to remember that it's important to be gentle with yourself. I find we're toughest on ourselves and need to allow ourselves just as much grace and patience as we do with others.



How do you stay informed about industry trends and emerging technologies, and what role does continuous learning play in your ongoing personal and professional development?

I strongly believe in the power of travel, curiosity, and having an open mind to everything around you. Hospitality spans across so many professional verticals, so it's important to attend meetings and events that do the same. Some of our greatest innovations have been inspired by trends in other lines of business. For example, SXSW has done an incredible job melding several tracks into one event. There's inspiration all around at SXSW, from experiential marketing, music, film, food and beverage trends, change champions and diverse keynote speakers. If you're aware and present, you'll see inspiration within the same verticals along your daily activities. Be curious and enjoy observing. Sometimes when learning about something new that I may not think is relevant is when the lightbulb goes off and I think this could be transferred and a real game changer.

The beauty of working in hospitality is that at the core of it, we're just taking care of people and providing experiences that allow them to disconnect. Finding moments for me to disconnect allows me the opportunity to learn, stay current and create.



PATRICIA PAGE-CHAMPION

Senior Vice President and Global Commercial Director, Hilton

Can you share a specific instance where you successfully navigated a major change or challenge, highlighting the key lessons learned and how they shaped your leadership approach?

I took a traditional route into hospitality, attending hotel school before embarking upon a graduate program. In the early days of my career, I transitioned through pretty much every role within a hotel. My goal was to become a general manager — a position I was offered the day after I found out I was pregnant. At the time, flexible working in this field was unheard of and, ultimately, I turned the job down for that reason. It was a difficult decision but a career-changing moment.

I took a revenue management role within the same company. As many women do, I was keen to show that I was still ambitious and committed to my work. Therefore, during my maternity leave, I had a computer installed at home and completed the hotel's trading forecast each week. When I returned from maternity leave, I worked reduced hours in the hotel but held down the same full-time job completing any outstanding work at night once my daughter was settled. Although this gave me more flexibility, my employer at the time only paid me for the hours I physically spent in the hotel. Hours of homeworking went unacknowledged.

So that's when I moved to Hilton, a company willing to truly consider flexible working, which was not the norm in 2000. It took a risk on me and as they say the rest is history; 24 years later I've never once regretted that choice. My career has grown with my family, and I've been given many opportunities to progress.

Along the way I learned that family comes first in whatever guise that takes. Women are carers, they are mothers, they are sisters, they are supporters of others, and that's hard to balance alongside a career. Our role as leaders is to ensure that we can enable women to navigate through these times, support them to be successful and, most importantly, not write them off. Statistics across our industry show we lose so many talented women at this point in their lives and then they lose the confidence to return at the same level.

We must create an inclusive culture where every team member can achieve their aspirations, where they can bring their authentic selves to work and be successful throughout the lifecycle of their career.

At Hilton I feel very privileged to be able to influence and support our team through some great initiatives, which include flexible working, dual maternity and paternity leave, job shares, mentoring and sponsorship schemes, as well as being part of our community where we enable crucial conversations to make positive changes.

How have mentorship and sponsorship played a role in your professional development, and how do you actively engage in cultivating talent within your organization?

I believe everyone should have their own "board of directors" who can provide mentorship and honest advice, who can be advocates and sponsors along the way. I'm very lucky to have a group of these people both inside and outside Hilton who have certainly made an impact on me and helped me be a better thought leader. I've sought their advice on career progression, navigating change and in some cases turning down promotions. It can be a superpower to have trusted allies who enable honest conversations that help you make balanced decisions.

I also believe being part of a network really makes a difference. For the last five years at Hilton I've been the senior lead for our Women's Team Member Resource Group (one of a number of resource groups). Our aim is to create a collective culture to support the advancement of women at



Hilton through a network of engagement, empowerment and development which ensures every woman can thrive.

We focus on providing a support network, promoting allyship, inspiring growth and demonstrating career possibilities. To me this has developed into a community that allows a safe forum for team members to share ideas, challenges and, of course, to support each other. We showcase a diverse range of inspirational personal stories and achievements to show what's possible. We also focus on health and wellness to support our team both personally and professionally.

We're proud of this work and its impact on our team members. In 2023, for the first time Hilton was named No.1 World's Best Workplace (by Great Places to Work) and for the last five consecutive years it has been the Best Workplace for Women in the USA and across many other countries. It's also ranked No. 1 for Employee Resource Groups, People With Disabilities, and ESG.

How do you maintain a healthy work-life harmony, and what strategies do you employ to prioritize your well-being amidst high-level responsibilities? How do you ensure your team does the same?

This isn't easy, but it should start with finding a job that you love. In today's world you're going to be working a long time, so if you don't love what you do then find something that really inspires you. Life is short, don't waste it.

Then it's important to set an example for your team when it comes to balancing work and home commitments. As a leader, your team will look to you to set the tone. If they see someone who is constantly working, not respecting boundaries, and not taking time out, they will assume that this is a prerequisite for the job. However, if they see someone who works really hard and delivers great results, but also makes time for the other things that are important to them, they're more likely to feel empowered to act in the same way.

This means different things to different people — it may mean working flexible hours so they can spend quality time

with children after school; it may mean completely switching off during the weekend. It may mean taking a walk or working out in the middle of the day.

To do this, you need to empower the team around you to take the lead and feel confident in their ability to make decisions and drive things forward when you're not around. Empowering your team will not only enable you to properly switch off when you need to, but it will also help propel others forward, giving them confidence by showing they're trusted to take the lead.

For me it also means making the most of time, which is one of our most precious resources. Take time to look up and smell the roses. Have a bucket list of small and large things you want to do or see. My leisure time includes walking my dog, reading, keeping fit, seeing friends and traveling — plus each year trying to do something new. This year I'm learning to play the piano.

How do you stay informed about industry trends and emerging technologies, and what role does continuous learning play in your ongoing personal and professional development?

Everyone learns and absorbs information differently so find what works for you. I like short, sharp articles and in today's online world it's easy to subscribe to great industry publications, some daily and others with monthly updates that keep you connected.

I'm also fortunate enough to have a brilliant team around me from whom I learn every day. We share information and discuss it as part of our daily business rhythms.

In addition, networking across the industry, being part of groups and mentoring others inside and outside the industry can give you so many rich insights.

Lastly, we also have the benefit of so much online learning be it part of our Hilton University or other leadership courses working with others. This last year I've been doing an executive learning course which has really ignited my interest in further developing my skills for the future.





ANN CHRISTENSON

*Chief Human Resources Officer,
Aimbridge Hospitality*

Can you share a specific instance where you successfully navigated a major change or challenge, highlighting the key lessons learned and how they shaped your leadership approach?

Challenge is my middle name. If you want to ignite something in me, tell me it's not possible. One of the greatest challenges I had in my career that truly helped define who I am as a leader today came when I was in healthcare. I was four months into my role as the vice president of HR for the healthcare system and the CEO called to tell me he was restructuring the leadership team, and that I would now be responsible for not only HR but also all administrative services, from security to facilities to our laundry and incineration business and even construction management. I remember vividly my first thought at that moment was, "What do I know about any of these things and why does he think I can lead all of them?" The greatest challenge in that role was that the construction team I was

overseeing was also the team leading the construction of a \$494 million medical center. That experience and exposure, and the trust in me and my abilities by the CEO, shaped who I am today. I had to think beyond the traditional idea of HR. Now I'm someone who will use my voice, see opportunity, and not be afraid to take on new challenges.

Today I don't consider my job to simply be HR. I'm driving the business of Aimbridge forward. Some days that's the people component, sometimes it's more operational or transformational. As a strategic leader in third-party hospitality management, I know our best resource is our people, and if we don't have the right strategies in place to develop, attract, retain and grow our talent, we will never be what we promised to be to our owners.

How have mentorship and sponsorship played a role in your professional development, and how do you actively engage in cultivating talent within your organization?

The best part of being in HR is watching others have their moment in the sun and opportunity to grow. As a leader in HR, I'm in a place where I get to see talent across the entire organization. I'm not focused on just one department or division. There's something really special about helping to open doors for people and directly mentor them, to make them better at their craft, and to help them see what's possible. Every company I've ever been part of has invested heavily in mentorship, including Aimbridge, and that support from others is also how I got to where I am today. I've also lived this myself. My career started because of an internship and every step of the way has been supported by people who have been willing to give me a chance to do something I never dreamed of. I think it's so important to give back to others and continue that cycle, so I've committed to helping people see their own individual path to success in any role they might have with the company.

Another part of this in HR is sometimes being able to watch this growth behind the scenes. I cannot tell you how many people I've been able to see take those important steps in their career because of decisions I've made, and they have no idea I helped contribute to that journey. It's powerful to influence the lives of others when they don't even know what role you had in doing so.

"I think it's so important to give back to others and continue that cycle, so I've committed to helping people see their own individual path to success in any role they might have with the company."

How do you maintain a healthy work-life harmony, and what strategies do you employ to prioritize your well-being amidst high-level responsibilities? How do you ensure your team does the same?

I've always felt like work and life should blend together so you can be healthy, happy and fulfilled. What matters most has changed for me over time, and my focus is on my kids first and foremost. I'm raising five boys who have given me an entirely different perspective and purpose in life. I have a busy, big job, which I love, and I'm a better mom to my kids and a better partner to my husband because I'm doing something I love.

When you think about how to blend all of that together, you're always going to feel like you could be doing more for someone. Sometimes you're making time for work calls when your kids are having fun and playing in the background, and sometimes you're making time for one of your kid's football games and missing the call. One word I always feel fits for Aimbridge is family. Our leaders are focused on what it means to be a family to our team and spend time with their own family. I make sure to prioritize those things.

When you model that behavior, others within your organization are going to see how you find time to have these priorities. It's important to me to show that to my team. Work is always going to be there, but we're also people with personal lives and things to do and we can't pretend we don't have that. I want to bring that into my team and be transparent so people know the distractions are there sometimes and you've got to find a way to make different things happen all at once. You find a way to survive in chaos.

How do you stay informed about industry trends and emerging technologies, and what role does continuous learning play in your ongoing personal and professional development?

In HR you have to be connected and pay attention to all that's going on around you to understand what people need and want from their jobs. I love being on top of global trends around people, and people technology in particular. One of the things I've gone all-in on at Aimbridge is digital HR transformation. The biggest investment we make aside from people is our technology suite and understanding ways we can give our employees a better experience and a better life. Aimbridge was a trendsetter in the hospitality industry with a shift-sharing initiative, which helped to "gigify" shifts at hotels following a more global trend. Our company wasn't the first to do it, but I'm proud that we were the first to find a way to make this work in hospitality. Our people wanted more flexibility and I spearheaded this technology to make it happen. Now I'm looking at ways to use AI in the people segment because we know the jobs we offer are going to change and transform through that technology. I want to help our teams become more efficient and effective, and with AI there's this open door to potentially offer different services, tools and experiences to employees that enables everyone to be better and make a greater impact.

"I love being on top of global trends around people, and people technology in particular. One of the things I've gone all-in on at Aimbridge is digital HR transformation. The biggest investment we make aside from people is our technology suite and understanding ways we can give our employees a better experience and a better life."



ANDREA DEMARCO

President, Regent Seven Seas Cruises

How do you define and communicate your long-term vision for both your personal leadership journey and the success of your organization?

I'm a people-centric leader and always look to identify people's potential and grow them. I'm also a strategic leader who sets a long-term vision and a road map to achieve our goals. I have an amazing leadership team with diverse perspectives and it's super important to me to involve them in the long-term strategy for our company. I hold multiple planning sessions each year so we can outline our key priorities, evolve initiatives as needed, and execute. Communication is key and having the entire team rallied behind one set of goals leads to success. We hold quarterly town halls and I send monthly emails to my team to keep everyone up-to-date and to reinforce our vision.

Describe a situation where you encouraged innovation or took a calculated risk in your leadership role. How do you foster a culture that embraces creativity and risk within your team or organization?

I always encourage my team to think outside the box and try new things. Innovation happens when you push yourself to do things differently. When different issues arise, I ask my team to brainstorm together to problem solve. I urge my team to continue to be innovative and find new solutions to problems or new ways to enhance our product. I also think demonstrating my willingness to take calculated risks and showcasing my own creativity encourages others to do the same.

Share an example of a successful cross-functional collaboration you led. How do you build and sustain effective relationships with peers and stakeholders across the organization?

As Regent's president, I'm involved in numerous cross-functional collaborations, leading diverse teams toward common goals. For instance, special promotions require seamless coordination between revenue, sales, marketing, and reservations. Similarly, launching a new ship involved close collaboration among our operations, events teams, and public relations. In both instances, my role was to provide support and guidance to these highly skilled teams, ensuring that each function works cohesively. Building and sustaining effective relationships with peers and stakeholders across the organization is ingrained in my leadership approach. I try to create an environment where cross-functional partnerships thrive, leading to the overall success of the company.

What steps do you take to champion diversity and inclusion within your organization, and how do you ensure that your leadership team reflects a broad range of perspectives and backgrounds? How do you measure those efforts?

Our company is committed to fostering an inclusive workforce where diverse backgrounds are represented, engaged and empowered to generate and execute on innovative ideas. I believe people are our most important asset. As such, identifying, recruiting and retaining top talent and incentivizing existing and future team members is critical to our long-term success. As a leader it's important to me to provide my team with opportunities to grow and develop skills and experience, regardless of job role, division or geographic location.

I'm a part of Elevate, the employee resource group of women leaders (senior directors and above) based out of the corporate headquarters. The Elevate group meets frequently for support, engagement and personal development. Sessions vary from networking within this group to self-development offerings focused on topics such as negotiation, personal brand and self-care.





CAROLYN DOYON

President and CEO, North America and the Caribbean, Club Med

Can you share a specific instance where you successfully navigated a major change or challenge, highlighting the key lessons learned and how they shaped your leadership approach?

Like the majority of my industry colleagues, the COVID-19 pandemic has been the biggest challenge that I've had to navigate. As a company, we had to figure out how to maintain Club Med's mid- to long-term strategy, while managing the ongoing crisis by protecting our cash flow, taking care of our teams and clients. To do this, we reduced costs as much as possible, but also significantly increased our internal communications. In a crisis, you have to overcommunicate to your team (at every level of the organization), give clear priorities, provide reassurance, answer questions, and be a visible and accessible leader. My advice to anyone going through a crisis: trust your gut and don't be afraid of taking risks, even if you don't have all the information. I'm happy to say Club Med has made it to the other side of the pandemic stronger than before the crisis thanks to a sustainable and profitable business model.

How have mentorship and sponsorship played a role in your professional development, and how do you actively engage in cultivating talent within your organization?

I've been very fortunate throughout my career to be surrounded by talented professionals who were also very generous with their time. Early on, I understood the importance of asking questions and getting out of my comfort zone to grow. This is where mentorship was key for me — finding someone to share their own experience and give valuable neutral advice when you need a new perspective. I've also been fortunate to work for organizations that empower their managers. In these roles, I took on responsibilities very early on, which allowed me not only to

build my confidence, but also to make mistakes and, most importantly, learn from them.

Since these mentorships have been instrumental in molding my path, it was natural for me to do the same for other young professionals. I was a college lecturer in addition to an adviser, judge and mentor for LaSalle University's tourism graduate program. This focus on talent development also translates to my work with Club Med, where we believe in surrounding ourselves with the best talent and retaining them. Success is a team effort. You can be the best leader and have the best product, but if you don't have the right people surrounding you, you're not going to succeed.

How do you maintain a healthy work-life harmony, and what strategies do you employ to prioritize your well-being amidst high-level responsibilities? How do you ensure your team does the same?

I believe a healthy work-life balance is key to having a happier and successful life. To achieve this, I realized that you have to let go of perfection in all areas and be surrounded by a talented and competent team at work and a strong support system at home. With this as a foundation, you can concentrate on having work-life balance. At Club Med, we encourage our team to have a healthy work-life balance and have implemented a remote work policy as well as a "workation" benefit that allows our employees to work remotely from one of our resorts for a week.

How do you stay informed about industry trends and emerging technologies, and what role does continuous learning play in your ongoing personal and professional development?

As an executive of a global hospitality brand, it's essential that I stay tapped into what's happening in both our industry and the world at large. I stay informed with daily worldwide news briefings, through my team, and our internal worldwide press coverage. I also use social media like LinkedIn for news, industry insights and networking. When I want to dive deeper into a specific topic, I'll look up podcasts (which are handy when I'm on the go and multitasking). I try to attend and speak at multiple conferences throughout the year in order to network and learn from other travel and hospitality professionals in a more personal and engaging way.





KARA FRANKER
CEO, Visit Estes Park

Can you share a specific instance where you successfully navigated a major change or challenge, highlighting the key lessons learned and how they shaped your leadership approach?

When I first took the helm as CEO of Visit Estes Park in Colorado, the list of challenges ran longer than the movie “Oppenheimer.” To give you some context, one leader in our industry said I had to un-sink the Titanic, while another called it a dumpster fire. The county government was about to yank funding, the residents were weary of tourists in their town

and Rocky Mountain National Park, the stakeholders had lost confidence in the organization, the local newspaper only ran negative headlines, and one of the ad agencies at the time was pre-billing for work it never completed — it was a free-for-all of some bad stuff. Oh, and it was my first time at the rodeo as a CEO, so I was unproven and green.

The silver lining was that I had a young staff who was willing to give me a chance and a stalwart board that believed in me. I did my own audit of every line of business in the organization, and I plugged into Destinations International through its CDME program, which parlayed access to some of the best minds in the industry. When I realized I didn’t need to reinvent the proverbial wheel and all I had to do was alien-style suck out the brainpower of those incredible leaders who had gone before me, it changed everything in my approach. It wasn’t about me and what I could or couldn’t accomplish alone. Instead, it was about leveraging a talented team, a supportive board, and industry knowledge into a detailed plan to catapult Visit Estes Park into an example of best practices. Whether we’ve achieved that or not isn’t for me to say, but I’m very proud of the opportunity to lead an organization from a low point to one that aims for the tallest peaks.

How have mentorship and sponsorship played a role in your professional development, and how do you actively engage in cultivating talent within your organization?

I believe leaders have a duty to build up talent from within. Throughout my career, I’ve been fortunate to have had a few key folks who generously shared their wisdom and guidance with me, and unfortunately, I’ve also been on the receiving end of those who tried to torpedo me along the way. I have a heightened sense of the power behind the leadership role and how it can crush or cultivate. I like to give



my team challenging projects and then sing their praises from the mountaintops at completion. Building confidence through encouragement is a driving force. Feedback is critical. And I love to highlight individual contributions and accomplishments. I support risk-taking because you don't know if you don't try, and a team that's engulfed by fear is completely stifled. My philosophy is everyone is in process, so let's grow together.

How do you maintain a healthy work-life harmony, and what strategies do you employ to prioritize your well-being amidst high-level responsibilities? How do you ensure your team does the same?

My favorite quote is “ideas are nice, execution is everything.” Which is code for: I like to work and I struggle with balance. Time management and flexible work arrangements have been game changers for me. I can churn out so much more output when I'm not bogged down by too many meetings or a run-of-the-mill corporate schedule. And then when I feel better about what I accomplished, I can be more present during my off times when I'm with my family. Hence, I feel more balanced and in control of my day-to-day life.

I believe the same principles work for my team. We have a great office that overlooks Lake Estes with towering, beautiful mountains in the background, but everyone has the choice of when they go to it. Some go in a few times a week and they live locally, but others live outside the region and come a few times a year. I essentially don't care when, how or where people work, as long as they're killing it. And my team kills it. That flexible approach to daily schedules doesn't work for every destination in the DMO space and certainly not for many hospitality organizations because in-person touchpoints are critical, but it works well for Visit Estes Park.

How do you stay informed about industry trends and emerging technologies, and what role does continuous learning play in your ongoing personal and professional development?

I love to learn and soak up as much new info as I can because I genuinely believe it helps me add value to the organization and my team. I have my juris doctor, so to maintain my law license I complete continuing legal education credits regularly. I recently received an executive certificate from MIT for a class called “Artificial Intelligence: Implications for Business Strategy,” and it helped me formulate the plan we would implement to build two white-label AI tools — one is consumer-facing through Matador Network's GuideGeek and the other is Intentful's HappyPlaces+, which we use as an internal tool to help boost team efficiency. I read a ton of travel industry publications, but I also devour a lot of digital editions of newspapers, both national and regional, on a daily basis. And I like Morning Consult, McKinsey & Company, as well as the technology insights that MIT sends out. As I mentioned earlier, I highly recommend Destinations International's CDME program for anyone on the DMO side of the industry. It has been such a game changer for me and my career trajectory.





DAWN GALLAGHER

*Chief Commercial Officer,
Crescent Hotels & Resorts*

Can you share a specific instance where you successfully navigated a major change or challenge, highlighting the key lessons learned and how they shaped your leadership approach?

Throughout my career, there have been instances where I've been overlooked for promotions, sometimes due to educational qualifications and other times likely because of my innovative approach. One specific experience significantly influenced my mindset, prompting me to set clear goals and achieve them strategically, positioning myself as the undeniable choice for future opportunities.

Let me set the stage: During a reorganization in a previous company, the emergence of division vice president roles presented a competitive scenario. I was up against an evenly matched counterpart, both of us starting on the same day with similar responsibilities overseeing the highest revenue-producing regions.

During my interview, conducted by my then-current boss, I came prepared with statistics on revenue performance and sales productivity. However, the brief, approximately five-minute meeting and my boss's demeanor made it clear that I wasn't going to secure the role. When he later communicated the decision, I actively sought specific feedback to understand how I could improve for future opportunities. While he couldn't pinpoint the reasons for

his decision, I knew that my inclination toward change and progress, challenging the status quo, played a role.

Determined to enhance my prospects, I set ambitious goals, volunteering for projects and undertaking companywide initiatives to increase visibility and showcase substantial accomplishments. Ultimately, these goals not only paved the way for my success in leaving that company, but also led to my role as the leader of the commercial division in another organization.

The key takeaway from this experience is the importance of aligning with a company and executive leadership team that shares similar goals. While gaining diverse experiences is valuable, reaching the highest levels of professional success requires working within an environment that fosters alignment and allows your potential to flourish without artificial constraints.

How have mentorship and sponsorship played a role in your professional development, and how do you actively engage in cultivating talent within your organization?

Mentorship, whether formal or informal, has played a large role in my life. As I was coming up through the ranks, I had role models in the field that I looked up to, took advice from, and followed their lead. I was blessed to work with a legend, Jean Spaulding, who was my greatest mentor. She tamed me where I needed taming, led me, supported me, and gave me space to be successful.

At Crescent, we have a program called Crescent RISE, connecting mentors and mentees across the company and at all levels. I currently have the privilege of mentoring a senior sales manager aspiring to step into her first leadership role. This initiative not only strengthens our talent pool but also





How do you maintain a healthy work-life harmony, and what strategies do you employ to prioritize your well-being amidst high-level responsibilities? How do you ensure your team does the same?

I like the phrase work-life harmony. As I was coming up through the ranks it was work-life balance, and for a working mother it was a life that I coined the phrase overcommitted. There were times I was overcommitted at work, and other times I had to be overcommitted in my family life. Nothing is perfect; we all do our best and sometimes that means we suffer.

Growing up as the middle child, with an older sister just 10 months ahead and a younger sister two years behind, taught me the importance of finding my path early for success. My inherent competitiveness, evident in my love for challenging anyone on my Apple Watch, goes beyond formal competitions — I find myself competing even when there's no structured contest. This daily workout routine serves as a stress-reduction strategy,

fueled by the desire to outperform someone in my group.

Competition is healthy. Even if you don't win, the act of competing brings out adrenaline that drives excitement and removes burnout. This spirit of competition isn't confined to my personal life; it extends to our Crescent commercial team. We share a collective goal of investing in ourselves to gain clarity on our objectives and evolve into performance coaches for our teams.

How do you stay informed about industry trends and emerging technologies, and what role does continuous learning play in your ongoing personal and professional development?

Staying ahead of industry trends and embracing emerging technologies is a constant focus. As someone driven by competition, I'm always looking at industry trends to see if they're adaptable to parts of our business. By recognizing the pivotal role that emerging technologies play in shaping our future, driving revenue and capturing market share more swiftly, we prioritize staying at the forefront.

In today's landscape, top talent expects advanced technology, making it a high priority for recruitment efforts. At Crescent, we've established a cross-divisional technology committee to ensure we adopt the best approach to technology integration.

Continuous learning for me is very important. I see it as a vital aspect of my role as a leader. I strive to set an example for my team by engaging in master classes, listening to performance coaching podcasts, and reading books that provide the performance edge needed for success.

“While gaining diverse experiences is valuable, reaching the highest levels of professional success requires working within an environment that fosters alignment and allows your potential to flourish without artificial constraints.”

contributes to the development of future leaders at Crescent.

Our commitment to nurturing talent extends to training and engaging individuals who display interest and exhibit high performance. Within Crescent, we introduce annual commercial priorities during our commercial kick-off meetings. The first initiative, “INVEST IN YOURSELF,” emphasizes the importance of personal investment for continuous improvement. This initiative is designed to fortify our team, positioning them for lasting success in both their personal and professional lives.



NIA I. GILLIAM

*Pilot, United Airlines
Co-Founder, Sisters of the Skies*

How do you define and communicate your long-term vision for both your personal leadership journey and the success of your organization?

My vision for my leadership journey revolves around leading by example. I believe in demonstrating a positive attitude, showing a willingness and commitment to undertake challenging tasks, and being dedicated to fostering an environment of encouragement to empower and inspire others. Regarding the success of the organization, my vision centers on creating a culture of inclusiveness, where open dialogue and input are actively encouraged, and members view the organization as a platform created for collective success based on collaborative effort.

Describe a situation where you encouraged innovation or took a calculated risk in your leadership role. How do you foster a culture that embraces creativity and risk within your team or organization?

The very existence of Sisters of the Skies was a calculated risk. The decision to organize and lead a new venture with an unprecedented mission means that everything requires innovation. Leading by example is one way, but the best approach is not only to encourage team members to bring ideas to the table, but also to be open to receiving their ideas in some capacity and to praise

their efforts. This gives team members confidence knowing they're valued and cultivates a desire to continue being creative and innovative moving forward.

Share an example of a successful cross-functional collaboration or partnership you led. How do you build and sustain effective relationships with peers and stakeholders across the organization?

Establishing our organization's outreach program, "Girls Rock Wings," as an opportunity for our participants to be immersed in aviation by a team of professionals who fully represent them. Showing up as my authentic self and being passionate about my vision is what I did to build the relationships, and showing my gratitude and appreciation is how I sustained those relationships.

What steps do you take to champion diversity and inclusion within your organization, and how do you ensure that your leadership team reflects a broad range of perspectives and backgrounds? How do you measure those efforts?

Sisters of the Skies' mission is to champion diversity and inclusion throughout the private, corporate, and military/government sectors of aviation. Externally, our positive impact is substantiated by data, revealing an increase in the representation of Black women as professional pilots. Within our organization, generational diversity offers perspectives and leadership from baby boomers, Generation X, millennials, and Generation Z. This diversity in thought can be measured in the efficiency of our operations, with the incorporation of more technology and in the increased reach of the Sisters of the Skies brand.





AMANDA JOINER

*Global Vice President,
The Ritz-Carlton Leadership Center*

Can you share a specific instance where you successfully navigated a major change or challenge, highlighting the key lessons learned and how they shaped your leadership approach?

I don't believe there has been any greater challenge for the world and the hospitality industry than the devastating impacts of COVID-19. At the time, I was a general manager at The Ritz-Carlton, St. Louis and had to strategize how to motivate a team whose future was unknown. COVID-19 challenged all of us to think differently about the entire guest and employee experience. Ultimately the success we had was founded on the principles of personalized experiences for our employees and guests: truly paying attention to the specific customer journey throughout all of the experiences and amenities that we offered our guests and listening to our guests, observing the nonverbal cues to fully respond to how we should interact with each guest uniquely to anticipate their needs and deliver a luxury experience.

The world — and our guests — were craving connection. We were thoughtful about breaking down imaginary walls created through plexiglass and surgical masks to provide true connections with our guests, allowing them cherished moments of relaxation, reflection and connection outside of their homes. When our employees felt comfortable and confident, they could thrive. Empowered employees were motivated to create memorable experiences and in turn our guests had unique and fulfilling experiences.

How have mentorship and sponsorship played a role in your professional development, and how do you actively engage in cultivating talent within your organization?

Mentorship doesn't have to be by official appointment. Employees and leaders who want to grow and wish to improve their skills can do so through observation of excellence around them. I wouldn't be where I am today without many great mentors showing me the way and believing in me. Being self-aware and reflective of your own

skills and talents will allow you to truly be open to upskilling yourself. I believe the greatest mentorship that I can give to anyone on my team or within my organization is to be an example-setting leader. Your actions cannot be a disconnect from the expectations that you have of your employees. You have to walk the talk each and every day, especially on the hardest of days. All eyes are on you, and you have to be the positive influence and ambassador of your company culture in every interaction. If you want a positive work environment, you have to be positive. If you want your employees to use the guest's name, you have to know the names of your employees.

How do you maintain a healthy work-life harmony, and what strategies do you employ to prioritize your well-being amidst high-level responsibilities? How do you ensure your team does the same?

Work-life harmony is when I feel passionate about fulfilling goals in all aspects of my life. For me this is gained through presence. In my work life, I work hard because I want my team to be successful. When my team is successful, I feel successful. When teams are meeting their goals and achieving exceptional results against a balanced scorecard, employees are motivated to deliver additional discretionary effort. As a result, I give my work my all — 100 percent of my focus when it's time to work. When I'm not working, I'm fully present in my personal life. I'm completely present with my husband and children to ensure that our time together is quality time. Cell phones help me get things done more efficiently, but I don't allow them to rule my life or my personal time.

How do you stay informed about industry trends and emerging technologies, and what role does continuous learning play in your ongoing personal and professional development?

There's a treasure trove of emerging trends available by listening to the voice of the customer. We do this through direct feedback and surveys, and this strategy is paramount to our success. However, we know that our greatest asset is the talents of our employees, so we lean into our internal customer feedback with equal importance. Focusing on the customer experience, both internal and external, is the way we ensure that we're evolving and remaining relevant. At The Ritz-Carlton Leadership Center, we apply the same strategy to that of our hotels. Through our consulting services, we work with our clients to lean into both their internal and external customer insights to create impactful change across their organizations. Our clients evaluate their success through the work that they do with us by analyzing how these insights change after we deploy our co-created strategies.

My entire career with The Ritz-Carlton and Marriott International has been a continuous learning experience. The most dynamic thing about our company is the depth and varied opportunities for growth available to employees. Often employees seek growth in title. Although this is important, seeking growth through new experiences and advancing our skills is of greater importance. When we advance our skills and push outside of our comfort zone, title advancement will eventually come. I'm proud to have joined this company as a housekeeping manager at The Ritz-Carlton and now lead the helm of The Ritz-Carlton Leadership Center that provides consulting services to Fortune 500 companies globally. Pretty cool.



MARINA MACDONALD

Chief Marketing Officer, Red Roof

How do you define and communicate your long-term vision for both your personal leadership journey and the success of your organization?

I've benefited throughout my career from mentors and leaders who have taken an interest in my professional development, which has shaped my personal leadership journey. Giving back and sharing my experience and expertise to elevate those around me has become increasingly important. I communicate this vision through actions: I mentor, serve on industry and association boards, and encourage change in my organization through programs like SHE, inspired by Red RoofSM and Purpose With HeartSM.

Fortunately, this is a vision I share with my fellow leaders at Red Roof. Red Roof's commitment to advancing our people is evident in the numbers: As of 2023, Red Roof has sponsored 12 women to participate in AHLA's Castell Project, and 41 team members have graduated from the Innovative Leadership Development Program, presented by the Innovative Leadership Institute. We've grown our population of 100 percent woman-owned or partially-owned properties to over 35 percent of our system. We're putting in the work to elevate others because a diverse population of leaders and owners is our vision.

Describe a situation where you encouraged innovation or took a calculated risk in your leadership role. How do you foster a culture that embraces creativity and risk within your team or organization?

Introducing the idea of a women's program in 2015 and articulating a goal to have 40 percent of our properties owned by women was a risk — not because I didn't think I would have support from my colleagues, but because no other hospitality brand was doing what I was proposing. Red Roof was the first. But as TS Elliott said, "Only those who will risk going too far can possibly find out how far one can go."

My colleagues and the Red Roof board rallied behind this idea. We went full speed ahead. And what started eight years ago as a whisper, a small but mighty desire for more women of Red Roof, has turned into a roar. We witnessed great success and engagement in the early years of our Forum on Leadership for Women Entrepreneurs.

This year, we realized our women and the women of the industry needed more. We looked at what we learned and accomplished and innovated again. We introduced SHE, inspired by Red Roof, a 360-degree program designed to Support, Help, and Elevate women through year-round thought leadership and access to resources on she-leads.com and our annual SHE Leads Forum.

I recently heard an interesting statistic on the time it took various technologies to reach 100 million users: the car (60 years); mobile technology (16 years); ChatGPT (only two months!). The speed of change necessitates that we try things that are new and different. We remain flexible, we assess, and we adapt.

Share an example of a successful cross-functional collaboration you led. How do you build and sustain effective relationships with peers and stakeholders across the organization?

At the same time that we introduced SHE, our chief development officer and his team were introducing RIDE with Red RoofSM, Road to Inclusivity and Diversity in Entrepreneurship. RIDE provides franchisees in underserved markets access to capital, educational resources and the connections needed to build a strong network of industry





partners. To ensure the effectiveness and longevity of each program, we needed to collectively take a good look at both: we recognized their similarities, defined their differences, and aligned on how the two programs could support each other.

We collaborated and agreed on the synergy: SHE, inspired by Red Roof and RIDE with Red Roof are “sister programs.” Where SHE is designed to motivate, RIDE is designed to activate. The two programs have been working together to grow our population of women owners.

What steps do you take to champion diversity and inclusion within your organization, and how do you ensure that your leadership team reflects a broad range of perspectives and backgrounds? How do you measure those efforts?

Diversity starts at the top with Red Roof. Forty-six percent of our senior leadership team are part of a minority group, and 48 percent of Red Roof leaders (director and above) are women. As an organization, creating and maintaining a culture of diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging that continually fosters growth and opportunity for all is paramount. This year, we formed a DEI&B committee, and our brand team members participated in DEI&B training at an all-hands meeting. Additionally, I welcomed Seema Jain, founder and CEO of Seva Global, to train my teams on cultural competency.

In addition to being the leader and founder of SHE, inspired by Red Roof, I’m the executive sponsor of our Purpose With Heart ESG committee. The committee is driving change in our organization by, among other things, communicating consistently and transparently on our ESG efforts, beginning with our 2023 Purpose With Heart Annual Report.



MONICA MELANCON

*Chief Human Resource Officer,
Wyndham Hotels & Resorts*

Can you share a specific instance where you successfully navigated a major change or challenge, highlighting the key lessons learned and how they shaped your leadership approach?

I've learned many lessons from the changes and challenges I've encountered over the course of my career. In reflecting, the COVID-19 pandemic stands out as one of the most significant. Not only was this a workplace issue that required

us to simultaneously assess, implement and change basically every practice and policy we had in place, but it was also very personal. From having limited time to make crucial decisions to navigating how to problem solve with many different opinions on the matter, the pandemic helped me to sharpen two of my most utilized skills: pragmatism and proactivity. These unprecedented circumstances forced me to quickly analyze the ever-changing information we had access to, consider how to proactively get ahead of issues and concerns where we could, and manage communication to team members globally in a way that was effective but sensitive.

At Wyndham we talk about our strong culture often, and it's because we care about our people. The pandemic reinforced that commitment to our people. We did what we could to keep them safe, motivated and engaged — and doing so with an open-mind and optimistic perspective, even when it challenged my own experiences. I'm happy to say that as we've since returned to our "new normal," our Wyndham culture and core values continue to be at the center of all we do. The lessons I learned in the process have helped to make our team even stronger.

How have mentorship and sponsorship played a role in your professional development, and how do you actively engage in cultivating talent within your organization?

I'm a firm believer in "paying it forward." It's why I prioritize cultivating relationships with talent inside and outside Wyndham. As a leader, there's no greater gift I can give to another person than to spend time with them and help shape their career path or achieve their personal goals. I believe that because it's something I've experienced myself. Many of the principles I hold onto as a leader today came from mentors who have invested their time in me. It requires honesty and





“As a leader, there’s no greater gift I can give to another person than to spend time with them and help shape their career path or achieve their personal goals.”

How do you maintain a healthy work-life harmony, and what strategies do you employ to prioritize your well-being amidst high-level responsibilities? How do you ensure your team does the same?

There’s not a one-size-fits-all approach to work-life integration, as I like to call it. Everyone has different values, goals and aspirations that impact their career and personal lives. That’s why leaders must get to know their teams and be open to their ideas and feedback. Even more important, leaders must not only set the expectation that work-life integration is a priority, but also lead by example.

I personally gave up trying to balance work and life early in my career. Instead, I’ve worked extremely hard to be fully engaged in life when I can step away from work. Whether it’s committing to my workout regimen, dedicating time to give back to the community with my husband, or even taking a timeout to do a jigsaw puzzle — because I LOVE a good challenge — I work hard to protect my time and respect it when my team members do the same.

One of our core values at Wyndham is fun, and I often remind everyone that “all work and no play” doesn’t represent who we are as a company. As a hotel company, we foster experiences for our guests in some of the most desirable places around the world, and it’s so important that we give our team members time to have enriching experiences both inside and outside work.

How do you stay informed about industry trends and emerging technologies, and what role does continuous learning play in your ongoing personal and professional development?

I’m a learner at heart. I thrive on seeking information, unique perspectives and new ways to deliver results for my team. One of my favorite things is attending industry conferences or HR events to learn more about ever-developing topics like AI in the workplace or HR data analytics tools and technology, to name a few. Being a continuous learner always surprises me because I expose myself to strategies and solutions I wouldn’t otherwise consider on my own.

I also believe forging relationships is so important to professional development. Building a network unlocks opportunity and opens the door to meeting those mentors and advocates who can change your personal and professional path for the better.

transparency, mutual dedication and flexibility — even if that means changing the relationship as development progresses.

Sponsorship goes even further. It requires dedication to someone’s career and a commitment to being their advocate. That’s why I’m passionate about getting to know the talent that joins our team and speaking up when I can. I want to see them grow, evolve and succeed at Wyndham. We’re a global business, and investing in our people is what makes us strong. When you put that kind of time into team members, we really succeed as an organization.

I’ve had mentors and sponsors who trusted in my capabilities and provided me with experiences that ultimately led me to where I am today. I’m eternally grateful to those people. They impacted my career and I still try to thank them because those are the relationships that are most important to foster.



SUZETTE NOBLE

*Chief Executive Officer,
LaGuardia Gateway Partners*

How do you define and communicate your long-term vision for both your personal leadership journey and the success of your organization?

The core elements to my role in leading what's next for the brand new, state-of-the-art Terminal B at LaGuardia boils down to creating and delivering the most stellar experiences, continuing to innovate, and cultivating partnerships to achieve a common goal. It's my role to challenge our team to think big yet practical, and creative yet intuitive in shaping meaningful and seamless experiences at every point along the airport journey — which includes everything from check-in and security to relaxation, shopping, and dining and hospitality. Keeping up with the latest offerings and trends redefining transportation and consumerism, and tying back to the paramount mission of service experiences, is how we will endlessly commit ourselves to being a leader in this capacity for our industry.

Describe a situation where you encouraged innovation or took a calculated risk in your leadership role. How do you foster a culture that embraces creativity and risk within your team or organization?

After 21 years at Walt Disney World leading hospitality and entertainment businesses, I took a risk by changing industries. While I was a bit nervous, everything I learned about leading dynamic teams and businesses

and creating premium experiences easily translated into aviation and the redevelopment of LaGuardia's Terminal B. Safety and efficient operations are cornerstones of every business, especially in aviation. Our approach to then weave in experiential surprises and hospitality raises the bar to reimagine and deliver a better airport experience.

Share an example of a successful cross-functional collaboration you led. How do you build and sustain effective relationships with peers and stakeholders across the organization?

Many are super impressed with the brand new Terminal B at LaGuardia Airport, but most don't realize that this amazing renovation was the product of what's now one of the largest public-private partnerships in American aviation history. This incredible project began with the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey entrusting our organization, LaGuardia Gateway Partners, with the massive redevelopment of this Queens gateway to New York City. We worked with several cross-functional partners pertinent across construction, design and management specialties to execute the completion of the \$5.1 billion project during my time as COO.

Now with this initial feat in the rearview mirror it's my role as LGP's new CEO to keep the question of how we continue delivering exceptional experiences to both our guests and stakeholders top of mind in all affairs with our amazing partners with whom we rely on their collaborations to be the best.





What steps do you take to champion diversity and inclusion within your organization, and how do you ensure that your leadership team reflects a broad range of perspectives and backgrounds? How do you measure those efforts?

The redevelopment of LaGuardia Terminal B quite literally paved the way for the future of aviation in New York City and offers a window into what transit innovation will look like going forward. Knowing this, LaGuardia Gateway Partners placed significant emphasis on inclusivity in the Terminal B redevelopment. More than 300 extraordinarily talented individuals across minority- and women-owned business enterprises participated in the project, with contracts valued at more than \$910 million. Our commitment to diversity and inclusivity is also underscored by our now majority women-led executive leadership team, most recently flanked by the hire of new COO Klaudia FitzGerald and CFO Mercedes Rendon. In serving one of the most diverse cities in the world, welcoming perspectives from all walks of life will always be an integral component of our organization's growth.

“Keeping up with the latest offerings and trends redefining transportation and consumerism, and tying back to the paramount mission of service experiences, is how we will endlessly commit ourselves to being a leader in this capacity for our industry.”



LEENY OBERG

Chief Financial Officer and Executive Vice President, Development, Marriott International

How do you define and communicate your long-term vision for both your personal leadership journey and the success of your organization?

Marriott's culture has been defined by its core values for nearly a century — put people first, pursue excellence, embrace change, act with integrity, and serve our world. These values have served as universal guideposts for leaders throughout the organization. Our founders believed that if you take great care of associates, they will take care of the customer, and customers will come back — enabling the business to thrive. I've found that focusing on our core values helps me make better decisions. I also believe that strong leadership includes approachability and good listening skills. At any level in an organization, there are always opportunities to learn from your team.

Describe a situation where you encouraged innovation or took a calculated risk in your role. How do you foster a culture that embraces creativity and risk within your team or organization?

I have the responsibility and opportunity to ensure we have access to the financial resources needed to drive our chosen business strategies in a way that maximizes value for our key stakeholders — associates, owners and franchisees, investors, suppliers, and customers. Consistent with our core value to

embrace change, we're constantly listening to our customers to inform our innovation journey and looking around the corner to position Marriott for long-term, sustainable growth.

One example where we saw tremendous opportunity was our 2016 acquisition of Starwood Hotels and Resorts, making us the largest hospitality company in the world. As part of the integration process, we knew revitalizing the iconic Sheraton brand in North America needed to be a top priority for the company. To underscore our commitment to the brand transformation, we spent \$255 million to purchase and then renovate the 1,000-room Sheraton Grand Phoenix hotel. While this move ran counter to our asset-light business model, it was an important signal of our commitment to the brand's evolution. The renovation went extremely well, and we recycled our invested capital by selling the hotel to a third-party owner with a long-term Sheraton management agreement. It has become a great example of our vision for the brand and encourages investment in other Sheraton hotels, which elevates the brand's performance.

We're always looking for ways to embrace change and empower associates to listen to our key stakeholders, challenge the status quo, and innovate. Mr. Marriott, our chairman emeritus, always says "success is never final" and our teams around the world embrace that challenge.

Share an example of a successful cross-functional collaboration you led. How do you build and sustain effective relationships with peers and stakeholders across the organization?

A recent cross-functional collaboration I'm proud of is our entry into the affordable midscale lodging segment, a new tier for Marriott. In studying demand trends and talking with our owners and franchisees, our development and insights teams led the initial analysis that identified tremendous opportunity in this segment to attract new customers in



new markets. From there, we worked in lockstep with continent teams and global development, design, operations, legal, brand, communications and finance to introduce regionally relevant lodging products to meet the needs of both customers and owners and franchisees in several key regions around the world, including City Express by Marriott in the Caribbean and Latin America, StudioRes in the U.S. and Canada, and Four Points Express by Sheraton in Europe, the Middle East and Africa.

As with any relationship, communicating openly and listening is vital to building trust and achieving mutually beneficial outcomes. Our culture of listening to our associates, customers and owners and franchisees has helped us anticipate stakeholder needs and deepen our longstanding partnerships.

What steps do you take to champion diversity and inclusion within your organization, and how do you ensure that your leadership team reflects a broad range of perspectives and backgrounds? How do you measure those efforts?

I joined Marriott in 1999 in investor relations and was hired by a woman who was committed to ensuring women and people of color were represented in finance roles. She set a great example for me and I'm proud that today over 60 percent of my global finance team is women and more than half of my direct reports are women and/or people of color. I recognize the tremendous value of diverse ideas and perspectives and their impact on achieving outstanding business outcomes.

As a company, our purpose is to connect all people through the power of travel. We're committed to providing access to opportunity and fostering a culture of inclusion. Our commitment starts at the top with our senior leaders, including myself, who establish strategies and priorities that drive accountability throughout the organization. I'm actively engaged with our board of director-led inclusion and social impact committee that ensures accountability and monitors the company's progress on the integration of diversity, equity and inclusion in all aspects of the business. More than half of our board of directors are either women or people of color, and we have enterprise-wide goals in place to achieve gender parity at the vice president level and above.



Beyond growing talented women leaders within our organization, supporting our community of diverse owners is an equally critical objective for the company. In 2022, we launched Marriott's Bridging the Gap, a multiyear \$50 million development program designed to meaningfully increase diverse ownership at Marriott among historically underrepresented groups. We've announced the first 19 projects receiving financial support through the program.



LISA OSWALD

*Senior Vice President and Global Head
of Customer Service, Travelzoo*

Can you share a specific instance where you successfully navigated a major change or challenge, highlighting the key lessons learned and how they shaped your leadership approach?

As much as we'd like to put the pandemic behind us, March 2020 was a pivotal moment for me. I needed to work out how to keep people focused in the midst of chaos, and optimistic in a time of darkness. That was a challenge — they were exhausted, anxious and under tremendous stress. The answer was to break things down into digestible bites. While not a new strategy, it was the right solution at the time. We started every morning with a team meeting to identify the one thing each person needed to get done that day to feel good about themselves, then came together at the end of the day to share results. Every day we checked things off our list, congratulated ourselves for the wins, and felt a sense of accomplishment that fueled our readiness to do it over and over again for months on end. Instead of being overwhelmed by the hundreds of things we needed to do each day, we forced ourselves to prioritize. In doing so, every person understood their purpose and the value they delivered to the business, every day. In the end, it was never really about the work; it was about making people successful. Through it all, my team has remained intact. I've not lost one person to furlough, layoffs or voluntary attrition.

How have mentorship and sponsorship played a role in your professional development, and how do you actively engage in cultivating talent within your organization?

I believe in lifting people up and bringing others along. It's the most crucial contribution I can make, and I have the time, resources and influence to impact the lives and careers of women in the workplace. I founded our first employee resource group at Travelzoo in 2019, called Women's Inspirit

Network (WIN). Since then, I've introduced our team to scores of women across disciplines — doctors, lawyers, entrepreneurs, authors, CEOs, career coaches — to support and inspire their personal and professional development. As the executive sponsor of our employee-led diversity, inclusion and belonging teams, we've since formed another three ERGs for our LGBTQ+ community, BIPOC community, and a global networking group, collectively to foster understanding and acceptance across the company and strengthen communication and collaboration.

How do you maintain a healthy work-life harmony, and what strategies do you employ to prioritize your well-being amidst high-level responsibilities? How do you ensure your team does the same?

I'm sorry to say, and not afraid to admit, I never did crack the nut on work-life balance. I think it comes down to knowing yourself and what works for you and just how much imbalance you can carry. My well-being might look and feel different week-to-week or even day-to-day, and that's OK. Certainly it's different for different people, and knowing what that is for each person on my team is key. It can be something as simple as saying, "That's enough for today" or "Just do what you need to do."

How do you stay informed about industry trends and emerging technologies, and what role does continuous learning play in your ongoing personal and professional development?

I stay connected to the travel and customer experience space through my membership in and leadership roles with professional associations. It's my way to get and give back at the same time. For me, it's been one of the best ways to get access to a network of thought leaders, practitioners and solutions providers, and a continual stream of in-person and online programs.

*"I believe in lifting people up
and bringing others along.
It's the most crucial
contribution I can make."*



ELIZA PESUIT

Founding Executive Director, Global Glimpse

Can you share a specific instance where you successfully navigated a major change or challenge, highlighting the key lessons learned and how they shaped your leadership approach?

In September 2018, I finalized a global partnership with United Airlines, the first in the industry to focus on making travel accessible to young people from low income and underrepresented backgrounds across the United States. After a decade of building Global Glimpse I felt like we had finally made it, our dreams were within reach.

That moment of glory was short-lived as the United Airlines partnership illuminated a lack of alignment on our board of directors around the pace of growth and organizational sustainability. This reached a fiery breaking point in late 2019, and nearly half of the board resigned. Even though I knew with tremendous certainty that those who resigned were driving a vision that was both unrealistic and dangerous for the organization, our employees, and the communities we served, I wasn't in a position to navigate a full board transition alone. For a full year I carried the weight of the turmoil on the board while leading the organization's day-to-day operations. I'm deeply grateful to my mentor, former chief community affairs officer at United Airlines, for guiding our board through this period and showing me what true partnership looks like.

Coming out of the board transition, our board was four women and we made a commitment to only bring individuals into the organization that approached the work with humility,

personal passion, and a commitment to bring resources into the organization, both financial and strategic. Working with this group of women to redefine our vision and our values taught me two invaluable lessons:

- There's no space for ego in leadership. Shared values set the tone for impact.
- Consistent alignment on vision and expectations is critical to both the success and the integrity of the work.

The lessons I learned during this period and the changes that we made to our board structure and culture at Global Glimpse have been fundamental to our success over the past five years and our ability to not just survive, but thrive coming out of the pandemic.

How have mentorship and sponsorship played a role in your professional development, and how do you actively engage in cultivating talent within your organization?

In the early years of building Global Glimpse I sought guidance from other social impact leaders, but I quickly realized that my vision was unique in both the travel and the nonprofit industries. The advice that resonated most profoundly came from the private sector. As I've grown as a leader I've sought out mentors and advisors whose skills, networks and leadership reflect my growth areas as a leader and what's required for the next stage of impact for Global Glimpse.

I've been blessed over the course of my career to find two incredible mentors that both arrived in my life at the exact moment when I needed their guidance most. These two leaders share a number of core traits: they're both women, they both held C-suite positions for global Fortune 500 companies, they're both mothers who have juggled family and work with tremendous grace, and they're both deeply committed to our mission at Global Glimpse. These two mentors have personally invested in my leadership development by going above and beyond a professional mentor relationship. At first I didn't feel I deserved this kind of





mentorship because I had never had anything like it before; as a social entrepreneur I'd always figured everything out myself and no one had ever told me that I was worthy of investment.

These two women have shown me what it means to truly invest in a mentor relationship and they've made me feel valued in a way I never thought was possible. Their belief and investment in me has allowed me to elevate my leadership.

As a leader I'm equal parts vision, aspiration and hustle. When I believe something is possible I'm going to find a way to get it done. Global Glimpse is a nonprofit organization with both earned and philanthropic revenue. In order to ensure impact and sustainability we have a culture that's both mission-driven and business savvy. We work to support team members to build their business acumen, develop a growth mindset, elevate their skills and capabilities, and expand their understanding of diversity, equity and inclusion by providing transparent and immediate feedback, intentional evaluation, and ongoing internal and external training.

How do you maintain a healthy work-life harmony, and what strategies do you employ to prioritize your well-being amidst high-level responsibilities? How do you ensure your team does the same?

I've repeated two mantras to myself throughout my career:

1. Everything is earned, nothing is given.
2. To whom much is given, much is expected.

I don't believe it's possible to build something extraordinary from nothing and also prioritize yourself — at least not in the early years. I don't think there's something inherently wrong with that. I think there are times when we have to give everything to bring a dream to life. In 2018, I hit a pinnacle in my career. I closed a multimillion-dollar partnership with United Airlines, and Global Glimpse served over 1,000 students for the first time. I had done it. I was living the social

impact dream. Looking back, it's almost comical how naive I was as a human, let alone a leader.

Over the past five years, I've lived through one traumatic event after another. The Global Glimpse board went through a period of extreme values misalignment, and I learned how truly unprepared I was to lead at the next level. The pandemic shut our programming down completely, and I had to let 75 percent of the team go in order to survive. I suffered a severe postpartum injury that left me bedridden with chronic pain for months. I lost my father, a childhood friend, and my brother-in-law all within a year.

This last chapter has brought a different kind of struggle that I couldn't muscle through. A struggle beyond the scope of daily routines and coping tools. Through this time, I've had to not only face my failures and weaknesses, but share them with everyone in my world. And in that vulnerability, I've found strength, gratitude, a sense of heart-centered well-being that feels so much deeper and more profound. When I think about well-being now, I think about riding the waves instead of standing tall in the storm. I think about trust, authenticity, vulnerability, sharing what it means to be human.

Everything and everyone evolves. Leading through that evolution is the true test. I move slower now. I used to run almost every day to keep my mind calm. Now I walk with intention, creating space for my mind to slow down. I've chosen to live in an urban area because I learned through the pandemic that I need to be around different kinds of people. I need unplanned interaction in my daily life, especially working from home. I get outside every morning and in nature at least once a week. I make time to connect with powerful women who light up my soul. I practice gratitude daily, and as silly as it sounds, I remind myself to breathe deeply. Finally and perhaps most importantly, I ask for the things I need to be my best

“Everything and everyone evolves. Leading through that evolution is the true test.”

self and do my best work. And when the universe bends too far, and I feel I’m going to break, I don’t hold on anymore; I trust the process and let go. I know now that I can’t hold it all together, and that’s OK.

I don’t resonate with the way work-life balance or self-care is marketed. Rather, I like to think about creating synergy between my work and my life. Authenticity has made me successful. Each part of my life brings me great pride and joy, and it’s the sum of those parts and their ability to coexist joyfully that makes me the best version of myself. Sometimes I have to lean in more in one area or another, and I try to build up the bank of goodwill in each so that there’s space for me to move and breathe.

I work to role model trust, responsiveness, accountability and humility. I do my best work when my team is doing their best work, and our collective and individual health and happiness are inseparable from this equation. At Global Glimpse, we have a value, “own your sh*t,” which encompasses so much more than work. Take care of yourself, your family, your community, your colleagues so that you’re best positioned to handle your business. Well-being looks different for each person. I lead a global team with staff across five countries representing a broad range of backgrounds, perspectives, experiences and needs. I think it’s absolutely essential to have strong and sensitive policies in place to support people, but even more powerful is building a culture where people are given permission and flexibility to build the work-life relationship that works for them. That is what I try to model.

How do you stay informed about industry trends and emerging technologies, and what role does continuous learning play in your ongoing personal and professional development?

My team will say that I’m a LinkedIn maniac because I’m constantly generating new opportunities on LinkedIn. This is no accident. I’ve spent the past 15 years cultivating a powerful network of leaders across the travel, education, and nonprofit sectors. I follow a combination of leaders across industries that give me a unique and powerful perspective on both needs and opportunities before they become mainstream.

This is a unique moment in the history of the travel industry as diversity and inclusion become a business imperative, not just a nice thing to do. The future of travel is going to be more diverse in every way and the industry needs to evolve to support employees, travelers and partners with diverse backgrounds, experiences, abilities and perspectives.

Over the past five years I’ve seeded groundbreaking partnerships with leading brands in the travel industry, including United Airlines, Away, Snap Inc., Expedia Group, and we’re in the process of building a new partnership with Marriott International. With each of these companies, I saw a need for social impact partnership that aligned the brand with the bottom line and provided meaningful avenues for employee engagement.

We’re doing something that has never been done before at Global Glimpse, and that kind of innovation requires continuous learning. The high school travel space is small to begin with and the equity section of this space is even smaller, so I look to peer organizations in the youth development, college study abroad, and private sector youth travel space to understand the trends in our immediate market. I’m a big believer in the power of mentorship and I actively seek out strategic advisors and board members who are positioned to guide my thinking and bring new perspectives to the table. I’m always watching and waiting for the next opportunity. When I see it I get in early, I build strong relationships, I listen carefully, I ask the right questions, and I build collaboratively.





STACY RITTER

President and CEO, Visit Lauderdale

Can you share a specific instance where you successfully navigated a major change or challenge, highlighting the key lessons learned and how they shaped your leadership approach?

Applying for my current position and subsequently being offered the role was a serious challenge. I didn't come from tourism; my world was politics and the entire hospitality community was against my candidacy. The local newspaper wrote two editorials opposing me. It was brutal but I knew I could do the job even if everyone else had their doubts. I put my head down, kept working at it and I was ultimately offered the opportunity to lead Visit Lauderdale. I lead with an "all things are possible" mentality and that people, especially women, should never have to wait their turn. Your turn is when you say it is and I encourage my women team members to go for what they want, even if it means losing them to another company.

How have mentorship and sponsorship played a role in your professional development, and how do you actively engage in cultivating talent within your organization?

Mentorship and sponsorship weren't a thing when I came of age, although I've had supporters and cheerleaders for me and the things I wanted to accomplish. Now as a senior leader, I believe it's my responsibility to foster younger women and encourage them to have confidence in their abilities. My door is open to anyone on my team who wants to talk about their career, work/life balance, new ideas and directions, or has constructive criticism for the work we do. I do, however, single out those with exceptional talent to groom them into the leaders they should and can be.

How do you maintain a healthy work-life harmony, and what strategies do you employ to prioritize your well-being amidst high-level responsibilities? How do you ensure your team does the same?

I give a routine speech to every new team member. I tell them we aren't curing cancer and we don't cut people's brains open so there's nothing so urgent that it can't get done tomorrow. It's important to take care of yourself and whoever else is your priority. For me, my family takes precedence over anything and everything, but I realize not everyone is so fortunate. I do let the team at Visit Lauderdale know that those are my priorities and I respect whatever priorities of a personal nature they have. I make sure that I shut down the computer at 7 p.m. barring some emergency like a hurricane. I know how never turning it off can affect your physical and mental health and it just isn't worth jeopardizing my well-being or the health of the team.

How do you stay informed about industry trends and emerging technologies, and what role does continuous learning play in your ongoing personal and professional development?

I took a personality test which showed I'm a lifelong learner. It's fun for me to read about and learn new things and then work to practically apply them if relevant. I also listen to a lot of podcasts about a variety of subjects when exercising, painting and driving. In a world that turns as fast as ours does and in an industry that's constantly changing and evolving, we have no choice but to keep up with what's current and what's next.

"I lead with an 'all things are possible' mentality and that people, especially women, should never have to wait their turn."



LINDA RUTHERFORD

Chief Administration Officer, Southwest Airlines

How do you define and communicate your long-term vision for both your personal leadership journey and the success of your organization?

I often say I'm an accidental executive. I never set out a vision to be where I am today. At this phase of my career, it's a personal mission of mine to focus energy and strategic attention to building the next generation of leaders. I find the best approach is to adopt the Brene Brown model and find opportunities to be authentic and vulnerable, sharing my career story and lessons learned. My success is now defined by how I build ladders for the future leaders around me and ensuring that the organization I love can be nurtured and grown for many years to come.

Describe a situation where you encouraged innovation or took a calculated risk in your leadership role. How do you foster a culture that embraces creativity and risk within your team or organization?

Calculated risks have always been part of the Southwest model of creativity. Our values and fun-loving attitude set the tone from the very top. Our CEO and other C-suite leaders set the example by speaking their minds and always looking for the next creative thing that shows off who Southwest is to the core. You may recall 50 years ago when we gave out alcohol with the purchase of a ticket. Or perhaps you've heard the jokes and humorous improv by our world-famous flight attendants. This kind of leadership and spirit has been essential to me personally. I didn't have to drop my personality at the door and have always been encouraged to take intelligent risks over the years. One example from years ago was when we were introducing a specialty aircraft with the California State Flag emblazoned on the exterior of the plane. I

thought the special media moment called for a live California golden bear. All fine and well until the bear wouldn't come down off the podium and a startled CEO Herb Kelleher was calling down to me to "get this bear out of here."

Share an example of a successful cross-functional collaboration you led. How do you build and sustain effective relationships with peers and stakeholders across the organization?

A cross-functional effort I'm particularly proud of is the creation of our Southwest promise safety initiative in 2020. We needed to garner customer confidence in our ability to keep people safe when traveling amid COVID, and we needed to showcase cleaning methods, HEPA filtration systems, and limited bookings to keep middle seats open. Marketing and communications worked together to create the initiative, all the associated graphics, video and other assets, and media outreach to create the necessary customer awareness and comfort that we were going to do all we could to keep the traveling public safe.

What steps do you take to champion diversity and inclusion within your organization, and how do you ensure that your leadership team reflects a broad range of perspectives and backgrounds? How do you measure those efforts?

Our entire organization focuses on the Southwest way values and have ingrained the values in our approach to work and performance management. We've launched both employee-led groups and employee resource groups to build community and teamwork for our people. This year, we launched a new competency to our performance management that focuses on belonging and how we ensure behaviors that are welcoming so everyone feels respected and appreciated. These inform not just your performance appraisal but our long-term talent management and compensation approach for our people.





Diversity in our senior leadership is essential to our business as we aim to be a great place to work. Diversity of perspective in background is vital to running a business as complex as an airline. In our boardroom we must have operators, communicators, finance, strategy, commercial and other disciplinary expertise to ensure we bring all stakeholders along and think through the ripple effect and implication of business decisions made every day. In 2020, we set company goals to strengthen and improve efforts to create more diverse, equitable and inclusive opportunities and candidate pipelines, as well as to champion an inclusive environment and experience for all employees. These efforts included a commitment to increasing diversity in senior leadership, double the percentage of racial diversity of leadership, and increasing gender diversity of our senior management by 2025. We track this data closely in partnership with our DEI and people departments and regularly report to our board of directors on this process. I'm proud of the progress we've made and know we will continue to work to reflect the diversity of our employees in leadership as well.

"My success is now defined by how I build ladders for the future leaders around me and ensuring that the organization I love can be nurtured and grown for many years to come."



VALENTINA DE SANTIS
CEO, Grand Hotel Tremezzo

Can you share a specific instance where you successfully navigated a major change or challenge, highlighting the key lessons learned and how they shaped your leadership approach?

My daily challenge is to take care of everything that is involved with the stay of our lovely guests, from the tiniest details to the most important procedures. I also dedicate a lot of my time to promote my little paradise around the world with my sales and marketing team

I am and have always been a host, even before becoming a hotelier. I've grown up spending every summer of my life at the hotel since I was a baby, so my role goes beyond any official position. The Grand Hotel Tremezzo and Passalacqua are my homes, and what I would like written on my business cards would be just "the hostess with the mostest." The key lesson I learned is that there's no better inspiration than one that derives from the heart and in my case, that's family. For centuries, the underlying inspirational spirit that has driven my success is the unification of efforts that make our hotel not just a team, but a real family unit. This is my successful secret.



How have mentorship and sponsorship played a role in your professional development, and how do you actively engage in cultivating talent within your organization?

The ingredients for a perfect recipe in hospitality are endless. But what cannot be missing is a huge dose of passion and love for your "home" and being ready to be versatile and embrace a different role every day. This is how I keep my team motivated.





How do you maintain a healthy work-life harmony, and what strategies do you employ to prioritize your well-being amidst high-level responsibilities? How do you ensure your team does the same?

I feel true happiness combining work duties and quality time with my family when I'm able to make the people around me happy. My kids of course are No. 1. Nothing makes my heart burst more than hearing laughter around the house and the hotels while they run with excitement in the corridors towards the kitchen at Tremezzo to say "ciao" to the chefs or they jump with joy finding an egg in the chicken coop at Passalacqua. Then making my team — my wonderful extended family — happy, wanting to ensure they feel inspired every day taking care of themselves. And last but not the least, of course, our wonderful guests. If they have a wonderful time at our hotels and find joy in experiencing "my" Lake Como, then I'm thrilled and feel in harmony.

How do you stay informed about industry trends and emerging technologies, and what role does continuous learning play in your ongoing personal and professional development?

I like to keep myself informed with hotel training programs designed to increase skills and leadership knowledge. In addition, I attend international workshops to strengthen networks and relationships around the world.



JYOTI SAROLIA

President and CEO, Ellis Hospitality Group

Can you share a specific instance where you successfully navigated a major change or challenge, highlighting the key lessons learned and how they shaped your leadership approach?

During the COVID-19 pandemic in the U.S., I had to be positive, resourceful and proactive. Banks were inundated with PPP loan applications so deciding which banks would be most attentive to expeditiously processing my applications was important. I leveraged my relationships with our existing lenders and remained proactive with them in terms of ensuring the applications they received from me were fully complete to facilitate their expeditious processing. We were also resourceful and positive in terms of reaching out to the various government agencies for potential rooms for those needing to be quarantined along with finding the necessary grant/aid support to allow our business to survive during what was a very challenging time.

I also successfully navigated a major change when I took on the role of chairing a franchise advisory council. I was the first female to hold the position. One key lesson I learned from this experience was the importance of communication between franchisors and franchisees. As the chair, I had to ensure that both sides sought to understand the other and engaged constructively to achieve positive outcomes for both.

How have mentorship and sponsorship played a role in your professional development, and how do you actively engage in cultivating talent within your organization?

Mentorship has been invaluable to me throughout my career. I've had the opportunity to reach out to others in areas where I've needed professional development. These individuals have been sounding boards for me as it relates to various ideas I've had on growing and evolving our business.

Sponsorship, on the other hand, has been instrumental in opening doors and creating opportunities for me. My sponsors continue to make important industry connections for me and are advocates in assisting me to serve on some boards, such as the AHLA Foundation board as well as the IFA board.

In terms of actively engaging in cultivating talent within our organization, there are several essential behaviors to achieve this. First is recognition and appreciation for your team. Second is investing in your team's professional and personal advancement, especially in terms of continuing education opportunities. Third is growing your business so that your team has opportunities for growth within your organization. Lastly, but most importantly, is having a company culture that embraces the aforementioned behaviors.

How do you maintain a healthy work-life harmony, and what strategies do you employ to prioritize your well-being amidst high-level responsibilities? How do you ensure your team does the same?

Boundaries are very important in terms of creating downtime for yourself. Be present when with your family, learn to say no and delegate when possible. I'm also aware that this is a constant balancing act. The perfect balance is hard, if not impossible to obtain. You just have to be accepting of yourself as much as possible.

I try to be a role model to my team in terms of work-life balance. I also tell them it's OK to be off-balance at times, and when they are to be accepting of the same. In addition, I plan activities with our team, such as hiking, and I enjoy volunteer work. This allows time away from work, positively impacts our communities, and further emphasizes work-life balance.

How do you stay informed about industry trends and emerging technologies, and what role does continuous learning play in your ongoing personal and professional development?

Continuing learning is extremely important to me. Like most people, work and life is consuming and I'm not regularly in a classroom setting. As such, I have to be purposeful in creating opportunities for myself for continuous learning and ongoing professional development. This occurs in several areas for me, one of which is through my mentor and sponsorship relationships and the exchanges that occur. This also occurs through volunteering within my industry, meeting others, attending conferences, and just being determined that I'm engaged in not just my own business, but within my industry as a whole.



LINDSEY UEBERROTH

CEO, Preferred Hotels & Resorts

How do you define and communicate your long-term vision for both your personal leadership journey and the success of your organization?

Our Preferred Travel Group ideology starts with four simple words: We believe in travel. For me, this isn't only a professional ideal, it's part of who I am. Travel is in my blood. Connecting people with unique locations is something the entire Preferred family is passionate about and collectively celebrates.

This year, my family is marking 20 years since we invested in this company. Throughout the past two decades there's one common theme: Our Preferred family is better together. Our more than 300 associates come together day in and day out from across the globe to make life better for each other, our customers, clients, partners, and the guests who seek out travel to connect and grow.

It truly is an honor and a privilege to lead our Preferred family in this endeavor. As an extension of our ideology, I lead with a belief that I'm here to co-create brighter futures, nurturing each associate's individuality and potential. I travel extensively throughout the year to see as many of our hoteliers and associates face-to-face as I can and host

a monthly meeting with the entire organization to answer questions and share information.

Being together is essential to our culture, and this year we brought the entire global team together under one roof for a week. The week was essential for our continued future success, offering opportunities to collaborate in a truly meaningful way and grow together as a global team. We help each other, encourage one another, make difficult decisions together, and lift one another up. It's what family does.

Reflecting on all the conversations and collaboration throughout the week, I know we're truly better together. That vision of working together like a family will create even more opportunities for us for years to come.

Describe a situation where you encouraged innovation or took a calculated risk in your role. How do you foster a culture that embraces creativity and risk within your team or organization?

We closed on purchasing Beyond Green, our sustainable travel brand, in February 2020. And then the world shut down.

In the midst of a global pandemic, while most companies were going through the process of clamping down, we had to make a decision to move forward or not. As I met with our board and discussed our options, we made an intentional decision to change our mindset from what we were willing to lose to what we were willing to invest. We decided to play to win, not merely play to play. It was with this psychological safety that we launched the brand.

During a dark time in the travel industry, launching Beyond Green was a bright spot. It gave us a focus on building something so that when we came out of the pandemic, we could springboard forward. We had to look at the big picture of what was happening in the industry daily, but also drill down on the tasks at hand to launch a brand. All the data was saying to pause, but I knew this was something we needed to do.

To be fully transparent, there were emotional moments along the way, but the enthusiasm our team had to make a positive impact for our planet and create something in the midst of tragedy was an incredibly positive move for us as individuals and as a company. This is just one example

“We decided to play to win, not merely play to play. It was with this psychological safety that we launched the brand.”

of walking the walk to show our associates, even in times of uncertainty, you can take risks and it takes courage and conviction to create change.

Share an example of a successful cross-functional collaboration you led. How do you build and sustain effective relationships with peers and stakeholders across the organization?

Our ultra-luxury legend collection represents the world's most prestigious hotels. I met with the owners and general managers of this collection in 2022 and heard from them that they wanted to feel like part of a community within our brand, including more clear positioning of the collection; more storytelling with our B2B and B2C audiences; and elevated sales, marketing and public relations. Not only did I hear that feedback, but I completely agreed.

To make that vision a reality for this key group of stakeholders, I formed a cross-functional team from throughout our organization, bringing together experts in brand creative, marketing, PR, revenue, sales, and more. This was a tremendous opportunity to do more for this very special collection, and we didn't want to let them down.

This also offered a business opportunity for our member hotels as demand in the ultra-luxury segment expands, so the stakes were high. We went to work, redefining the imagery and language we use for the collection. Building around the theme, "A legendary perspective on luxury," the team brought to life the vision to elevate the collection, driving strong demand for each member hotel.

But we didn't stop there. We also launched a highly targeted development strategy, born from the belief that having legend collection properties in the right locations drives demand and awareness (i.e., a halo effect) for this very exclusive group of hotels.

What started as a candid conversation with stakeholders led to a major initiative that celebrates the collection. I'm proud of the sense of community we're cultivating and the teams that collaborated to deliver for our stakeholders.

What steps do you take to champion diversity and inclusion within your organization, and how do you ensure that your leadership team reflects a broad range of perspectives and backgrounds? How do you measure those efforts?

At Preferred Travel Group, we champion diversity and inclusion through a dedicated task force. I'm proud to say that our associate survey results demonstrate that this is truly a place where people feel they belong. I'm incredibly proud to be one of the first hotel brands to launch an LGBTQIA+ welcoming travel program, PreferredPride.com. We've worked to advance equality, inclusion and lasting change for our organization and for the customers we serve.

My leadership team is diverse in a traditional sense, representing diversity of gender, sexual orientation, and race, and I value the unique perspectives we each bring to the table. Yes, we have diversity with the stats to back it up, but even more importantly, I measure our success in this area based on the psychological safety and freedom to bring your whole self to the workplace. It's that feedback directly from our associates that tells me we're on the right track.

"What started as a candid conversation with stakeholders led to a major initiative that celebrates the collection. I'm proud of the sense of community we're cultivating and the teams that collaborated to deliver for our stakeholders."



KAMA WINTERS

President, Delta Vacations

Can you share a specific instance where you successfully navigated a major change or challenge, highlighting the key lessons learned and how they shaped your leadership approach?

The most impactful lessons are often when an outcome isn't as successful as you anticipated. One specific example is when Delta announced changes to its loyalty program last year. Our customers' immediate feedback enabled us to reset around our customer-centric values. It was also an important moment of leadership accountability. I took ownership for key decisions, provided transparency into the process for the team on how we arrived there, and actively listened to our customers' feedback on the situation. Together, we developed a solution that took those learnings into account and in turn had the opportunity to come together as a team and support our business and customers.

How have mentorship and sponsorship played a role in your professional development, and how do you actively engage in cultivating talent within your organization?

I often reflect on the influential role that my mentors, both formal and informal, have played in supporting and unlocking every step of my career. They include my graduate professor who helped me land my breakout internship, the executive who pushed me to consider my first leadership role, and a peer mentor circle of working moms who are a continuous sounding board for ideas and development. Your mentors often see things in you that you don't (yet) see in yourself — be open to that input.

Active sponsorship was pivotal in every role in my career. It can feel uncomfortable to openly seek out mentors and take further steps to ask for their sponsorship, but based on your career goals it's a critical step. Challenge yourself to identify and nurture a diverse "board" of mentors, and then be willing to listen and action the guidance they provide.

Within our organization, one of the first questions I often ask my team when we're discussing talent is do they have a mentor. If the answer isn't a definitive yes, that's our starting point. Delta fosters formal mentor relationships across all levels of the organization, and I'm fortunate to be able to invest my time in supporting others through these programs.

How do you maintain a healthy work-life harmony, and what strategies do you employ to prioritize your well-being amidst high-level responsibilities? How do you ensure your team does the same?

For me, this is a work in progress. Just like in the travel business, there are seasons in life and in work. I strive to be intentional in my investments in all areas of my life and acknowledge that sometimes I don't always get the balance right. Many years ago, there was an article on this topic that stuck with me, the concept was: work, sleep, family, fitness, or friends — pick 3. I still lean into this during particularly demanding times and acknowledge that the current season won't last forever. It helps me make conscious adjustments to balance my priorities, while being intentional about where to divest without (as much) guilt.





My most important strategy though is to give myself grace. As a working parent, setting and establishing boundaries that align with my priorities and values is always challenging — but as a leader there are others in the organization that observe how I do this. When I started my career, there weren't many leaders who made being a female executive with a family look achievable. Now, the number of times individuals have shared with me that I've inspired them in this area is one of my proudest accomplishments as a leader. You can't motivate your own team to find balance if you yourself don't lead by example.

How do you stay informed about industry trends and emerging technologies, and what role does continuous learning play in your ongoing personal and professional development?

I set aside time every day to keep a pulse on what's happening in the news, from alerts and consolidated internal feeds. I intentionally seek out diverse sources of information. This helps me stay connected not only to trends, but

importantly, what's on the minds of our customers. We keep a regular dialogue across our leadership teams around topical areas and opportunities. I also draw a lot of relevant insights from HBR.

I've contemplated going back to school, but not in this season of my life. In the meantime, I love listening to podcasts, both as a source of information and inspiration. A few of my favorites are from Glennon Doyle, Mel Robbins, Gayle Lantz, Adam Grant, and Simon Sinek. I also enjoy Love as a Business Strategy and TED Talks Daily. In addition, I spend regular time with a robust peer network and have an executive coach. At the start of 2024, I also planned one key developmental investment in myself per quarter — a conference, seminar, or training that aligns to my goals. This has been on the list to “restart” coming out of COVID and I'm excited to put more structure around my own personal development while encouraging the team in this area as well.



SANGITA WOERNER

Senior Vice President, Marketing and Guest Experience, Alaska Airlines

Can you share a specific instance where you successfully navigated a major change or challenge, highlighting the key lessons learned and how they shaped your leadership approach?

Alaska Airlines has been in business for over 90 years and it's clear that the key to our success is our people. The genuine, heartfelt care that our employees showcase to each other and our guests is palpable. Rebuilding our workforce after COVID meant we had thousands of new employees that needed to embody our secret sauce of CARE. Starting in late 2022, I led an effort to create an in-person training course for all new and existing employees to ensure our foundation of CARE was solidified. It was important that this didn't feel like a standard course, and it needed to be emotive and memorable.

We took over an old warehouse space in Seattle and converted it into what we called the "CARE Retreat." The entire space felt like our brand, and we infused elements of care throughout. We structured the day into three parts: caring for yourself, caring for each other, and caring for our guests. It was important that it felt like a personal experience because that's what Alaska Airlines is about. Overall, we had over 12,000 employees go through the course and the results were positive with folks feeling like Alaska cared about them and that it was clear that CARE is core to who we are.

In terms of shaping my leadership approach, I had never created a training course like this before and it took many iterations to get it right. I learned that it wasn't going to be perfect at the start, but we had to keep fine-tuning and improving the course, taking into account employee feedback. Listening to the feedback was crucial to the success of the program.

How have mentorship and sponsorship played a role in your professional development, and how do you actively engage in cultivating talent within your organization?

I honestly don't have a formal approach to mentorship and sponsorship. I'm constantly listening and learning and asking for advice from colleagues at all levels. Continuous improvement is synonymous with professional development in my mind. Knowing when to ask for help and feedback is critical. In terms of cultivating talent within my organization, I'm a big believer in giving stretch assignments to people with strong potential. They're able to showcase their talents to the broader organization and it exposes them to new challenges, growing them as future leaders.

How do you maintain a healthy work-life harmony, and what strategies do you employ to prioritize your well-being amidst high-level responsibilities? How do you ensure your team does the same?

Honestly, it's hard to maintain work-life harmony. My husband and I both work and we have four children and a goldendoodle. Life is crazy, fun, amazing, rewarding and challenging all at the same time. I think it's important to ringfence the things that are important to you. For me, for example, it's Woerner family dinners. We've made it a point to all sit down together for dinners at least five days a week. Work travel and other events get in the way, but we try to preserve that as much as possible. The other example is exercise. That's my personal outlet and I need to do some type of a workout about five days a week.

For my team, I try to notice if someone is working too many hours, and we discuss how to prioritize or how I can step in and help. Also, it's so important for folks to manage their own work schedule and make sure it fits with their personal life. Flexibility is critical to have work-life harmony.

How do you stay informed about industry trends and emerging technologies, and what role does continuous learning play in your ongoing personal and professional development?

We're learning every single day, and it comes from everywhere — news, social media, marketing publications, open dialogue and experimentation. The big ideas come from being curious, connecting the dots between all these different sources, and then being bold enough to act on it.



MONICA XUERB

Chief Commercial Officer, Loews Hotels & Co.

Can you share a specific instance where you successfully navigated a major change or challenge, highlighting the key lessons learned and how they shaped your leadership approach?

In 2010, after a 17-year career with Marriott and Ritz-Carlton, my position was eliminated. At the time, I was working with Ritz-Carlton as the vice president of revenue management and the company culture was very much part of my personal identity. It was difficult to think about not waking up every day and living our credo and the employee promise. But as my husband noted, it was good for me to get kicked out of the nest, as I never would have left on my own. I realized this was an incredible opportunity for me to do something completely different and start my own consulting company, which was very successful.

Some of the key lessons learned include believe in yourself and trust in your capabilities, and use this as an opportunity to adapt and bounce back stronger. Embracing change and being adaptable are vital skills for many situations. Keep moving forward!

How have mentorship and sponsorship played a role in your professional development, and how do you actively engage in cultivating talent within your organization?

Mentorship and sponsorship have played an important part in my life as a hospitality professional. I've had the privilege of several informal mentors, both men and women that have played critical roles for my development, especially at significant career junctures. From my personal experience, having advocates or sponsors is even better than having a formal mentor. Sponsorship typically involves a senior or influential individual actively supporting and promoting a person's career advancement. A sponsor goes beyond offering guidance or advice; they actively advocate for you, using their influence and networks to create opportunities

for your career growth. Sponsors often provide visibility, recommend the person for projects or promotions, and actively work to open doors within an organization.

Within our organization, I actively promote and endorse our team members, speaking positively about their work, accomplishments and capabilities. This helps build their reputation and credibility with everyone they encounter, both within and outside our company. I strive to understand their goals, offer support and guidance, and provide constructive feedback. Whenever possible, I recommend them for projects, opportunities or collaborations that align with their interests and strengths. Ensuring they receive credit and are recognized for their contributions reinforces their capabilities and drives further growth.

How do you maintain a healthy work-life harmony, and what strategies do you employ to prioritize your well-being amidst high-level responsibilities? How do you ensure your team does the same?

Working from home presents both challenges and benefits to maintaining a healthy work-life balance. For me, having a schedule and sticking to it is imperative. I have clear boundaries between my work and my personal time. I wake up early and spend the first two-and-a-half hours doing things I love to do. I meditate, play with my dog, exercise, get outside — usually walking the dog — and then make myself a great breakfast. I guess you can call that self-care. So I go into work already feeling like I've taken care of my mental and emotional well-being. And I try to end my workday with similar activities, again meditating, going outside, and cooking a great dinner so I can fully disengage.

Taking time off and fully disengaging from work is something I urge all our team members to do. I remind them on a regular basis to ensure no time off is left unused and to take time throughout the year to reset and get re-energized. Disengaging from work means not attending to any work calls, not answering emails, and not taking your laptop on your vacation or days off. I practice this myself, so everyone knows I'm serious about it.

How do you stay informed about industry trends and emerging technologies, and what role does continuous learning play in your ongoing personal and professional development?

I start my day with several podcasts about what's happening in financial and international news. Throughout the day, I read several industry newsletters and try to get ahead of trends that will impact our business. I'm curious about new technology, especially from a productivity standpoint as well as from the customer experience, and am always willing to try new things and share feedback with our team. Since I walk a lot, there are several long-form podcasts I listen to, usually about neuroscience, human behaviors, and improving health and well-being. Recently I signed up for MasterClass so I can delve into some subjects outside my normal interests.

WHO WE ARE

Allianz Partners

As a global leader in travel and specialty insurance, Allianz Partners has a long history of helping people—anytime, almost anywhere. And whether it's that once-in-a-lifetime trip, tickets to an epic concert, or pre-paid registration fees for the next big marathon, life can sometimes throw a wrench in the best of plans. Every year, more than 100 million people worldwide choose us to protect their experiences, and we take pride in exceeding their expectations. As an established company with both a long, proven track record and a commitment to innovation, we're uniquely suited to deliver ideal solutions that meet your customers' ever-changing needs. Visit www.allianzpartners.com to learn more.



Women Leading Travel & Hospitality is a membership-based association that connects executive women across all sectors of the travel and hospitality industry. Its mission is to unite, inspire and empower its community of executive women leaders by providing unparalleled resources, support and motivation to achieve personal and professional growth. For more information, visit womenleadingtravelandhospitality.com.



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