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Exclusive Interview | Chris K. Franzen, Area Vice President, Hyatt for West India & General Manager Grand Hyatt Mumbai Hotel & Residences

April 03, 2020

“Team cohesion is paramount for me to make the hotel tick. If you have one expert who is a top talent but is not a team player, he or she will disrupt the entire set-up and this can be very damaging.”

— CHRIS K. FRANZEN



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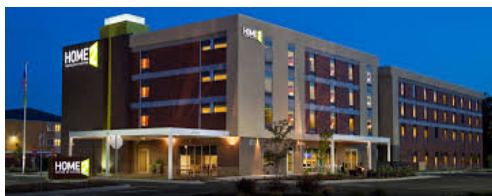
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Area Vice President – West India

General Manager – Grand Hyatt Mumbai Hotel & Residences

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Editor: Tell us about your journey. How did it all start?



I originate from the Swiss Alpine village of Zermatt, in the heart of the Alps, where almost every family depends on the hospitality business. With only 6,000 permanent inhabitants in the car-free village, the same operates over 125 hotels! I am also a third-generation hotelier, with my grandfather and father also having been in the trade.

I began my hospitality career as a Chef in Switzerland; before graduating as a Sommelier a few years later. I am still passionate about cooking!

I completed my Bachelor of Business in Hospitality from the Australian International Hotel School and Cornell University in 1999.

After spending several years in the culinary and food & beverage departments, I opted to try out other areas of the hospitality trade. I worked for many smaller luxury hotels and restaurants along the way such as the Hotel La Porte D'Octodure in Martigny and the Hotel Duc Berthold in Fribourg, both in the French-speaking part of Switzerland.

I have over thirty years of experience having worked in Europe, the US, Australia, Russia, the UAE, Oman and Qatar before joining in India.

I started my Hyatt career at the Hyatt Regency Dubai, followed by other appointments at the Grand Hyatt Muscat in Oman, the Park Hyatt Moscow in Russia, the Grand Hyatt Dubai in the UAE, and the Grand Hyatt Doha Hotel & Villas in Qatar before moving to the Grand Hyatt Mumbai Hotel & Residences as Area Vice President for Western India and General Manager.

Editor: What do you think it takes to succeed in this industry?

Determination, the will and understanding that it is long hours you have to work and not being able to take off on weekends and other holidays.

Editor: What are the attributes you look for while selecting or hiring? If someone wants to work with you, what should they do?

When I was in a more junior position, I was looking more for their technical understanding and expertise for the job they applied for. Now being in a more senior position, the technical aspect is gauged by my colleagues during their interviews. I am looking if the candidate has the right attitude and fits into the team. Team cohesion is paramount for me to make the hotel tick. If you have one expert who is a top talent but is not a team player, he or she will disrupt the entire set-up and this can be very damaging.

Editor: What according to you can trainees do while they are training at hotels to make it a win-win for them & the hotel/unit?

Actively participate and learn, ensure you get feedback from them not just at the end of their training, but on a daily basis. Spend five minutes with them at the end of each day and ask them what we could have explained better. What observations did they make? Anything they think we should change?

Editor: What are some of the trends you see impacting the hospitality industry?

A very interesting question! With COVID-19 upon us, I firmly believe hygiene will be at the forefront of everything we do. And how we communicate what we do to the guests will play an important role.

I think people would be willing to pay extra to hotels and restaurants who go the extra mile and spend more time sanitizing areas more thoroughly, have procedures

and training in place where we can ensure even more so the health and safety of our guests and colleagues.

Editor: Tech is now an enabler for great hospitality. Can you share with us some of the tech that goes into creating your guest experience?

Anything from RFID keyless entry to great e-conference facilities and a stable WiFi environment is simply the basics these days for any business hotel. I think we are just at the beginning of a cycle full of innovations that will transform the guest experience in years to come. Guests will be able to communicate and connect instantly, hotels need to ensure they can provide feedback and services instantly.

Editor: Two things you would like to change in the industry.

The fact that guests do not understand why hotels want credit established on arrival is difficult to understand for me. Which other service or product can you consume first and then pay later?

Be humble, at all times, as a guest or as an employee. On many occasions, problems arise because Ego's are involved... But this is not just industry related. It is daily life. Too many times have I seen how a guest is treating a colleague in a way not acceptable to me, yet when someone more senior engages with them the tone and appreciation is changing. Why? We should respect the individual, not the title.

Editor: If you are undertaking any activity/initiative towards the fight against COVID19, please do share it with us.

This virus is at the forefront of everything we do and like many, if not all, of my hotel colleagues we have put procedures, training and systems in place not only to contain the spread of the virus but also to prevent the same from occurring hopefully again. I think it is a little too early to talk about this, but rest assured the industry will learn and all of us will change the way we operate and look at procedures and standards.

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