

HOTELIER

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MIDDLE EAST



General managers
leading the way



The General Manager Power List 2023

In a region with the largest hotel pipeline in the world, in what is already one of the competitive sectors on the planet, great leadership has never been more important. That is why we are celebrating the very best general managers operating today once more. Back for the third year, here are 101 leaders that are making a difference in the Middle East's hospitality scene



CHRIS FRANZEN

General Manager, Waldorf Astoria Lusail, Doha

Having spent more than half of his career in the GCC, holding top roles across the UAE, Oman and Qatar, it hardly comes as a surprise that hospitality veteran Chris Franzen was able to pull off the launch of Waldorf Astoria Lusail Doha in record time for the 2022 World Cup. Franzen's last general manager role in the region was at the Grand Hyatt Doha, which he left in 2019, having turned it into one of the city's most profitable hotels.

Franzen might have been in the industry for three decades, yet he continues to innovate, as well as nurture the next generation of hoteliers with strong learning and development programs in place to power their growth. His path-breaking leadership and laser-sharp innovation were on full display during the grand opening of the Waldorf Astoria Lusail which marked the brand's debut in Qatar and establishing its reputation as a symbol of luxury in the region. He established a diverse and united team, bringing together individuals from over 70 different nationalities and led them to strategically prepare and tailor the property for the World Cup, emphasising its global significance.

Christian Pertl, chief commercial officer, The Lux Collective

LLC, said: "One of Chris's most commendable attributes is his unwavering support. He is determinedly trustworthy and authentic, consistently standing behind his team despite their challenges. His commitment to collective success is determined, fostering a sense of unity and collaboration that is truly exceptional. In summary, Chris Franzen embodies the qualities of humour, innovation, empathy, and trustworthiness that define a remarkable leader. His visionary and inclusive leadership style inspires individuals and teams to achieve exceptional results, solidifying his status as an invaluable asset to any organisation."

Hotelier Middle East caught up with Franzen on what it takes to be a forward-thinking leader, why the Middle East is a great place to be a hotelier today, and his top tips to the next generation of general managers. Here's what he had to say:

What makes a great GM?

"A great general manager possesses a combination of leadership, interpersonal, and strategic skills. But above all, he or she must be able to nurture a healthy culture, that is driving the business and culture where the team is able to focus on results. This will only work if the leader is approachable and open to feedback himself.

"A leader must know the trigger points of motivating their teams, and ensuring the highest levels of guest satisfaction. Their ability to adapt to change, make critical decisions, and manage resources efficiently are also crucial. Moreover, a great GM should be a visionary who keeps the hotel at the forefront of innovation in the industry, constantly seeking new ways to enhance the guest experience. I personally dislike the title of general manager, we are above all hosts."

The number one tip for someone looking to become a GM:

"The road to becoming a GM can be challenging but extremely rewarding. My number one tip for aspiring GMs is to cultivate a deep understanding of the hotel industry from the ground up. Start in entry-level positions and gradually work your way through different departments. This hands-on experience will provide valuable insights into the operational aspects of a hotel.

"Don't be afraid to change brands and companies, they all add value to your experience. Additionally, invest in your



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leadership skills, focus on effective communication, and build a strong professional network. Developing a well-rounded skill-set, combined with hard work and dedication, will pave the way for a successful transition to the role of a general manager.”

Why is the Middle East, and Qatar in particular, a great place to be a hotelier?

“The region has experienced remarkable growth and development over the past few decades. With massive infrastructure projects, world-class events, and increased tourism, there’s a constant demand for hospitality services. This presents endless opportunities for hoteliers to thrive and excel. The Middle East is a cultural melting pot, offering hoteliers a chance to work with people from various backgrounds. It’s an enriching experience that fosters a broader perspective and cultural sensitivity.

“The Middle East is synonymous with luxury and opulence. As a hotelier in this region, you have the opportunity to be at the forefront of luxury hospitality trends, setting new standards for innovation and guest experiences. Many cities in the region offer an exceptional quality of life with high standards of living, a cosmopolitan lifestyle, and diverse recreational opportunities, making it an attractive place to build a career in hospitality.”

