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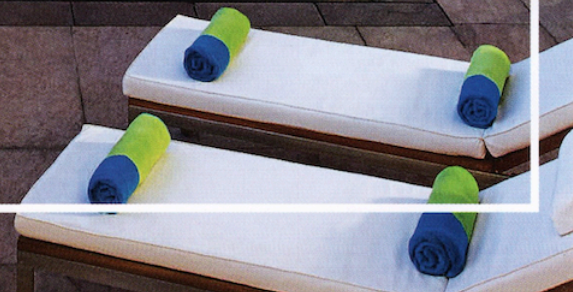
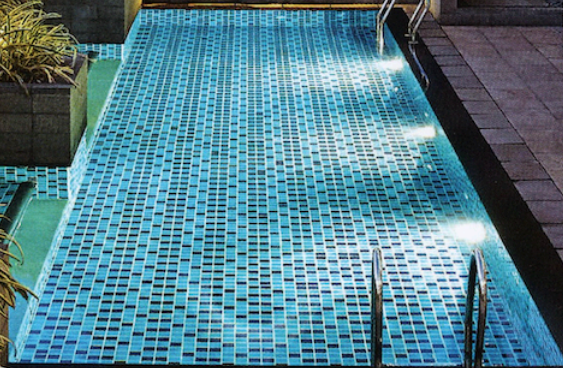
The 10

HOTEL ROOMS YOU JUST
WOULDN'T WANT TO LEAVE!

TRAVEL
SELLING INDIA
TO INDIANS

AIRLINES
GETTING BACK
ON THEIR WINGS

CHEF TALK
HESTON BLUMENTHAL
GORDON RAMSAY
JAMIE OLIVER
CLARE SMYTH
TOM KERRIDGE



GUEST COLUMN



BY **CHRIS K. FRANZEN**

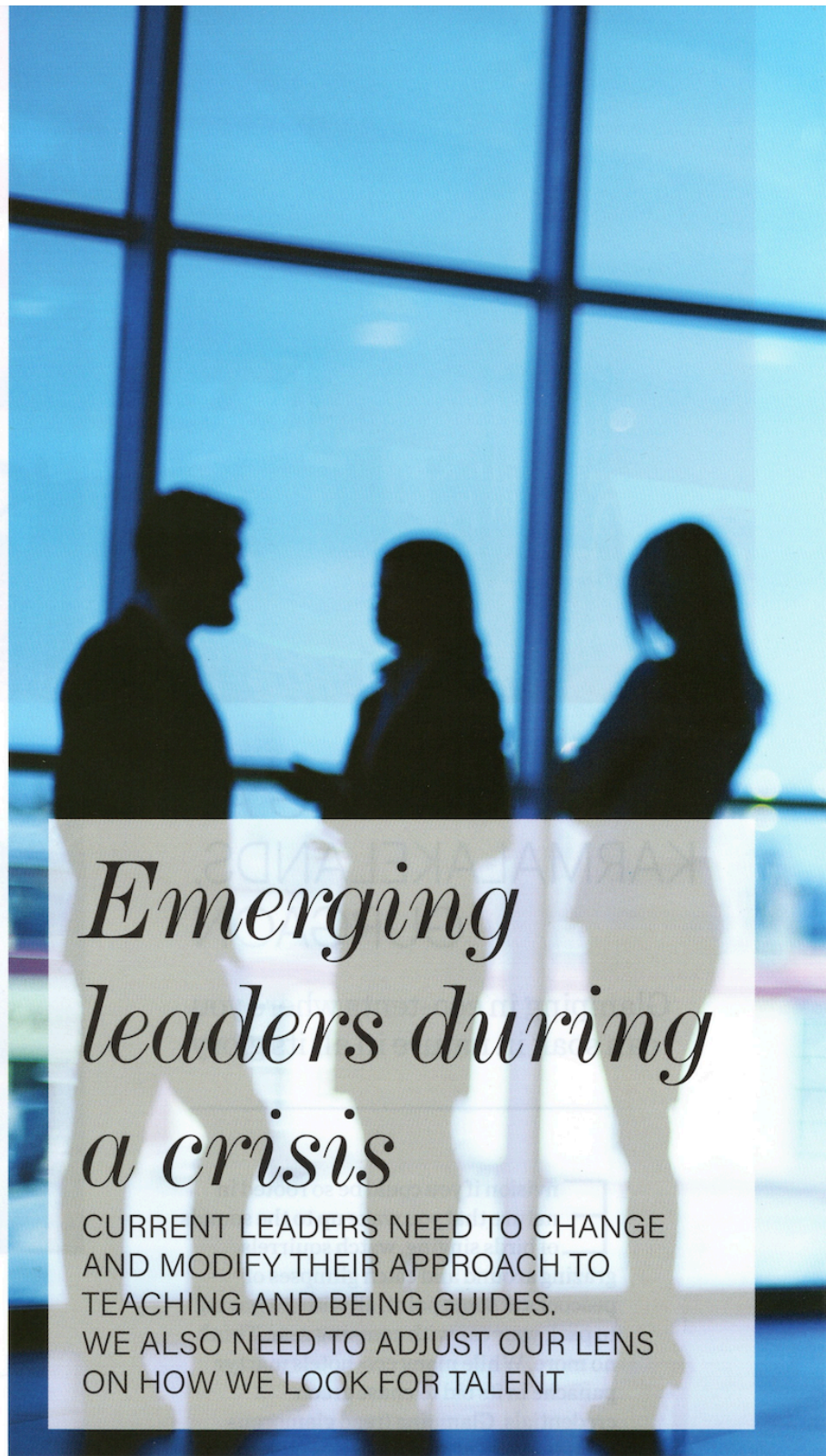
Looking back to the middle of the COVID-19 crisis, say around August of 2020, it was already clear to everyone that this situation had hit our industry not only very hard but that the crisis would drag out for far, far longer than any of us could even imagine just a few weeks earlier.

By mid-2020, we had already done our second round of crisis planning, cost reductions, put expenses on hold, asked for reduced charges in contracted services and accepted the reality of reduced salaries if not redundancies for many of us. Those who still had a job probably accepted a pay cut gladly just to sustain some form of income.

Depending on where in the world you lived, no job meant no salary and really 'no income'! The somewhat lucky ones could expect a massively reduced income through government subsidies.

Having gone through a cycle of borderline panic, facing a situation that none of us in the industry ever faced in living memory, we were now gearing up and crystalball-gazing to predict what the future would hold. There were, by and large, no trends emerging, and the data was anything but reliable and clear. It was impossible to make any form of prediction or sensible forecast in our business.

The teams and hotels moved heaven and earth and came up with some brilliant ideas. Revenue streams were tapped that were previously of little importance due to the low



Emerging leaders during a crisis

CURRENT LEADERS NEED TO CHANGE AND MODIFY THEIR APPROACH TO TEACHING AND BEING GUIDES. WE ALSO NEED TO ADJUST OUR LENS ON HOW WE LOOK FOR TALENT

contribution in the overall picture, or new revenue generating avenues were found. With the new year firmly upon us, we also went through the year-end cycle of looking at our teams and doing performance assessments in one form or another.

This is the point where I really started to take a hard look back and did some self-reflection, letting the scenarios and the worldwide situation pass through my mind again, reflecting on them. I was lucky enough to work with engaged and professional teams when the pandemic hit – but at the same time when looking back it raised two questions centered around talent we identified as leaders of the future.



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**"IT IS IN THE CHALLENGE
OF UNCERTAINTY WHERE
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CHARACTER IS FORGED.
WHERE TOUGH DECISIONS
MUST BE MADE."**

Firstly, how did these 'identified future leaders' fare during the crisis? How did they handle a situation so unfamiliar that even their own leaders couldn't help them with a proven recipe for success and guidance? Did they embrace and challenge the unknown and take risks or just 'drop the ball', become intimidated and wait for guidance? We are speaking about natural leaders who under a normal scenario would be highly self-motivated individuals with a certain degree of self-belief.

Secondly, did we see leaders emerge in the face of uncertainty, who we did not identify before?





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EXISTING LEADERS

Looking back, it is clear that by and large, our identified future leaders performed wonderfully. But it is also clear that the current leaders need to change and modify their approach to teaching and being guides. The mentors must convey their experience above and beyond the usual business models and prepare future leaders for situations that are exponentially interruptive to the business for an extended period.

Unfortunately, we also saw a very limited number of colleagues who did not perform well under pressure and had difficulties adapting to the new normal. More alarmingly, some of the managers leading them then started questioning the candidates, asking if they are indeed of the right pedigree to be leaders of the future.

I believe that this is exactly where leadership really counts! If we identified someone as a future leader, then the mindset, skills and emotional intelligence is already present – so did we as leaders not prepare them enough?

I realised soon that many of our colleagues in senior positions were interpreting one of their report’s failure as their own failure. Rather than

addressing the situation and asking themselves what they can do better, they instead discount the person and may even go as far as relabelling them as not fit for leadership. As leaders, we must take the time to assess the situation in greater detail when something like this happens. Conversations with the individual need to be had to clearly understand where the problem lies.

FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN

Through my own interaction I can tell you that on most occasions it was simply the fear of the unknown. They don’t know if they will still have a job in a few weeks, they don’t know if they will be able to feed their family, send their kids to school, pay the rent and have enough money saved for medical emergencies.

Now take a step back and put yourself in this situation; you do not know if you can sustain your current lifestyle and on top of it there is pressure at work to deliver the unthinkable. We as senior leaders must see this and seek out those colleagues who need help. And by help, it could be something as simple as assuring a person that he or she still has a job. Or just being someone to talk to about their problems and fears or simply assuring them that we as managers will do our best to assist them as much as we can. More than once



over the past months, I have seen a complete turnaround in performance from an associate once he or she was given the opportunity to get their worries out in the open!

NEW LEADERS

We all gained a lot of experience and learned a lot in the past year. We really went further than the horizon on many occasions to places and situations we thought we could not handle – yet we did! It is in the challenge of uncertainty where leaders are born. Where character is forged. Where tough decisions must be made.

And here is where we found colleagues that performed superbly well during times of uncertainty, who rose to the occasion and took charge and showed leadership without being told to do so. While I am blessed to be

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surrounded by many such champions, I am certain we have them everywhere. We just must look harder. But we also need to adjust our lens on how we look for talent. It is not just a clear set of rules that define leadership and a person's capability to lead.

I made myself a little list of attributes I will look for in potential future leaders besides drive, enthusiasm and willingness to learn. We should ensure that we look for colleagues who display the following characteristics:

Shares Information: They must be great communicators! They must be able to convey the message and while most people are good in managing upwards, the skill to communicate downwards is even more important to drive the message.


Willingness to Adjust Leadership Style: Many leaders are set in their ways and expect the people around them to adjust to them. Let's face it, not everyone likes to be managed the way we lead them, and our leadership style may even prevent others from really being able to perform. Remember, personalities are different, and a leader's style must be flexible enough to adjust to his or her team to get the best out of them. They must also be tough enough to remove disruptors from a team, no matter how good they are in their specific profession!

Embraces Empowerment: I know this has been around for some time, and many colleagues do not like this word for various reasons. Who am I to give power to you? But if the experiences of the past nine months have taught me anything, it is the fact that in certain cultures, leaders have great difficulties in letting go and letting teams do their jobs. A lot of time is wasted in micromanaging an outcome that would have been achieved anyway.

Empower through delegation! And stop wasting time.

Shows Empathy: A lot has been said about empathy and the fact that we should walk in the shoes of the other person before judging them. And rightly so. During difficult times this is more important than ever, and I still feel it needs to be raised and people still need to be reminded.

Enables and Removes Obstacles: As a leader, I always feel that my biggest responsibility is to make the job of those working with me easier; to remove obstacles and to ensure I am enabling them to perform better. But the flip side is that this can be misinterpreted. Some leaders reporting to you will stop leading and will always come to you to look for a solution. It is a fine line and we must still be the enablers who remove obstacles, but at the same time also tell those colleagues around us that they are accountable and must present or offer solutions to a problem.

Stay safe! Love and support each other! 

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