



Without a passionate interest in life, which a talented person looks at through the prism of his creativity, success is impossible. We all travel through the world, stay in hotels and proceed to forget, except on occasions, something is different. We might witness a miracle of transformation of the hotel into a charming place you want to come back to again and again. Our columnist Valeriano Antonioli is a famous hotelier, the creator of unique experiments in the hotel business and an interesting person who knows how to change a hotel to make it a successful business.

Valeriano Antonioli

A Self-Portrait

When I will eventually write my autobiography, the outcome will be a combination of James Bond and Forrest Gump. I already know what the introduction will look like. It's hard to believe the kind of stories I experienced. When my career in the hotel industry started I automatically attracted adventures. I always happened to be in the middle of action and near extraordinary people like my early experiences in Moscow, where there was political ferment and change with the election of President Putin. I realized that I had encountered interesting people who then became international figures. A highlight was when President Obama addressed the nation from the hotel where I was staying. Life becomes interesting and the Universe is your accomplice when you know what you want. Coincidences are a projection of your will and it is important to notice them and understand how to use them. It is my philosophy and explanation of my fortune, luck and success.

People should be eager to learn and change themselves. When I was twenty I decided that at the age of thirty-four I would become a general manager of the best hotel in the city. I made a plan, listed the necessary disciplines, entered and graduated from VWA Goethe University in Frankfurt, Germany. Every time I'd been working on something I felt supported by some power, say, luck. In 2000 I became a manager of Sheraton Diana Majestic-Milan Hotel which I repositioned as 'the fashion hotel in Milan' by making a true happening of the Milanese habit of having an evening aperitif. Here, I created the Diana Garden and Black Label Room transforming Diana Majestic into one of the hippest hotels in Europe! It was far from being the best hotel in the city and I had to work hard, during that time, I felt confident, wrote books and recorded CDs. All doors were open to me, I had sponsors, cars, expensive suits. By that time, in 2007 I became Legion of Honour as Cavaliere della Repubblica Italiana and many brands took my concept as their base.

From Milan I returned to the US and became the manager of W Los Angeles Hotel. I transformed it and doubled the profit in a year. I used the same tactics as with the previous Diana Majestic: gathered people following Oscar night parties and made the hotel become a place where people enjoyed spending time together. Same story happened at the InterContinental Montelucia Resort & Spa and other hotels I worked for.

Today I am CEO of the Lungarno Collection joining the team in 2010, a hotel management company owned by the Ferragamo family but not a fashion brand of hotels. Fashion is volatile and changes with the seasons while a hotel requires longevity with the challenge of remaining fresh and innovative. With the new concept of Lungarno called Portrait we are able to experiment this innovation in hospitality with our human resources.

We decided not to be like others, there was a need for something new. So, first we removed the different uniforms. No sign of subordination was left and the director looked exactly like a clerk. Every member of the staff knows who the guests are and what they are here for, for how long they will stay and what their tastes and preferences are, we tend to become the 'personal local assistant' of all our guests. We changed the attitude towards the choice of hiring people implementing in all Portrait hotels a winning lean organizational chart where everyone on the team are equally responsible in the decision-making process and able to provide any kind of recommendation to our clients. We uniquely recruit and train employees providing hands on hotel and local experiences reflecting in extremely personalized service. This can only be done with strong internal communication where essential information is shared to create a competent team and trustworthy relationships with the guests.

We also accept the challenge of a highly technological century and declare our wish to remain human. I am currently planning a new Portrait project in Italy bringing the brand to the next level where I will use my accumulated experiences towards making it a fantastic concept. While I hope it surpasses expectations I want to continue to personalize luxury in a very human way.

Each of us address the difficult question of what exactly we want in our lives. Not everyone can answer this question and the one who can is happy. I look for answers and I think that everything is connected in life and it is good to feel the Universe in its complexity. Probably the main thing one needs is to search for a sense, new forms and move forward. When you understand who you are and what you want and can accomplish in your life, success becomes an everyday reality.

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