

News

A young hotelier's advice: 'Always be thinking of that next step'

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By [HOTELS Contributing Editor](#) on 6/1/2018

Jay Gauer's view has definitely improved over his three decades in the hospitality business: At age 8 he was working in a hotel kitchen; today, at 37, he presides as general manager at Hotel des Trois Couronnes, a historic 5-star resort in Vevey, perched on Switzerland's Lake Geneva, overlooking the Alps. Gauer spent his formative years learning as much as he could about hospitality, studied business and had a brief fling with the finance side. But he migrated back to operations and has stayed there ever since. Gauer's eye for promotions and a deeply ingrained sense of hospitality have helped keep the Trois Couronnes in the spotlight.

Gauer is one of 20 rising stars (all 40 and under) HOTELS interviewed for our May feature. All shared their insights about their lives in the business and thoughts about some of today's challenges and opportunities. In a Wall Street Journal-sponsored series, read Gauer's responses to our questions and [click here](#) to link to the full list of interviews with HOTELS 20 Next-Gen hospitality leaders.



Jay Gauer, general manager, Hotel des Trois Couronnes, Vevey, Switzerland

Contributed by Megan Rowe

HOTELS: What's the state of career opportunities in the hotel industry?

Jay Gauer: There have never been so many opportunities. Our world is changing and constantly evolving, and new jobs are being created from that. I also think openings for people with cross-functional experience are growing; I see more and more hiring of people who aren't graduating from hotel schools.

H: Do you think glass ceilings and the old boys' network in the hotel industry remain intact? And how are younger professionals networking now?

JG: In my case I can say not at all. I think we have more women managers than men. In some meetings it's just women and me. When it comes to networking, there are new ways to interact, and the younger generations are very eager to interact digitally. But I still think meeting and spending time with people is important and maybe even more essential now in our business.

H: Are company cultures shifting in a timely manner to meet hotel staff and corporate needs? How can employers ensure that younger professionals are attracted to the hotel industry?

JG: Earlier in my career I remember the hotel culture was very tough. Mistakes were not allowed. Everything had always been done a certain way and still had to be done that way. Today, we see ourselves as a learning organization. Just because we did things one way for the past 10 years doesn't mean we will continue to do so. We constantly coach and challenge the staff, take them out of their comfort zone and try new things. We want to have a culture of being the first to do new things.

We try to treat employees like our guests because we want them both to be happy. What we strive to do every day is to have a positive impact on people's lives, and that starts with employees. We also hire for attitude and train for skill — attitude is more important. So if you have someone who provides you with perfect service but is kind of robotic, with no emotion, versus someone with a sunny personality who makes mistakes, you will always forgive those mistakes more easily. That kind of attitude is really essential to what we do.

H: What do you care about most when it comes to hotels and careers?

JG: Having a positive impact on people's lives — if we can bring them happiness, joy, inspiration, this is what matters.

H: What about the business keeps you up at night?

One of the big issues we have now is data flow and how we can use all this data that we have. We want to offer personalized service, but for independent hotels, mastering technology that helps us do that is a challenge. Big chains have more tools at their disposal.

H: To what do you most attribute your success and growth?

JG: In general, I have been lucky to be surrounded by smarter and better people.

H: What would you tell people entering the industry now?

JG: Ask yourself a question: If you had a magic wand, where would you be and what would you be doing five years from now? This is something we ask our staff. You should always be thinking about that next step.

H: Describe the things that you try to do every day, and why you do them.

JG: I meditate, which helps to cure my mind. I eat with our employees in the cafeteria, which enables me to connect with them in a different way. And I greet our guests at their tables during lunch and dinner, which puts a face behind the place and enables us to develop relationships.

H: Where do you find inspiration?

JG: In general, disruptive companies and ideas inspire me. WeWork is a good example; it's providing a transformative solution that enables people to be more creative and productive, turning boring office spaces into creative spaces. Travel, nature, art, design, architecture, psychology, sociology — all inspire me. When it comes to people, my father, an old-school hotelier, inspired me by teaching me the importance of being with guests and entertaining. These days, I'm inspired by people like Inés Miró-Sans, who created Casa Bonay in Barcelona; Ted Teng, CEO of Leading Hotels of the World, who always asks the right questions; and AccorHotels' Sébastien Bazin, who isn't afraid to invest in different ventures.