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Leadership Lessons From Hotel Impossible

REALITY TELEVISION SHOW BREATHES
NEW LIFE INTO DISTRESSED HOTELS

By Larry Broughton

What the heck can veteran leaders and high-achievers learn from a hit reality television show that features failing hotels and out of touch business owners? As it turns out, a whole lot.

My first gig in the industry was as a night auditor at a small no-tell motel in San Francisco's seedy Tenderloin District. The basic job description for the overnight position was to keep the peace among the raucous clientele; file a report when guests' cars got vandalized; and call the police when I witnessed drug deals or prostitution taking place onsite.

After working the graveyard shift for several months, an investment firm purchased the property with the intention of renovating and repositioning the tired motel as a hip rock-n-roll hotel. As the firm acquired more hotels, I was promoted to an executive position, and ultimately became a partner at what became one of the vanguard companies in the budding boutique hotel industry.

Fast forward twenty-some years (more than a dozen years after launching my own hotel company), a reality television show premiered on the Travel Channel whose premise was to do exactly what I had built my hotel career doing: breathing new life into distressed hotels. The show, called *Hotel Impossible*, is hosted by Anthony Melchiorri, a firecracker of a personality, who is

fearless about speaking the truth, and cares deeply about employee satisfaction and the guest experience.

I was surprised nearly two years ago to receive a call from Anthony, asking me, "Who the hell are you?" Although he had

tell he was serious. He explained that he was working on a difficult project for *Hotel Impossible*, and needed assistance convincing the owner that if they really wanted the hotel to succeed, they needed to step away from the business and hire a professional hospitality management company. During

his search, it seemed everywhere he turned, he said, industry influencers and professionals recommended my firm. This serves as a testament to one of our business mottos: pursue excellence in all you do.

I agreed to meet Anthony at the job site, and we immediately

"Whether it's a hotel website, property curb appeal, team training or clean rooms, the details really do matter. A great guest experience, an excellent product and superb value are the minimum standards in hospitality today."

-Larry Broughton



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Leadership Lessons From *Hotel Impossible*

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By Larry Broughton

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his search, it seemed everywhere he turned, he said, industry influencers and professionals recommended my firm. This serves as a testament to one of our business mantras: pursue excellence in all you do.

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hit it off. Perhaps it was our shared love for hotel turnaround projects and our ability to see gold where others only see garbage; or perhaps it was our shared military veteran status. Anthony served in the U.S. Air Force as a Protocol Officer; which seems much more fitting for a transition into hospitality, than mine as an Army Special Forces Weapons Sergeant.

Now, two years later, after making a few appearances on the hit show, I have been able to recognize and reinforce several key leadership lessons, and connect the dots as to why some hotel businesses fail, while others flourish.

Successful, transformational leaders:

- treat team members with dignity and respect. Too often, failing hotel owners treat staff members like servants and maintain deplorable work conditions, yet expect them to be effective ambassadors, remain

because they have found success in an unrelated industry, that they'll immediately find success in hospitality. It's not rocket science, but there are thousands of decisions that must be made each day to be successful when running a hotel. Successful business owners and leaders become experts and authorities in their chosen industry, and remain current with changing trends.

- maintain focus and master the basics. First impressions matter. Whether it's a hotel website, property curb appeal, team training or clean rooms, the details really do matter. A great guest experience, an excellent product and superb value are the minimum standards in hospitality today. The only way to insure this is to implement effective systems in every area of the business.

- actively solicit feedback. Every hotel (and every business for that matter) must ask guests and patrons for feedback on their experience. The key is to



“Eight of the top hotel brands have publicly committed to hiring veterans, including Hilton Worldwide, Marriott, Hyatt, Starwood and others.”

hit their first roadblock. Effective leaders continually remind themselves of the potential legacy that once inspired them to take on a particular project and accept the

and dump them willy-nilly to the nearest employee. World-class leaders are master delegators.

- recognize that change starts at the top. Our grandfathers had it right when they told us to lead by example. If we want an upbeat, positive culture in our businesses, we must be upbeat and positive. If we want our guests to be treated well, we must treat our team members and community members well.

- take responsibility for problems. Many failing business owners are quick to point the finger at employees, the competition and market conditions for their woes. Successful leaders truly are problem solvers. In business, all problems fall into four categories: people, process, product and profit. At the end of the day, however, all problems boil down to people problems. It takes an ounce of humility and profound courage to accept that more often than we like to admit, the biggest people problem is looking back at us in the mirror. Sometimes we need to be the change we expect in our business and our life.

Let these lessons sink in for a moment, then, go do something significant today!



loyal and make money for them. That recipe simply does not work. Successful leaders treat team members the way they want their clients and guests to be treated.

- know their industry. I'm baffled at the number of new hotel owners who assume

avoid being offended, but rather to take rapid action towards improvement.

- continually re-evaluate and communicate long-term goals. Too many business owners want to throw in the towel when the going gets tough, or when they

mantle of leadership; and they are vocal evangelists for their cause.

- play to their strengths. Successful leaders know the strengths of each team member, and they delegate projects accordingly. Many failing hotel owners shrug off important tasks