

# TeleGRAM

## Great American Hotel Group Quarterly Newsletter

### Another Year Wiser

Wishing a very happy birthday to our Great American Hotel Group office and property associates:

*Candace Snelling - December 14  
Kathy Chalue - December 17*

### Giddy Up

Congratulations to the following office and property associates on moving on up the corporate ladder:

*Dan Hays - GM The Inn of Pensacola*

### Around the Block

Wishing a "Happy Anniversary" to our Great American Hotel Group office and property associates:

*Dave Akridge - 24 years  
Gabrielle Smith - 17 years*

### Welcome Aboard

Darcy Lyle has joined the team at the Hampton Inn Bennington as the new Director of Sales. Most recently, Darcy was employed by the NY State Tourism Division and the Quality Inn in Latham, NY.

### A Laugh A Day ...

*Well yes, it's a huge bill....  
But you've been in your room the whole winter!*



*RJ Greene (left) and CEO Albert Lu (right)*

## GRAM to Manage Two Hotels in Queens, NY

Great American Hotel Group has entered into a 10 year management agreement with East West United Realty Development Group LLC to operate two new construction hotels in Queens, NY. GRAM, a Marriott approved legacy management company, will oversee operations for the 123-room Courtyard by Marriott and 96-room Fairfield Inn, both slated for a December 2015 opening.

"We are honored to partner with LiYi "Albert" Lu (CEO), Shisheng Chen and Aile Zhou (Partners) on two great hotels featuring two great brands," noted RJ Greene, Principle. "The Queens location is perfectly positioned nearby CitiBank Field, home of the NY Mets, with easy access to the Long Island Railroad and Horace Harding Expressway." The hotel will offer shuttle service to the train stations, CitiBank Field, JFK and LaGuardia airports.

The two hotels will be adjacent to one another, but connected underground. They will have a common basement with shared back-of-the-house commercial laundry, featuring an on-demand natural gas fired hot water system with ozone clean washing machines and natural gas fired dryers. Utilizing steel frame and block construction, with plank floors, the hotels will feature E-zone rated energy efficient windows and Island Air's new energy efficient PTACs.

The hotel will employ approximately 70 hourly and 10 management staff.

## Hotel Room Number Fraud

Beware of scammers duping your GSRs into transferring calls to guest rooms. It is, and has always been our policy to ask callers for the name of the guest before transferring a call to a hotel room. Please reinforce this practice to all shifts to avoid potentially damaging hotel and guest fraud. Recently, one of our hotels received such a phone call and because of proactive and knowledgeable action, a potential situation was averted!

This is how it works.... someone calls the front desk and asks for room 201. The GSR transfers the call to the room. The guest answers the phone and the person on the other end identifies themselves as a front desk clerk, goes on to say that there was a problem with the guest's credit card and address information and would they mind verifying the data. They are so smooth, the guest could easily think they are talking to the front desk.



Train your GSRs to look out for potential fraud. Make sure that if someone calls your hotel and simply asks to be transferred to a specific room, that the GSR verifies the guest name. Proper response would be, "I'd be happy to transfer your call. For security purposes, would you please verify the name of the guest you are trying to reach?" If the person cannot give you a full name, then the GSR should indicate that this name does not match our records and you would be happy to take a message and relay it to the guest.

Smooth talking scammers may even try to get the information from your GSR by appealing to their emotions. For example, one caller confessed, "I met this girl at XYZ restaurant tonight and she told me to call her at the ABC Hotel. I am embarrassed that I forgot her name but we really hit it off and I only remember her room number. Won't you just help a guy out?"

Don't let your hotel be duped. Reinforce your staff phone training today!

## Work Smarter, Not Harder

### 8 Tips for Perfect Chair Posture [\(Click here\)](#)

1. Sit back in your chair. If you can't sit back, support your low back with a lumbar roll, rolled towel or small pillow.
2. Don't lean forward and sit on the edge of your chair. This will cause your low back to arch, your head to drop forward and your shoulders to round.
3. Drop your shoulders and keep them relaxed, so it doesn't look like you're wearing them as earrings.
4. Keep your arms close to your sides.
5. Make sure your elbows are bent 90 degrees.
6. Stretch the top of your head toward the ceiling, and tuck your chin in slightly.
7. Keep your upper back and neck comfortably straight by rolling your shoulders back and tucking in your tummy about 20 percent.
8. Place your feet flat on the floor, pointing them forward so your knees are level with your hips. If necessary, prop up your feet with a footstool or other support.

## Renovation Update:

Work continues at the Clarion Inn Wakefield MA. Sean Wilson, General Manager, reports that the lobby is just about done. "We have some minor painting and tile work to do before it is finalized, but all and all we are pleased with the progress." The lobby renovation included a new fireplace with flat screen television, new carpeting, and a beautiful black granite tile entry. The picture below shows the new front desk.



Room renovations on the first floor are 90% complete. Work has started on the second floor of the hotel. Second floor rooms will begin to come back in inventory the first week in November.

The balance of the public areas are slated for renovation. Work still continues on the pool, the billiards room and the restaurant.

Holiday Trivia Questions Answers:

1.b 2.b 3.b 4.d 5.d 6.b 7.a 8.c 9.d 10.c 11.a 12.c 13.c 14.b



## Selling the Sizzle ....

Linda Komornik, Corporate Director  
of Sales & Marketing

Creating packages and promotions can be an asset to your sales and marketing activities - but only if they make sense and do not encroach into your sales margins. Combining an amenity, meal, event, or gift with guest rooms is oftentimes attractive to the client because of the value-add angle. With careful planning, such promotions don't need to cost the earth and can deliver a high ROI. Here are a few tips on how to run a cost-effective sales promotion:

**IDENTIFY THE RIGHT REWARD** - The right reward will capture the consumer's imagination, create awareness, and reinforce brand values. The potential consumer must be engaged and excited and want your product. This does not need to be a big-budget reward, after all, we want to make more money, not give away the house. Family days are increasingly popular. A day out for 2 adults and 2 children could be attractive to those who do not have an over abundance of disposable income.

**CHOOSE A COST EFFECTIVE VEHICLE** - The key is to get the message out there so the consumer can buy from you. E-blasts, direct mail, social media and distributing flyers by hand are the easiest methods to get the word out. Create a digital friendly flyer, send out with all your correspondence, print out the flyer and put it in your sales kits, send information out to your email and hotel databases, hand carry and post flyers in businesses and neighborhoods, ask your corporate customers to distribute or post in their employee break rooms. If you don't get the word out you can create promotions until the cow comes home and no one will ever buy it!

**MAKE SURE THE PRICE IS RIGHT** - Determine what the cost of the value-adds are and price your package appropriately. Are you giving rewards points? Are you adding gift cards? Are you including tickets to an event? Make sure that you cover the price of the amenity either by discounting the price of the item or discounting room rate. Build the back half of the package in your PMS appropriately so that you don't spend hours trying to allocate spending to the right account after the fact.

Value-added sales promotions are a way to increase awareness and sales while maintaining margins. Creativity is essential in order to capture the imagination and attention of any target audience and to give the promotion the "chat factor" and therefore longevity. BOGO's and other price promotions are oftentimes forgotten, where a promotion offering a creative reward such as family holidays, luxury breaks and dining out at a great price appeals to many people who are watching their personal spending.

Happy value-adding!

## A Time For Giving (And Receiving)

Here's a chance to test your knowledge of the holiday season! Answers to the quiz can be found on page 2 of this newsletter. Enjoy!

1. How many pilgrims came over on the Mayflower?  
a. 89                                      b. 102                                      c. 185  
d. 217                                      e. None of the above
2. What does the term "cornucopia" mean?  
a. Corn Husks                              b. Horn of Plenty  
c. A Traditional Corn Dish
3. Which US State produces the most turkeys annually?  
a. Alabama                                      b. North Carolina                                      c. Missouri  
d. Washington DC                                      e. Iowa
4. How high must a cranberry bounce before it is harvested?  
a. 6 inches                                      b. 8 inches                                      c. 3 inches  
d. 4 inches                                      e. None of the above
5. What is the name of Rudolph's dad?  
a. Vixon                                      b. Dixon                                      c. Dasher  
d. Donner                                      e. Santa Claus
6. What is the guardian angel of George Bailey named in "It's a Wonderful Life"?  
a. Mike                                      b. Clarence                                      c. Robert  
d. Gabriel                                      e. William
7. Why was the Grinch so nasty?  
a. Small Heart                                      b. Small Brain                                      c. Broken Leg  
d. Bad Boss                                      e. Dirty Hotel Room
8. In what movie does the song 'White Christmas' first appear?  
a. White Christmas                                      b. The Bells of St. Mary's                                      c. Holiday Inn  
d. Going My Way                                      e. Miracle on 34th Street
9. What does Ralphie (A Christmas Story) want for Christmas?  
a. Bicycle                                      b. 2 Front Teeth                                      c. A New Dad  
d. Red Ryder BB Gun
10. Who is most know for singing Blue Christmas?  
a. Dean Martin                                      b. Papa Smerf                                      c. Elvis  
d. Bing Crosby                                      e. The Beatles
11. How many times does Santa check his Naughty & Nice list?  
a. Twice                                      b. Annually                                      c. Quarterly
12. Which is not one of Santa's reindeer?  
a. Dasher                                      b. Prancer                                      c. Wisen  
d. Dancer                                      e. Blitzen                                      d. Cupid
13. How fast can wild turkeys run?  
a. 15 mph                                      b. 5 mph                                      c. 25 mph
12. Who was first President to make Thanksgiving a national holiday?  
a. Washington                                      b. Lincoln                                      c. Jefferson  
d. Roosevelt                                      e. Carter                                      d. Adams

What is the difference between an employee appraisal and a development discussion? If you answered that all appraisals are development discussions, but not all development discussions are appraisals, you would be correct.

One mistake that is commonly made in managing the development of team members is that the leader saves up all their feedback for a team member, and discusses things like their goals, their challenges and their ambitions only once a year - at the time of the "annual appraisal". This yearly tradition is perceived by many as an opportunity to dump or unload everything that is on their chest.

In effect, the appraisal should not be a Review, it should be mostly a PREview. If a leader is doing their job properly, all of the things that need to be reviewed are handled at the time they occur. Many of the greatest role models and mentors have a fixed appointment with each of his/her key players every month to discuss how things are going relative to their goals. It is an opportunity to check on milestones achieved, review targets and discuss strategies for individual successes - and of course to provide feedback as appropriate, over and above the feedback that was delivered in a timely fashion when things occurred. This means that the annual appraisal can be used to summarize discussions that had taken place during the year and use them as a springboard for the year to come, setting goals and going over development opportunities.



So, how should such a development discussion or performance PREview look?

**Step 1 - Introduction:** Establish a positive atmosphere and introduce the idea of the development discussion in advance, giving the team member a chance to prepare. The success of the meeting will depend to a certain degree on the culture of communication and transparency that has been established as a team.

**Step 2 - Past Successes:** Ask the team member about recent successes. "In your opinion, what were your main successes?"

"Where would you consider you have developed most since our last meeting?" Having heard the team member's opinion, it is time to make comments and add impressions and observations. Talking about these successes will lay a positive foundation for other parts of the discussion.

**Step 3 - Current Strengths:** Ask the team member about their strong points or skills and how these helped achieve their last milestones and successes. "What are your strong points, particularly as they relate to your current position?" "What particular skills do you think you have that have contributed to your recent successes?" Add your opinion based on the success and the strong points of the team member.

**Step 4 - Objectives For Future Development:** Ask the team member "Where do you think you need to focus for your personal development?" "What skills would you like to focus on developing for the future?" Discuss points of improvement and new objectives for the future. It will be important to focus on new skills, or even where the team member might be strong in their current position, but will need to develop if they are to grow within the hotel.

**Step 5 - Setting Objectives:** Ask the team member, "Having reflected on your strong points and areas of improvement, what are your personal development goals for the future?" The goals set need to be concrete with focus on measurable outcomes and timelines. If they are not concrete, then these goals become voluntary. It is also important that these are development discussions and that the environment needs to be one of dialogue.

The good news is that research has shown that by focusing on "developing others" combined with timely communication, managers can increase their overall leadership by 50-60%.

Contributing information from the article "Try Development Discussions Instead of Employee Appraisals" by Tim Millett



Trip Advisor Review Headline: *"A Smoke Alarm Interrupted Our Guest Experience".*

While we shutter at this type of headline, it is better than the headlines generated because of a hotel fire. In this particular instance, an elderly couple was awakened at 11:00 pm, just as they dozed off to sleep, because the smoke alarm in their hotel room sounded. Panicking, they began looking for a fire and when they didn't find either a fire or smoke in their room, called the front desk. The GSR indicated that engineering would be up immediately. When the engineer arrived, he took a cursory look and said all looked fine, apologized for the disturbance but never checked the smoke alarm itself. Around 7 am the smoke alarm again went off in the same room. These guests were still sound asleep and their reactions were very frightened. They again called the front desk and were told that someone would be right up. After 15 minutes of enduring the shrill sounding alarm and waiting for someone to come up, the elderly gentleman pulled a chair up to the smoke alarm and removed the batteries.... not a great thing for an octogenarian! When engineering finally arrived, he noted that the battery (dated) had not been changed recently. No apology, no reaction, just a quick "sorry".



A second situation involves a smoke alarm that was generated in the public area of a hotel. The night auditor disabled the alarm and failed to check the panel and note the location of the incident. Had the night auditor followed procedure and checked the source of the alarm, he would have found that a computer in the back office was smoking and overheated. He chose to simply silence the alarm and go back to work. While a fire never started, this was potentially a very serious situation.

Both of these incidents could have translated into catastrophe and huge liability for the hotel, ownership and management.

So how do we get our employees to understand that every situation regarding an alarm needs to be acted on immediately? And how do we get our employees to understand the essentials to interacting and following up with guests to put their minds at ease? Oftentimes, these two departments are not a focus of guest service training or emphasis and yet they end up spending more time with guests than those that do receive more intense guest service training. They are the ones that come to the door or the meeting room and must respond, answer or solve a problem. It may take them several minutes or trips so their interaction time with the guest can be extensive. How they handle these situations, as well as how they then pass the baton to the next touchpoint in the guest experience, can also impact service recovery in a positive or negative way. Look at policies and procedures from the guest's point of view and not just operational efficiency. Orient employees to better understand uncovering and discovering the emotional impact of any interruptions. Train them on how to come to the rescue with the appropriate emotional response and solution. Minimize alarming moments with guests. Maximize the positive opportunities that come with continuity and seamless service delivery, and ensure service excellence for the ultimate in guest protection.

### Did You Know?

- ♦ If two columns of figures should balance but don't, subtract one total from the other and if the difference is 1, 10, 100, 9 or 99, you have made an error in addition.
- ♦ When adding up a column of numbers, you get two different totals, check to see if the difference is divisible by 9. If so, you have probably transposed a figure (e.g. written 89 instead of 98).
- ♦ If your balance says 45.25 but your statement says 42.55 - the difference is 2.70 which is divisible by 9 so, therefore, it is probably a transposed figure. You can see the 5 and 2 have been transposed.

## Working Hard or Hardly Working?

A recent survey conducted by CareerBuilder reveals that the top workplace productivity killers revolve mostly around technology. Accordingly, here are the top 10:

- 50% Cell phones and texting
- 42% Gossip
- 30% Surfing the Internet
- 38% Social media
- 27% Snack or smoke breaks
- 24% Noisy co-workers
- 23% Meetings
- 23% Checking personal email
- 23% Co-workers dropping by
- 10% Co-workers putting calls on speaker phone

On the flip side, it is easy to see how technology and, in particular social media, could increase productivity in the workplace. Indeed, a 2013 Microsoft study emphasizes how social media can improve collaboration and the speed with which information is shared.

What is the craziest thing you've seen co-workers do when they should be working?

Here are a few examples or what "not to do at work" from the survey:

- ✦ Employees blowing bubbles in sub-zero weather to see if the bubbles would freeze
- ✦ Employee caring for her pet bird that she smuggled into work
- ✦ Employee shaving her legs in the woman's restroom
- ✦ Employee laying under boxes to scare people
- ✦ Employee sleeping (claimed he was praying)
- ✦ Employee taking selfies in the bathroom
- ✦ Employee warming bare feet under bathroom hair dryer

### Roomer Has It

#### COURTYARD LAKE PLACID

Recently, a rather serious situation was averted at the Courtyard in Lake Placid due to the proactive behavior of the housekeeper, supervisor and general manager.

It was noted by housekeeping during daily rounds, that a guest that was scheduled to stay in the hotel for 3 nights had not slept in the bed nor touched anything on the arrival night. His gear was just as he left in the room at checkin. The next day, that same housekeeper noted that again - that it appeared the guest had not used the room. The housekeeper reported these facts to her supervisor and to General Manager Melissa Oliver who looked up the guest on line and found out that he was an avid hiker. She called his contact information and it was confirmed that he may have gone hiking. Melissa called the authorities and the police started looking for his vehicle at all the many trail heads in the Adirondacks.

Gut instincts were correct! About an hour later, the police phoned to say they found the guest stranded on a rock ledge with no way down and that forest rangers were in the process of rescuing the man.

Upon his arrival back to the hotel, the man was exhausted and worn out. He was very grateful and appreciative that we had been so observant.

This is a great teaching moment for our service staff. Paying attention to the little things just may save a life!



## Business After Hours ...

Courtyard Lake Placid hosted Business After Hours this past October 9th. More than 50 attendees from local businesses attended this networking event. "It was great to get a buzz going in anticipation of our rooms renovation, set to begin the end of March," noted Carolyn Bordonaro, hotel Director of Sales. Congratulations to the entire team on this very successful event!