

Influencers in Hospitality

Influencers in Hospitality is a regular RLA Q&A with movers and shakers of the hospitality world. Providing insightful and enlightening industry perspectives whilst sharing some personal traits that have made them successful.

RLA's influencer in hospitality is Cornelia Kausch, Vice President Development, Pandox AG.

RLA: As a seasoned hospitality industry professional, with a proven track record in hotel management, strategy development and asset management in your career, is there a particular skill or attribute that has helped you in your professional life?

CK: It's having a holistic approach. It breaks down into several elements; combining the business strategy with people's interests, being authentic in the approach, and bringing plenty of discipline and endurance to the whole thing.

Continuous learning and a diverse network is a stepping stone. My leadership style is humble and open-minded. I have clear values in mind which I also live up to in my projects. My focus is on revenue generation.

I pick the low hanging fruits and profitability growth, rather than focusing primarily on the strategic "high hanging" fruits. Naturally, increasing return on investments for my clients is part of that focus.



Cornelia Kausch

To achieve all of the above, a key ingredient to my recipe is to invest into my personal development continuously, mindfully growing my network and saying "no" to a project if I cannot deliver in line with my personal standards.

RLA: How do you keep all stakeholders, particularly Owners and Operators happy?

CK: It's a combination of managing real people, expectations and budgets.

The human aspect plays an important role, of course: my priority is to align strategic concepts and exceed expectations for all the stakeholders involved. I think that's a fundamental element of maintaining an excellent and trustworthy client relationship.

Depending on the contracts between the owners and operators, it must be stated very clearly what the expectations are in the years to come both from a brand (white label) perspective as an operator, and from a fee perspective of the owner.

Commercial structure naturally plays a role, but budgets need to be realistic and based on professional knowledge and valuable market information. It's important to create a win / win scenario in which - bracketing with an optional clause - both parties have a chance to question and rectify the status quo.

RLA: As an industry what should we do more or less of, and why?

CK: We should do more questioning, less assuming and less "personal monument" building.

We should be humbler, remembering resources are under our care. Industry trends and disrupters are our friends - they represent opportunities to drive change. This humility should extend to greater awareness of cultural differences - what might be running well in one country, may flop in another. Listening more would encourage us to stretch beyond current concepts.

We should bring together focus groups of diversity and drive creative meetings to ensure that an outside-in approach prevails. We should never take "It's always been like this" as an answer and take the time for reflection.

RLA: In the next decade or two, what do you foresee changing about the Hotel Guest Experience?

CK: I believe technology will cause an interesting shift in business sensibilities.

Artificial Intelligence will be an integral part in the hospitality industry and it will be natural that my needs are met upon check-in and during my stay, as all information is available. This will automatically lead me to the hotel properties/destinations which align with my personal interests and suggestions will pop up / or heard when I next plan a trip.

The B to C will be decisive and instant gratification and suggestions will be the new normal. Already today, via Alexa and Siri I get via voice what I used to have to type in. Extrapolate this and the next generation of kids will be "relearning" how to handwrite a letter.

Businesses which have a sustainable concept and take care of people and the environment will be the winners in the long run. Communication and diversity of corporations and thus projects will be the new normal. I believe that we will be seeing that mankind will be going from a patriarchal to matriarchal values, where EQ is essential for survival.

RLA: You have been involved in many “women in business” initiatives. Why?

CK: As an experienced professional I believe in leading by example. By being a sounding board, I am able to give back to people what I have learned, unlearned, experienced and become aware of in my career history.

In recent times, it is all about people, about human ‘beings’ not human ‘doings’. It is not only a gender issue, but it is about stereotyping, the conscious and unconscious biases. We need to create awareness, continue to question and to speak-up to change the current mindset in this field. Therefore, I keep participating in various events organized around this concept.

Cornelia Kausch has worked for over three decades in the hospitality industry, across Finance, Sales, Business Development, Asset Management and GM disciplines, and in increasingly senior roles within leading international hotel brands.

She is currently writing her thesis for her Executive Masters in Consulting and Coaching for Change at INSEAD with topic: “People/ human resource transition during an organisational change”, Creating a refuge for diverse human beings in organisations.



Cornelia Kausch with Roger Allen, RLA Group CEO at Ecole Hôtelière de Lausanne

I was a part of a panel in London last September, where Millennials and their career paths were put in the spotlight. This session was initiated by the Circle Movement, a community for women who are making, or aspiring to make a difference, and supported by CBRE Group, Inc., the largest commercial real estate services and investment firm in the world.

Then, at Ecole Hôtelière de Lausanne (EHL) I played an active part in a discussion about women in the hospitality sector questioning “how will I make it to the C Suite?” or “why it is still an issue to combine job and family”? The conversation was organized for the students within the Career Fair of EHL on 14 October, and facilitated by Sowon Kim Crettex, Professor of Management at EHL.

I embrace speaking about this topic as there is a lot of insecurity, a lot of will and determination to truly make a difference. It always has to do with fair play.

RLA: What is the best piece of advice you have ever received?

CK: Have discipline, live your values, be the ambassador of your country, listen and learn.

RLA: What do you think is true about the hospitality industry that many people might disagree with?

CK: That it is a fabulous profession. Exceptionally motivated people hosting fabulous people while being at the centre of happenings - within the current economic climate. It is one of the most international, diversified and fascinating professions, stretching well beyond the ‘Known’ --despite being paid rather poorly in comparison to other industries.

RLA: In our industry where can we find additional or hidden value?

CK: Everywhere! Making use of slack time in a better way to drive ROI and by either growing the network of the people within to stretch outwards or looking for better and more creative ways to do things. Question, always question the status quo.

RLA: What is the most unusual thing you’ve had to do to “make it work”?

CK: I think, teaching my team and associates the in-depth understanding how money is made in this business; that revenue does not equal profit.

We set a Saturday aside and together with many volunteers, we painted and cleaned the back of house together. This ensured that questions were asked, teamwork strengthened, and pride was built. Attention was paid to the tools which we are given to use and to take care of. Let them walk in my shoes, and I walk in theirs.