

teaching note

Women in Leadership at the Four Seasons

Summary

This case study examines the importance of increasing diversity at top luxury hotels, with a specific look at the Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts. In general, there is a lack of women in executive leadership roles such as general manager or hotel manager across the hotel industry, but particularly among luxury hotel brands. Women play pivotal roles and comprise almost 50 percent of the workforce and should consequently have larger representation in leadership roles. The World Economic Forum's 2017 Global Gender Gap Index reveals that there has been no real improvement over the last 10 years as only 22% of individuals holding senior managerial positions are women (Harris, 2017). A quick search through Four Seasons' Press Room Hotel Press Kits on its company website astonishingly reveals there are only 10 female general managers or hotel managers in the company's vast global dominance in the luxury hotel sector ("Hotel Press Kits"). Recommendations for increasing diversity include incorporating diversity training through Manager in Training (MIT) program.

Target Audience

The case may be taught at the undergraduate and graduate levels in human resources management and organizational behavior classes. The information provided is suitable for in class discussion on diversity and inclusion, and gender and wage disparity issues in hospitality. The material provided in the teaching note is also useful for analysis in a written assignment.

Learning Outcomes

This case study identifies a tangible example of women rising to the top in a luxury hospitality organization. By the end of this case study, the student should be able to:

- Identify the facilitators and barriers to female success in the hospitality industry, including implicit biases.
- Evaluate the how mentorship plays a role in advancement in the workplace.
- Create a new blueprint for women to succeed in the hospitality industry.

Discussion Topics & Questions

Implicit Bias: What is it? How do we recognize and overcome it?

As humans, we are all prone to thoughts that perpetuate or confirm stereotypes, and gender issues in the workplace are no exception to this occurrence. Because many of these thoughts and stereotypes may be unconscious, they have been termed an implicit bias (Payne, Niemi, & Doris, 2018). Implicit biases lead to overgeneralizing and

sometimes even discrimination. And because it is often an unconscious phenomenon, it even occurs among people who do not think that they are being biased. Because there are gendered biases that may be the cause of injustice in many business and workplace settings, Harvard has created a test for implicit bias (see <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>).

What actions can industry professionals and academics take to change a male dominant culture? Why is it important?

While we find comfort in hiring people like ourselves, research has demonstrated the importance of hiring people who are dissimilar. Hiring a diverse group, including individuals across genders, helps to deter and dissuade issues of group conformity and confirmation bias (Rock, Grant, & Grey, 2016).

Other questions to consider include:

- What is your impression of the climate for women, especially minority women at in the hospitality industry?
- What implicit biases may be at play for women in the hospitality industry?
- Identify three opportunities emanating from this case study that hospitality organizations could use to improve the climate for women, whether as participants or business partners.
- What steps could be taken to create a climate of inclusion at the executive level of the hospitality industry that would promote more women to ascend the ranks and make them feel welcome and valued?
- How can management in training programs offer women a chance to succeed at the higher levels of the organization?

Instruction

There are various ways in which the case study may be analyzed in class. One way to dissect the material is to assign the following profiles in female leadership to individuals or assigned groups of students. The profiles may be examined using the blueprint for female leaders in hospitality as an assessment tool. Students should be encouraged to consider the obstacles each woman overcame and how she used her knowledge of business and the industry to succeed in the male dominated hospitality climate. Additionally, students may be presented with the discussion topic questions and be asked to examine the assigned profiles using the questions as prompts. Students may also be encouraged to access the female leaders' professional pages in order to gain a more holistic understanding of these women. Lastly, students may be asked to identify a female leader from a different organization and compare and contrast the qualities of these female leaders with their chosen female industry leader.

Profiles in Leadership

Ilse Harley

Regional Vice President and General Manager

Four Seasons Hotel Las Vegas

Ilse Harley serves as both the Regional Vice President and General Manager of the Four Seasons Hotel Las Vegas. Her tenure at Four Seasons began in 1988 with her first Four Seasons job as Housekeeping Assistant Manager for Four Seasons Hotel Boston (Cole, 2018). Over the years, Harley's, Four Seasons hospitality career and rise in the company has taken her to Four Seasons Resort and Residences Anguilla, Four Seasons Resort Hualalai, Four Seasons Hotel Seattle, Four Seasons Resort Maui at Wailea as part of the opening team, Four Seasons Hotel New York, Four Seasons Hotel Atlanta, Four Seasons Hotel Boston, Four Seasons Resort Maui at Wailea, and Four Seasons Hotel Boston. Interestingly, at Four Seasons Hotel Seattle, Harley became a General Manager in 2011 being only one of five women in an executive management position within the entire Four Seasons company then (Cole, 2018). It was during her time at Four Seasons Hotel Baltimore that she was promoted to Regional Vice President which she still holds today providing guidance and support to other Four Seasons managers in Miami, St. Louis, Baltimore and Atlanta in addition to her role as a conduit to the corporate office in Toronto (Cole, 2018).

Originally from North Olmsted, Ohio, Harley earned her Bachelor of Science degree in Hotel and Restaurant Management at the University of Massachusetts (Cole, 2018). Harley is quoted as saying, "food and beverage is fun and creative, but I've always liked rooms because that's what really makes the money" as she ascended the company's rank via its rooms division (Cole, 2018). Regardless of location, Harley's management style centers upon encouraging employees to be themselves which she also attributes to her own success from managers giving her autonomy from the start stating, "I believe very strongly that's the way to instill confidence. People make mistakes. But letting them make and then correct them is the best way for them to learn... There are hundreds of interactions at any moment at a hotel, and managers can't be the end-user in every situation... So we give employees the tools, get them comfortable and confident, and then trust them to do the right thing" (Cole, 2018). Harley's rise at Four Seasons has been the result of doing the right things.

While some professional women limit their own ambitions with self-imposed barriers such as being aware of the impact that motherhood can have on their professional prospects, Harley credits for her long-running success with Four Seasons to having "a really great family situation" wherein her husband Matt has been the primary caregiver for their son Sam (Cole, 2018). She further notes, "Matt's partnership has allowed me to be successful in a profession that operates 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. I am very fortunate." Harley has embraced both her professional and private lives in such a manner that it enabled her to break

the glass ceiling for women leaders at Four Seasons (Cole, 2018).

Cornelia Samara

General Manager

Four Seasons Hotel's The Surf Club
Surfside, Florida

Cornelia Samara serves as the General Manager of the Four Seasons Hotel at The Surf Club located in Surfside, Florida. Samara is quoted as saying, "There are certain things a hotelier can train, but true hospitality is not one of them. Here it's genuine, not practiced, and it comes from the heart" (Rafati, 2018). Samara's hospitality career did not begin at the Four Seasons for her previous roles were at 1 Hotel Brooklyn Bridge, the Andaz 5th Avenue, the Park Hyatt Washington DC, the Hyatt Regency Boston, the Park Hyatt San Francisco, and The Royal Hawaiian Resort in Waikiki.

Originally from Jerusalem, Israel, Samara earned her Bachelor of Science degree in Tourism and Travel Services Management at Hawaii Pacific University. Samara was destined to be in the hospitality industry for, as Samara says, "hospitality runs in my blood" referring both to her family's history in the industry with her parents' ownership of a travel agency in Jerusalem as well as of the "exuberance and capabilities" she brings to her role as General Manager of Four Seasons Hotel at The Surf Club (Rafati, 2018). She left her parents' travel agency to pursue a career in hotels referencing as an inspiration Four Seasons founder Isadore Sharp's book, *Four Seasons: The Story of a Business Philosophy*, throughout her hospitality career (Rafati, 2018).

Although Samara recently started her tenure with Four Seasons with her current role as General Manager at The Surf Club, she hotel career was launched at a traditional Hawaiian beachfront resort and then moved on to luxury city hotels throughout the U.S. advancing through operations in the room's division (Rafati, 2018). It was then Samara earned an appointment as General Manager of a new luxury lifestyle property in the heart of Manhattan followed three years later with becoming the opening general manager of the first nature-inspired, luxury-property at the Brooklyn Bridge Park (Rafati, 2018).

Samara's management style is not that of a micro-manager instead preferring to surround herself with "like-minded people" she can place her trust in and know she can rely on their individual talents to perform their respective roles (Rafati, 2018). Samara says, "There are certain things a hotel manager can train, but true hospitality is not one of them. Here it's genuine, not practiced, and it comes from the heart" (Rafati, 2018).

Karen Earp

General Manager

Four Seasons Resort's The Biltmore Santa Barbara

Karen Earp serves as the General Manager at the Four Seasons Resort's The Biltmore Santa Barbara in California. Earp's Four Seasons tenure began in 1983 with her first Four Seasons assignment as Assistant Manager of Four Seasons Hotel London (Plouchart, 2016).

Throughout her hospitality career, she has worked at Four Seasons Hotel Canary Wharf in London, Four Seasons Hotel George V Paris, Four Seasons Hotel Istanbul, Disneyland Resort Paris, The Pierre, New York (formerly a Four Seasons Hotel), Four Seasons Hotel London (formerly a Four Seasons Hotel), and Four Seasons Hotel London (Plouchart, 2016).

Originally from Solihull, England, Earp earned her Master of Business degree at City University in London, and a degree in Hotel, Catering and Tourism Management at Surrey University in Guildford, England (Plouchart, 2016). Earp has a long 26-year career wherein she has been instrumental in the launching of 10 hotels including a golf course in addition to Four Seasons hotels in Istanbul, Paris and London (Plouchart, 2016).

Her early experiences growing up in Solihull helping her mother with dinner parties along with a part-time job at a small property sparked her interest in hospitality followed by earning a vocational degree in hotels and catering (Plouchart, 2016). Earp says, "When you get down to it, it's all about the people running the hotel. Instilling passion for service, for 'wowing' the guest – to me, that's the core of being a good hotelier" (Plouchart, 2016).

Meredith MacFarlane

General Manager

Four Seasons Resort and Residences, Vail, CO

Meredith MacFarlane serves as the General Manager at Four Seasons Resort and Residences in Vail, CO. Her Four Seasons tenure began in 2007 with the assignment of Director of Rooms for Four Seasons Hotel Toronto (Moser-Harrison, 2018). Since then, MacFarlane's hospitality career has included Four Seasons Resort Rancho Encantado Santa Fe, Beverly Wilshire, Beverly Hills (A Four Seasons Hotel), Four Seasons Hotel Toronto, Delta Chelsea Hotel in Toronto, Delta Toronto Airport, and Delta Hotels & Resorts Corporate (Moser-Harrison, 2018).

Originally from Toronto, Canada, MacFarlane earned her Bachelor of Honours degree in History and Political Science at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, Canada (Moser-Harrison, 2018). MacFarlane's first foray into the hospitality industry was as an overnight receptionist which gave her a sense of empowerment wherein she noted her independence to "upgrade guest rooms or send guests amenities if I wanted" which enthralled her (Moser-Harrison, 2018). She later joined Four Seasons Hotel Toronto in 2007.

Unlike other general managers that ascend the ladder through experience over the years, Macfarlane had to quickly learn the ropes as a quasi-manager in 2008 when the then general manager of the Four Seasons Hotel Toronto accepted a temporary assignment in the corporate office in Toronto requiring Macfarlane to take on many duties not traditionally a part of her then role as Director of Rooms recalling the time as "a good opportunity for me to get my sea legs" (Moser-Harrison, 2018). Nonetheless, she rose to the occasion and demonstrated initiative beyond her job title such as reworking the hotel's budget process,

cross training employees to be more efficient, and during an economic downturn, Macfarlane managed to introduce creative solutions to lower costs without diminishing guest experience (Moser-Harrison, 2018).

Macfarlane's management style includes being visible with employees, attentively listening to co-workers' concerns, and pitching in whenever she's needed (Moser-Harrison, 2018). "If you have poor service at a hotel," says Macfarlane, "it's because the employees are unhappy. I believe it's important that management is here to support them" and it's a philosophy she attributes to her success (Moser-Harrison, 2018).

Beverly Magee

General Manager

Four Seasons Hotel Baltimore

Beverly Magee serves as the General Manager at Four Seasons Hotel Baltimore. Magee's Four Seasons tenure began in 1987 when she was assigned to concierge at Four Seasons Hotel Houston noting, "I fell in love with hotels right from the start" before moving onto sales for the corporate and group markets (Criss, 2018). Since then, she has worked at Four Seasons Hotel Austin, Four Seasons Hotel Seattle, Fairmont Olympic Hotel Seattle, and Four Seasons Olympic Hotel Seattle – a former Four Seasons hotel (Criss, 2018).

Originally from Houston, Texas, Magee earned her Bachelor of Science degree in Communications from the University of Texas at Austin (Criss, 2018). Magee credits her success to being the type of general manager that encourages ideas and is visible to both guests and employees saying, "it's important for everyone to know that when the need arises, I'm not afraid to roll up my sleeves and jump right in" (Criss, 2018).

Magee's rise as a Four Seasons General Manager did not take the traditional path via rooms or food and beverage, as is more customary, but rather, she transitioned from sales and marketing to operations with ease before becoming Hotel Manager of Four Seasons Hotel Austin for she was "well versed in the Four Seasons experience she was selling" stating, "I'm still selling that luxury experience, but now I get to have a direct impact on the team delivering it" (Criss, 2018).

Katie Jacquemin

Hotel Manager

Four Seasons Hotel Denver

Katie Jacquemin serves as the Hotel Manager at Four Seasons Hotel Denver. Jacquemin's Four Seasons tenure began in 2015 with the assignment of Assistant Director of Rooms at Four Seasons Hotel Denver before being promoted to Director of Rooms in 2017 (Cohavi, 2018). Prior, she has worked in areas of property management and hotel operations including at The Arrabelle at Vail Square in Vail, Colorado, the Bimini Bay Resort & Marina in the Bahamas, Keystone Property Management in Keystone, Colorado, Vail Resorts Hospitality in Broomfield, Colorado, Snake River Lodge & Spa in Jackson, Wyoming, the Jackson Lake Lodge in Moran, Wyoming, and The Lodge at Vail in Colorado (Cohavi, 2018).

Originally from Alpena, Michigan, Jacquemin earned her Bachelor of Arts degree from Eli Broad College of Business at Michigan State University (Cohavi, 2018). She did not start out intent on a career in hospitality for she considered being an engineer, but being a people person who thrives on interacting with people, Jacquemin finds “passion through meeting guests from all over the world and employees from every ethnicity and background. Hospitality is extremely rewarding in the interpersonal aspect between guests as well as colleagues” (Cohavi, 2018).

Jacquemin's love of competitive sailing contributes to her success as a Hotel Manager stating, “you learn many important lessons relevant to the hospitality industry...how to be a team player, making split second decisions, committing to a strategy and seeing it through, how to win and lose gracefully, and how to hold your ground even while knowingly going into a collision” (Cohavi, 2018). Furthermore, Jacquemin leads through values with passion, discipline and purpose fostering a work environment where “growth and development are strong, priorities are clear and the team is all working in tandem with the same intensity and for the same results” (Cohavi, 2018). Fun, however, is a critical factor to Jacquemin's management style adding, “one of the top motivators in a work environment is friendship. If we roll up our sleeves together, laugh together, succeed together, fail together and grow together, the connection is incredible. Guests feel that when they interact with us” (Cohavi, 2018).

Lynn Brutman

Regional Vice President and General Manager

Four Seasons Hotel London at Park Lane
London, England

Lynn Brutman serves as the Regional Vice President and General Manager at Four Seasons Hotel London at Park Lane in London, England – the longest operating Four Seasons Hotel which “helped define the principles of Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts that still underpin [its] service culture of today” (Drayton, 2016). Brutman's long and seasoned Four Seasons tenure began in 1991 with the assignment of Management Trainee at The Ritz-Carlton Chicago, formerly a Four Seasons hotel (Drayton, 2016). Brutman's hospitality career includes Four Seasons Hotel Toronto, Four Seasons Hotel Hampshire, Four Seasons Hotel London at Canary Wharf, Four Seasons Resort and Residences Whistler, Four Seasons Hotel Miami, Four Seasons Hotel Newport Beach, Four Seasons Hotel Atlanta, Four Seasons Hotel Philadelphia, and The Ritz-Carlton Chicago (Drayton, 2016).

Originally from Long Island, New York, Brutman earned her Bachelor of Science degree in Hotel Administration from the University of New Hampshire (Drayton, 2016). It was at the flagship Four Seasons Hotel Toronto where Brutman served as Hotel Manager as part of the hotel's move to its current location, transformation, and reopening stating the hotel “represents fifty years of someone's [Chairman and Founder Isadore Sharp] life's work and I am proud to have been there

for the before and after” (Drayton, 2016). Since then, Brutman has served as General Manager to the East London Four Seasons Hotel in Canary Wharf followed two years later as General Manager of Four Seasons Hotel Hampshire (Drayton, 2016). Of her transition from the U.S. to London, Brutman says, “London is the gateway to everywhere in Europe. I wanted to welcome visitors from around the world, and be a visitor to other destinations myself” (Drayton, 2016).

Maria Jagla

General Manager

Four Seasons Resort Bora Bora

Maria Jagla serves as the General Manager at Four Seasons Resort Bora Bora where she's brought more than 20 years of worldwide hotel experience (Packer, 2016). Jagla's Four Seasons tenure began in 1993 with the assignment of Executive Housekeeper at Four Seasons Hotel Sydney (Packer, 2016). Jagla's hospitality career includes Four Seasons Resort Sharm El Sheikh in Egypt, Four Seasons Hotel London at Park Lane, Four Seasons Resort Maui at Wailea, Four Seasons Hotel Chicago, Four Seasons Hotel New York, The Pierre (formerly a Four Seasons hotel), Four Seasons Hotel Sydney where her tenure in various operational roles included the Olympic Games in 2000, Four Seasons Hotel San Francisco as Director of Rooms in the pre and post-opening period, and a former Four Seasons hotel – The Regent Sydney (Packer, 2016).

Originally from Rieshofen, Germany, Jagla received her Abitur/ Higher School Certificate and studied at the Kermess Hospitality Management School gaining experience in hotels throughout Europe (Packer, 2016). From an early age, Jagla had her sights set on working within the hospitality industry by first working in her family's small inn located in Bavaria (Packer, 2016). Jagla's worldly experience, extensive exposure and never-say-no attitude has taken her far and wide in various leadership roles (Packer, 2016). Jagla's previous expertise at Four Seasons Hotel Sydney during the 2000 Olympic Games made her an ideal addition to the London hotel team where she led hotel operations during the 2012 Olympic year (Packer, 2016).

Esther Oh Kostecky

Hotel Manager

Four Seasons Hotel Seoul

Esther Oh Kostecky serves as the Hotel Manager at Four Seasons Hotel Seoul in Korea. Oh Kostecky's Four Seasons tenure began in 1999 with the assignment of Front Desk Receptionist at Four Seasons Hotel Los Angeles at Beverly Hills (Yoon, 2016). Oh Kostecky's hospitality career includes Four Seasons Hotel Philadelphia, Four Seasons Safari Lodge Serengeti, Bilila Lodge at Serengeti National Park, Beverly Wilshire, Beverly Hills – A Four Seasons Hotel, Four Seasons Hotel Silicon Valley at East Palo Alto, Four Seasons Hotel San Francisco, The Pierre (formerly a Four Seasons hotel), and Four Seasons Hotel Los Angeles at Beverly Hills (Yoon, 2016).

Originally from Seoul, Korea, Oh Kostecky earned her Bachelor of Science degree in Hotel Administration from the University of Nevada in Las Vegas (Yoon, 2016). She always knew she would be a part of Four Seasons from the moment Chairman and Founder Isadore Sharp visited Korea and expressed an interest in bringing a Four Seasons there staffed with Korean talent (Yoon, 2016). Oh Kostecky joined Four Seasons in 1999 and climbed the proverbial ladder through the Rooms Division from her start at the front desk (Yoon, 2016). Her first leadership role was as the opening Director of Lodge Projects at Four Seasons Safari Lodge in the Serengeti (Yoon, 2016). Then she joined the opening team as Director of Rooms at Four Seasons Hotel Seoul prior to becoming Hotel Manager in 2016, an opportunity Oh Kostecky thought was the “perfect way to challenge myself and go to the next level” (Yoon, 2016).

Oh Kostecky notes that Four Seasons was not well-known in Korea when it first opened so her initial focus was on building brand recognition by “spreading the message that working with Four Seasons means working with the best” utilizing her language skills as a conduit between international and local staff, and as a “cultural carrier” promoting Four Season and its culture on the local hotel scene (Yoon, 2016). Oh Kostecky believes that what differentiates Four Seasons from its competitors is “the people element” whereby personal behavior, attitude and development are all part of training and encouraging staff to think on their own, which, in the end, empowers employees which she finds is rewarding for both staff and guests alike (Yoon, 2016).

Yvette Thomas-Henry

Regional Vice President and General Manager

Four Seasons Hotel Atlanta

Yvette Thomas-Henry serves as the Regional Vice President and General Manager of Four Seasons Hotel Atlanta – the only AAA Five-Diamond/Forbes Five-Star address in Atlanta (Middleton, 2018). She started her hospitality career humbly, however, as a front office agent then later promoted into management training before becoming an assistant manager (Middleton, 2018). Thomas-Henry’s Four Seasons tenure began in 2007 with her first assignment as Director of Rooms at Four Seasons Hotel New York then later Hotel Manager in Washington, DC (Middleton, 2018). Her hospitality career history also includes Four Seasons Hotel Washington, DC, The Ritz-Carlton Boston, Conrad Miami, The Waldorf-Astoria, Loews New York Hotel, and The Plaza in New York (Middleton, 2018).

In 2013, Thomas-Henry’s accepted the role of acting General Manager upon the transfer of the hotel’s longtime leader (Middleton, 2018). Rather than view her new role as a placeholder, Thomas-Henry thrived. In her new capacity, she confidently told her department heads “We can either sink or sail – and imagine how great it will be when we succeed” giving them what they needed to flourish in what she deemed was “a very challenging environment during the busiest season” (Middleton, 2018). Appreciative and accepting the challenge,

Thomas-Henry’s new team rose to the task graciously enabling her to be “successful during those eight months in large part because I was working with talented and dedicated staff” (Middleton, 2018).

In her dual roles now, she is admittedly not a micromanager but instead believes in “trusting people, allowing them to find their own path, and giving them what they require to do their job well” (Middleton, 2018). Recalling a pivotal career moment, the general manager at another New York luxury hotel told her, “If you want to play with the big boys, you need to wear a big boy hat” which Thomas-Henry interpreted as “you need to be able to speak up and not be afraid of getting your feelings hurt when you voice your opinions. It’s a lesson that wasn’t easy to learn, but it was invaluable” (Middleton, 2018).

Thomas-Henry believes this is an opportune time for women to aspire to leadership positions such as hers saying, “Women bring a special sense of style and an approach to leadership that is unique...I firmly believe this is one of the best times to be a woman in business. The value of what we bring to the table is being recognized across many industries” (Middleton, 2018). Thomas-Henry puts advancement of women in hospitality as a priority and is active in the Women in Leadership Executive Council of the American Hospitality & Lodging Association (Middleton, 2018). She continues to mentor young women on their way up the ladder knowing that she only a phone call away saying, “I tell them, ‘please be prepared to be candid with me. If you don’t give things to me straight, you’ll miss the opportunity to grow’” (Middleton, 2018).

Thomas-Henry has broken the proverbial glass ceiling and made history becoming the first female African American General Manager of any Four Seasons Hotel and the first from the U.S. Virgin Island to accomplish such a remarkable achievement (JNR Media Solutions, 2016). She is not only successful in her own right, but also serves as champion for other women leaders to follow.

Assessment

In addition to in-class discussion, students will be assigned a written report that analyses the keys to female ascension in the hospitality industry. They will be asked to write a report on one of the females presented in the profiles and identify how she achieved success using the blueprint as a template for success. This may be accomplished by guiding the students to access the professional websites of these women (e.g. LinkedIn). Alternatively, the narratives and profiles may be used as a starting point and additional profiles from other female leaders may be compared and contrasted in order to distinguish common rhetoric and similar characteristics that represent the women who have ascended the ranks in luxury hotels. Identifying additional ways in which female leaders can and did succeed that do not fall within the parameters of the blueprint provided is also recommended.

Additional Readings

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