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Hoteliers of the World





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about the cover



The 2014 Hoteliers of the World — Hilton Worldwide President and CEO Christopher Nassetta and Sacher Hotels Managing Director Elisabeth Gürtler, as voted by HOTELS' global readership — are passionate about their businesses almost to the point where it defines their lives. They understand what it means to be perfect hosts and have the vision — Nassetta from his McLean, Virginia, headquarters and Gürtler from her iconic Vienna palace — to make sure their teams look beyond individual roles and responsibilities to be a part of something bigger. Read more in Special Report starting on p22.

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Erika Gomez, executive chef, La Concha Resort, San Juan, Puerto Rico

Corrections

In the HOTELS 325 ranking in the July/August issue, Dorsett Hospitality should have been listed with 18 hotels and 5,064 rooms, ranking 250th. HOTELS regrets the error.

**Christopher
Nassetta**

PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
HILTON WORLDWIDE, MCLEAN, VIRGINIA

Hoteliers

**CHRIS NASSETTA AND ELISABETH GÜRTLER ARE
CHARISMATIC LEADERS WHO SHARE A CALLING TO
CONTINUALLY BUILD A CULTURE THAT FOCUSES ON
THE BIGGER PICTURE.**

CULTURE IS EVERYTHING

to Hilton Worldwide President and CEO Christopher Nassetta and Sacher Hotels Managing Director Elisabeth Gürtler. They are passionate about their

businesses almost to the point where it defines their lives. They understand what it means to be perfect hosts and have the vision — Nassetta from his McLean, Virginia, headquarters, and Gürtler from her iconic Vienna palace — to make

sure their teams look beyond individual roles and responsibilities to be a part of something bigger.

This year's HOTELS Hotelier of the World award winners continually talk about aligning their objectives with all



Elisabeth Gürtler

MANAGING DIRECTOR
SACHER HOTELS, VIENNA

of the
of the shareholders — guests, teams and owners. For Independent Hotelier of the World Gürtler, hospitality, she says, is not just her business, it is her pleasure, and she works with her team to share that vision. For Corporate Hotelier of the World

Nassetta, his mantra reinforces more the “why” than the “what” when it comes to the objectives and setting the tone at an industry powerhouse such as Hilton.

At the end of the day, for this year’s award winners — as voted by HOTELS’

global readership — it is first about their abilities to share visions for success, and on the pages ahead, Nassetta and Gürtler talk more about their paths to reaching those goals, as well as what lies ahead.



Bigger than one

**CORPORATE HOTELIER OF THE WORLD
CHRIS NASSETTA'S WINNING FORMULA AT
HILTON IS ALL ABOUT CULTURAL MAGIC.**

by JEFF WEINSTEIN, EDITOR IN CHIEF

CHRIS NASSETTA

is convinced success comes first and foremost from building a great culture. In fact, he says setting the tone at Hilton Worldwide is his most important role. “When you get culture right, magical things happen,” says the approachable CEO, who has spent most of his life immersed in great cultures — both personally and professionally. “My experiences have helped me understand the importance of feeling part of something bigger than myself,” he explains.

Perhaps it is his commitment to creating intense alignment around “who we are, why we are here, what we are trying to accomplish, how we act and what the objectives are” that helped him to steer Hilton through anxious economic times starting in 2008 only to ring the bell at the New York Stock Exchange in December 2013 with Blackstone Group’s Jonathan Gray when Hilton’s US\$2.4 billion IPO generated the highest multiple in the business. For investor Blackstone, it generated one of the largest

private-equity profits in U.S. business history. And perhaps it was those same guiding principles that led HOTELS readers to choose Nassetta as the 2014 Corporate Hotelier of the World.

Nassetta says in the case of Hilton, the higher calling is “enriching lives” of customers, team members and hotel owners. The loquacious 52-year-old credits his close family’s entrepreneurial spirit and mentors such as Terry Golden, with whom he worked for more than 20 years, for pointing him in the right direction.

SPECIAL REPORT: HOTELIERS OF THE WORLD

Chris Nassetta makes cupcakes with the chef at Waldorf Astoria New York.



“Chris connects with everyone around the globe, from employees to hotel owners,” says Blackstone’s Gray. “It makes a critical difference in attracting talent and helping Hilton grow. Chris Nassetta truly epitomizes Conrad Hilton’s pledge to ‘fill the earth with the light and warmth of hospitality.’”

The backstory

Nassetta’s grandparents came from Italy with next to nothing and ended up building a great life with his cabinetmaking-grandfather eventually becoming a successful real estate developer. Next, his father went to Georgetown’s law school and similarly created his success as an entrepreneur. “I saw that spirit, so as a kid I was already interested in building businesses and managing people,” Nassetta says.

Those family values and roots remain strong today as Nassetta still lives in his hometown of Fairfax, Virginia, literally next door to two of his sisters and a mile from his parents. Ever the family man and always home on the weekends to support his wife, Paige, and six daughters, Nassetta is likely to be found in the kitchen on Sunday cooking Tuscan fare

for a crowd of 40 or 50 family members and close friends.

Nassetta describes himself as a workaholic who is almost always on the grid, having developed a balanced set of skills and experiences that manifested in his own leadership style. That skill set was honed first as a teen, when he recruited his friends to work with him cutting lawns and plowing snow with the money he saved to buy his first

automobile, a Willys Jeep, and then again still as a teen in the engineering department at his first hotel, the Capitol Holiday Inn in Washington, D.C.

After graduating from the University of Virginia with a degree in finance, Nassetta spent seven years at The Oliver Carr Co., where he first met Golden and ultimately served as chief development officer of a vast commercial real estate business. Together, they eventually rebuilt that business financially.

Next, the duo co-founded Bailey Capital Corp. in 1991, where Nassetta was responsible for the operations of the real estate investment and advisory firm, dabbling in hotel deals along the way.

The next stop, in 1995, was again with Golden at Host Hotels & Resorts, a spinoff of Marriott’s distressed hotel assets. The team turned a bad real estate company into a great company, not only fixing the troubled portfolio but also growing the asset base to US\$25 billion from US\$2 billion. Nassetta became CEO of Host in 2000 before Hilton came calling in 2007 and his focus shifted away from deals and finance and more toward the organizational side of business.



Chris Nassetta is a dedicated family man, often cooking Tuscan-style for his extended family on weekends.



Nassetta's viewpoint

The 52-year-old president and CEO of Hilton Worldwide has been at the helm since 2007 after spending 12 years with Host Hotels & Resorts and gaining previous experience in private equity and real estate development.

The dedicated family man — father of six young women — has some great advice to share.

TO YOUNG HOTELIERS:

“Find a place that has a culture that is as focused on you as you are on it. Find a place where you are part of a team and the vision of the company allows you to understand what the higher calling is.”

MIXING THE PERSONAL AND THE PROFESSIONAL:

“There is a way to do business at the intersection of your business and personal lives. I have tons of great relationships and I love my time

with everyone. I have 25-year relationships with my competitors, too, so there is hardly a thing I do that is not interconnected, and happily so.”

MAINTAINING BALANCE:

“I could travel all the time, but I want to be with family, so I am home on weekends. When I am home I am dedicating time to them and making other sacrifices to be with them. You must make sure you are thoughtful

about it and allocate time appropriately.”

ON BEING THE FATHER OF SIX DAUGHTERS:

“I am more sensitive, thoughtful and humble as a result. It keeps me real and authentic.”

ARE YOU A HOTELIER?

“Yes. I’ve been in and around the business since I was a teen, and the majority of my career I have been running hotel companies. Now I can’t imagine doing anything else.”

Fortuitously, while at Host as a hotel owner, Nassetta received great training for what he was about to do with a multitude of brands at Hilton. “We had a huge seat at the table and found out what everyone in the industry was doing — from operations to branding, technology and distribution,” he says.

Setting the tone

Today at Hilton, Nassetta says his first job is to lead the strategy and culture. “I have to make sure the strategy and execution are right, change courses when

required and build a great culture,” he explains. “I set the tone personally with my behavior and push it deep into the organization. If I get those two things right, the rest takes care of itself.”

However, there were some difficult moments after Blackstone bought Hilton at the peak of the investment cycle in 2007, and between 2008 and 2010 the company was simultaneously trying to get the company debt restructured, dealing with litigation and managing through difficult business conditions. But Nassetta recalls that the principals believed the adversity

didn’t matter. “You don’t often get to buy a company like this. If you see value, there is reason to have conviction,” he says.

“When you take all the data, distill it to its simplest components and understand that the company was mismanaged and sub-optimized, you make the deal. No one else saw the upside.”

Nassetta kept his steady hand on the wheel, never lost faith, direction or discipline, and he kept his team focused. “It would have been very easy to get distracted [during the rougher moments] and for people to take their eyes off the ball,” he reflects. “We would have lost our best talent and wouldn’t be in this position to be a leader. That was ultimately the most pivotal moment: being a part of keeping people in the company focused on the future and digging our way out, keeping our head up and making strides with the culture to put ourselves into a leading position on the other side.”

Gray says Nassetta and his team — inspired by Chris’ example — just got up every day and kept executing. “They re-organized the company, moved the headquarters, shifted the timeshare business to a capital-light model, rapidly expanded around the globe and, most importantly, energized the whole organization,” Gray says. “The tremendous financial success of Hilton today is a direct result of Chris’ can-do attitude and perseverance.”

What Nassetta says he learned is that while it isn’t easy, the formula becomes magical when everyone taps into that stream. As a result, he continues to spend most of his time on culture-building. “That is where the dividends are,” he adds.

And Nassetta is far from done paying dividends. “I want to contribute and be part of something bigger, build a culture that will outlive me and push myself to grow and learn. This place is limitless in its potential, and I am 150% committed to being a part of that for the foreseeable future.”