

Executive Profile



PETER KOEHLER
GENERAL MANAGER,
INTERCONTINENTAL
SAN FRANCISCO

SPENCER BROWN

Background: Most recently, general manager of Kimpton's Hotel Palomar in San Francisco. Previously at Campton Place and hotels in Mexico, New York and Washington, D.C.

What was your first job:

Doorman at a hotel in Bremen, Germany.

Education: Degree in hospitality management in Bremen, Germany.

Residence: Pacific Heights. In all my years in the industry, I never lived more than 20 minutes from where I work. If I can't do that, then don't take the job.

Business philosophy

Essential business philosophy: You have to stay ahead and be proactive. You've got to know who your clients are and what they want. Too many times, we assume what the client wants.

Best way to keep competitive edge: Anticipate your customers' needs rather than just react to them. Right now we're doing big things with technology, (like) Gigabit Ethernet. It's not that we need it today, but we will need it in the next four or five years.

Guiding principle: Treat people with respect. Ensure that our team members have the opportunity to excel and to advance.

Yardstick of success: We have good owners who really believe in the long term, in community and giving back and being involved. It's not an institutional investor who says, "tomorrow there is someone coming who is paying \$20 million more."
Goal yet to be achieved: We have to achieve a successful opening and position the hotel in the upper market. (The hotel opens in February 2008.)

Judgment calls

Best business decision: I was working for Sheraton in Paris. I had a scholarship for Cornell University summer school in 1981. The next year I repeated that in conjunction with a work and study program in New York and continued staying. I got my visa and green card. I achieved more here in the U.S. than I could have in Europe.

Toughest business decision: In the mid 1990s, not in the U.S., I closed up and laid off 150 recently hired and -trained employees after the deal fell apart six months prior to the hotel opening.

Biggest missed opportunity: Many of my friends and colleagues worked in places they didn't want to go but they thought it was advancement for them. I always stayed away from it and joined organizations that let me live in cities where I really wanted to live. I don't believe I missed a big opportunity.

Mentor: My mother. Very early on she said do what you need to do and go overseas and go into the industry.

Word that best describes you: Passionate. Enthusiastic. I have a can-do attitude.

True confessions

Like best about job: Building great teams

and working with good people.

Like least about job: With the (hotel) opening, there is not enough time in the day to get all the things done.

Pet peeve: Impersonal and indifferent service.

Most important lesson learned: You learn something every day. But you have to be conscious of that and have a beginner's mind.

Person most interested in meeting: Nelson Mandela.

Most respected competitor: Four Seasons. They have consistently superior service.

Three greatest passions: Friends, family and traveling.

First choice for a new career: To be photographer for National Geographic.

Predilections

Favorite quote: You have to be the change in the world you want to see.

Most influential book: "The Long Walk to Freedom," Nelson Mandela's autobiography.

Favorite cause: Mint Plaza and the Mission Hiring Hall.

Favorite status symbol: Living in San Francisco.

Favorite movie: "Milagro Beanfield War."

Favorite restaurant: Vivande on Fillmore Street. Auberge de L'ill in France.

Favorite vacation spot: Mediterranean coast.

Favorite way to spend free time: Walking in the city. Have maybe some pasta, an espresso, a glass of wine.

Automobile: Zero carbon footprint! I take a cable car for the time being.

— Ryan Tate ■