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STEIGENBERGER'S EXPANDING VIEW

WHAT'S HOT





THE POWER OF PUTTING PEOPLE FIRST

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When Alex Kim took the managing director position at California’s Ojai Valley Inn & Spa at the start of this year, he did so in large part for personal reasons. The 52-year-old hotelier — whose career has included management positions with properties such as California’s La Quinta Resort and Club, One&Only Ocean Club in the Bahamas and, most recently, Meadowood Napa Valley — has three young children and wanted them to live in a strong community with good schools.

However, the 308-room Ojai Valley Inn & Spa, which dates back to 1923, presents professional challenges for Kim as well. This year, the property is debuting a re-imagined signature restaurant, a new adults-only pool and a refined lobby design, with additional renovations set to begin next year. Capital improvements aside, though, Kim says the hotel’s staff has made this job stand out for him. “Professionally, I’ve been more satisfied in this place than anywhere I have been,” he enthuses. “It’s just a magical place.”

HOTELS: How did you decide to pursue a career in hospitality?

Alex Kim: My parents always said be a doctor or a lawyer. I just naturally enjoyed working with people, and what better way to do that than to be in a resort where guests are there to be happy?

H: In all the properties you have worked in, what constants have you seen that always lead to success?

AK: There are internal conflicts no matter what kind of hotel you are in, but if everyone

thinks at the end of the day we are here to take care of our guests, then suddenly all those debates become simpler.

The next thing is knowing management really is here to take care of our staff. Some managers forget the staff is not there to take care of you. They are there to take care of the guests. I’m here to help our staff take care of guests better. That is a very important core value.

Thirdly, something I learned later on is never forget you have to make a profit.

H: How do you balance your work and family life?

AK: There are little tricks. If I think I’ll be home by 7 p.m., I tell my wife I’ll be home by 8:30. So I under-promise and over-deliver. When I have to make difficult decisions at work sometimes I chat with my wife so she feels she is part of what I do. That helps.

H: What’s your advice for other hoteliers?

AK: If you are interested in building your career and continuing to do more and more, you will have to do things you don’t like to do. There will be difficult decisions you have to make, difficult conversations you have to have, but you need to learn to do things you don’t want to do.

Two, try not to think about the money you’re going to make. If you love what you do and you have a passion for it, money comes automatically.

Three, know your blind side. The hardest thing is critiquing yourself. Always have an open door to hear feedback from people you trust who are willing to tell you stuff you don’t like to hear.