

AN INTERVIEW WITH DIRK BRAND

Hotel Manager of QUEEN MARY 2

by
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Dirk Brand, a native of Germany who now lives in Spain, already has an impressive list of accomplishments for such a young man. In addition to managing the biggest department on the ocean liner QUEEN MARY 2, he has headed the hotel departments on some of the world's largest cruise ships including GRAND PRINCESS, CARIBBEAN PRINCESS, CORAL PRINCESS and DIAMOND PRINCESS. Further proof of his ability to accomplish things in this area is that after joining CROWN PRINCESS for her first season in the Baltic, he will join RUBY PRINCESS during her construction in order to shape her hotel department. All of this is on top of substantial experience with the Crown Plaza & Intercontinental hotel chain.

On QUEEN MARY 2, the hotel manager is one of four senior "four stripe" officers. The captain is in overall charge of the ship. The staff captain is second in command and in charge of the deck department. The chief engineer is responsible for the technical part of the operation. However, the senior officer with the most direct impact on the passengers is the hotel manager. "The hotel manager on a ship is generally responsible for everything except the engine and the deck department, which on the ocean liner QUEEN MARY 2 is pretty massive at nearly 1,100 crew members on board. The medical department, the entertainment, the food and beverage, the housekeeping, all the concession areas, are the main areas. They are responsible as departments to the revenue managers who run those departments and oversee those departments and they work together and report to me."

The hotel manager is charged with ensuring that the ship delivers the type of voyage that was promised in the line's promotional literature. In doing this, he must act within the framework of the policies and procedures set forth by the line's head office. "A uniform system is important. If a guest is on one ship that runs the product this way and [then comes on another ship in the fleet where] the management runs the product a different way, the guest would say: 'Hey, hold on. Here's the menu and this is all totally different. On one ship you provide this service for free and on the other one you charge me for it.' So, there is a uniform system in place which guarantees a similarity and a style which is the copied throughout the fleet."

In addition, with modern technology, there is increased oversight and communication between the head office and the ships. "There is a very good, excellent communication and feedback and a very good support and advisory role from the head office. There is clear guidance and regulation for each company, policies and procedures but there is, of course, a certain amount of freedom that we have on board where we can manage and handle things in the interest of the guests. If there are any questions, issues or advice that we need the head office is there as well."

There must also be good communication within a ship. For example, if there is bad weather ahead, it will affect not only the deck department's navigation of the ship but also the serving of meals and the nightly entertainment. Also, the decisions made by the senior officers and the head office are meaningless unless they are communicated throughout the chain of command.

"There is a very good communication aboard between the senior officers as well as in my team because at the end of the day they are the ones who make it happen and they need to be behind the idea and make the product successful."

Managing the hotel operations on a passenger ship is significantly different than managing a hotel on shore. "It is a massive and a large hotel. You don't find many hotels the size of an ocean liner like QUEEN MARY 2 with nearly 3,000 guests and 1,260 crew members. The two key things are: number one, the people live on the ship; it is a 24-hour environment, it is their work and their time off. It is very important the comradeship, the teamwork, working with each other and it is just amazing to see how many different nationalities you have here and different beliefs and interests and everybody works together happy as a team. They live here, they know they are all on one ship, you need to stick together."



Hotel Manager Dirk Brand.

"The other thing is the logistics. Here, especially on a transatlantic crossing, six days at sea, we can't just call the suppliers and say 'hey, we forgot the carrots, the butter and the sugar.' A lot of flexibility, a lot of organization, a lot of planning. The quality of the service that you find here, you wouldn't find in a shore-side hotel. Maybe in a small exclusive hotel but not in a large hotel of this size, I don't think that exists ashore."

But, that was not always the case. When QUEEN MARY 2 first debuted, which was prior to Mr. Brand's tenure, the service was not all that could be desired on a premium ship. "I think first of all, every new prototype, every new, really unique establishment - - and the QUEEN MARY 2 being a totally, amazing and unique ocean liner, the first prototype of its kind - - takes a little while to settle in. It is the normal process regardless of if it is in the auto industry, the cruise industry, if it is a new hotel, the crew members learn to settle in, they get used to a routine."

In addition in seeking to remedy this problem, Cunard focused on building crew morale. "I think it is important not to put too much pressure on the crew. Let them do their jobs, let them do what they are good in, what they have learned and what they trained. And it is

part of good morale to have a good management team who give them recognition so they can be proud of the product. It is also important to offer them as well a lot of programs in their free time, a lot of activities because the crew lives on the ship. This is their home here. Other people go out of their companies, go to the movies, go in the restaurant, do their activities, meet with their friends, so it is important that we provide those activities."

Indeed, Brand lists crew morale as a top priority "because a happy crewman makes a happy guest. I think very important is the bonding between the crew and the guests and we want to achieve the best service we can provide -- excellent five-star plus service to provide to the guests. [My goal is to] increase the guests' satisfaction and provide a service that does not need even the guests to ask for it, be able to provide it before." On Cunard, the bonding is not just between passengers and waiters, bartenders and stewards but includes the ship's officers as well. "Here, the focus is very much on the guests. It is a tradition on Cunard, that is why. I think the guests come back because there is a very close

bond, a very good, close bonding between the guests and the officers. It is still one of the few companies in the world, the few lines, where we are hosting tables [in the dining room] and have many, many functions and parties in order to have good contact with [the guests] and recognition. I think the guests enjoy it as well as the officers and everybody else who participates in those functions. That is what makes Cunard very unique and different to other products and I think, also QUEEN MARY to other ships in the world."

Cunard is known as being a quintessentially British line with an emphasis on a British tradition of service. How does Cunard maintain that tradition when the majority of the crew is from countries other than Britain? "I think many of the crew members have a tradition of hospitality starting from when they were growing up. If it is India or Asia, the people are coming from hospitality countries. If you do a history, [there was] a lot of connection there with the U.K. [In addition, while] the focus is still absolutely a British product and the tradition of Cunard, I think a little bit of an international atmosphere onboard, if it is from the crew, the international crew, helps to carry to the international clientele that we have, which is very much mixed, many different nationalities."

There is also training in the British/Cunard tradition of service. Cunard uses various manning agencies located around the world who select potential employees based upon criteria established by Cunard. The people selected by the manning agencies often have a "background in the hospitality industry, either in a five-star or first class hotel or even in the cruise industry. In addition, we do White Star training onboard. We have a White Star Academy where every new joiner goes through a certain training program for some weeks [in which] we train them and focus on the White Star service. Then, there is the day-to-day program. Of course, within two or three weeks, you can't train somebody from scratch to the final product. That is why it is important that management train those people everyday. However, we, of course, want to make sure that those guys are not tested on the guests. What we want is that they provide the top service right away from the first moment, the first impression. So, [the new people] learn in the 'back of the house.' The back of the house dining is the crew area, petty officers mess, the officers mess. They progress through the ranks. When they are ready, we let them go to the front of the house."

With the QUEEN VICTORIA entering service, a substantial number of QUEEN MARY 2's crew went to the new ship "to make sure she starts out well." Brand believes affording the crew this opportunity was

good for crew morale. In addition service on QM2 did not suffer. Replacements were brought in but the good morale on QM2 and nucleus of veterans enabled QM2 to maintain the level of service.

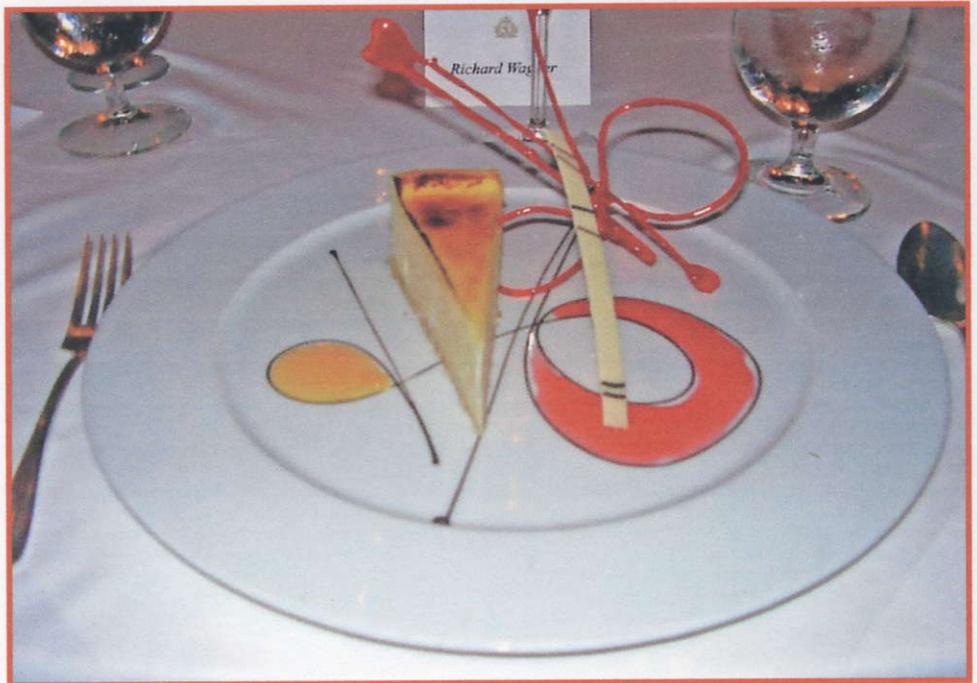
Cunard will face the opposite problem when QUEEN ELIZABETH 2 leaves service in 2008. "Some crew will be coming over here. There will be some crew members going over to QUEEN VICTORIA. There might be some people who bring out the VICTORIA from the other fleets [in the Carnival Corporation family], returning back to the other fleets. So the QUEEN ELIZABETH's crew can either go on the QUEEN VICTORIA or the QUEEN MARY."

Cunard is a subsidiary of Carnival Corporation. This allows Cunard not only to call upon its sister companies for additional crew but also to tap the sister companies for management expertise. Indeed, as indicated earlier, Mr. Brand came to Cunard from sister company Princess Cruises. While access to these resources is clearly beneficial from an economic point of view, will this crosspollination lead to homogenization of the companies? "The mother company has many different brands and many different ships. However, the companies still run different products, not similar though the entire fleet. With Cunard and the other companies, you can see the difference. This is not to say that one is better - - they are all unique and they are all amazing products and they all provide an amazing service. It is just catering for a different kind of guests, clientele, in my opinion. You tailor to whatever your guests wish. There is a different dress code for example. The people here love to dress and it is more formal than on other brands. For example, P&O and Princess and other brands, people come there to be more casual. Every product is different and has its unique way and caters for the clientele and what the clientele wishes."

"Every company has its unique way and the companies review and see who is doing what. You synergize some things which make sense but the products will still remain as they are, I am pretty confident, and will not be standardized and lose their character because that is the whole idea - - to have the tradition and the character. That is why the people come back to the companies. They do not want to have a copy of this over there. I am pretty sure it will remain the same and that we still focus and concentrate to be unique here at Cunard in particular. [Even] if you can learn something from another company and it suits to the product, you still have to tailor it to your product. You cannot copy the same and put the same over here because it would not match and would not work. Good ideas are [not

always] born totally new, you see something and tailor it around something in order to fit to a certain product."

Cunard emphasizes tradition. However, that has not prevented the company from innovating and adapting over time. Indeed, when Samuel Cunard started the line in 1840 passengers were not the primary focus rather it was to carry the mail. More recently, QUEEN ELIZABETH 2 survived by evolving for 40 years when all of her contemporary ocean liners were laid-up or removed from transatlantic service. This tradition of gradual change is continuing on QUEEN MARY 2. "We are planning a few projects for 2008 which we are reviewing at the moment. We are progressing steadily in order to make new programs, new incentives and new facilities. There will, for sure, next year be modifications and changes made to the ship. Not in a major significant way because the ship is amazing as it is and it is very complex, very unique and runs as a solid unit by itself. But, for sure, there will be modifications made and service improvements and also facilities. Every month and every day, we improve in certain areas and we work on further. So, you will, for sure, see some change. Nothing where you will say 'Oh my gosh, I do not recall the ship anymore.' We always add new things and people always ask for new things such as the computer technology, updates, modifications, wireless. We are still learning. It is always a healthy process of trying new things, staying with tradition but also trying new ways as well."



Above: A special dessert creation in QM2's Britannia Restaurant. Below: QM2's Todd English Restaurant.

