



Hotel Industry Movers & Shakers

Jamie Fox

Director of Rooms — The Hotel Emma, San Antonio, Texas

As the Director of Rooms at The Hotel Emma, an historic independent property in San Antonio, Jamie Fox’s philosophy is simple: “The guest experience is everything. If you constantly provide an exceptional experience, the positive ratings and revenue will follow,” he says.

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Jamie didn’t always know that hospitality was the right path for him. He started in the hotel business when he and a buddy moved to Big Sky, Montana and needed jobs to support their skiing habit. “We didn’t have a place to live, we didn’t have anything,” Jamie recalls. “We just wanted to ski and enjoy the Western lifestyle. But once I started in hospitality, I found that I loved it.” He started in reservations, moving up very quickly and eventually became the front desk manager.

Broadening horizons

From there, Jamie moved east for an opportunity as the Rooms Division Manager of the Woodstock Inn Resort in Vermont. “The General Manager took a risk on me. I was young and new to hospitality, but he gave me the chance to show him, and to show myself, that I was on the right path,” he says.

After a few years, Jamie spent time with a variety of hospitality properties, including both branded and independent hotels, as well as a private club in the Adirondack Mountains of New York state.

Later, he took a brief departure from hotels, and became involved with an international touring company, booking tour guides in Asia and the west coast of the United States. Jamie filled a wide range of functions within this company from product research, to the hiring of new guides, to creating travel itineraries. “I got to travel all over Asia and personally craft unique experiences for our clients,” Jamie says.

Returning to hotels

Eventually, the hotel industry called Jamie home in 2009 with an opportunity to take on Rooms and Revenue Management at the Lodge at Woodloch in Pennsylvania, which was undergoing a transition of sorts. “By focusing on guest experience and re-evaluating our rate structure, we were able to increase occupancy by three times on an annual basis,” he says.

Jamie very much enjoyed his booming success and the work he was doing in Pennsylvania. But ultimately, he and his wife wanted to be close to family in San Antonio, so he began to search for positions in the US Southwest. After two and a half years in his next role at the world renowned Inn at Little Washington, the perfect opportunity came along.

Changing the market dynamics

About his move to Texas, Jamie immediately recalls, “The Hotel Emma was a project I was excited to take on the minute I heard about it.” The offbeat, upscale independent hotel, once a 19th century brewhouse, is located on the northern edge of the downtown area, just a short trip from the San Antonio River Walk and the famed Alamo Mission. “This hotel is a one-of-a-kind place. When you see this space you just can’t help but want to be here and be a part of it,” he says.

One of the biggest challenges the hotel faced as opening neared last November was capturing its share of the market. “San Antonio is a convention city,” Jamie recalls, “so as a result there are a lot of big branded properties and not a lot of high-end independents to choose from. We wanted to be #1 on TripAdvisor, but with

over 350 hotels in our market, that’s very hard to do, especially as an independent hotel.”

The strategy? Jamie called on all of his previous years of experience creating exceptional experiences. “The Hotel Emma team decided the only way to capture long term business and success was not to compromise on rate, but instead to be the go-to place in San Antonio for a luxury hotel experience,” he says.”

The result? By staying strong with a commitment to the guest experience, and by using Revinate Surveys™ to capture more guest feedback and boost review volume, Jamie and the team at The Hotel Emma took the hotel from #148 to #1 on the TripAdvisor Popularity Index in just nine months.

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Owning the guest experience

One of the biggest challenges that Jamie sees in hospitality today is the proliferation of online guest feedback. “It’s a challenge for us to feel like we’re at the top of our game when a guest review can be so subjective,” he says. “But,” he adds, “paying attention to guest feedback is so critical to staying relevant in the market and understanding what it is that makes a hotel exceptional.”

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On the philosophy that took The Hotel Emma to the top of its market, Jamie says, “Owning the guest experience is at the core of everything. I don’t believe you can be 100% perfect, but we have to know our business and know our guests so well that we never let someone fall through the cracks with an unhappy experience.”

For those looking to take their careers in hospitality to the next level, Jamie says, overall, that hoteliers need to avoid getting caught up in trends that come and go. “Stay true to knowing your guests exceptionally well and listening to them. If that’s at the heart of everything you do, you will find the path to success,” he says. He also has three pieces of advice:

1. Take the time to understand each department’s needs.

Don’t be afraid to do the jobs you’re asking people to do. Every now and then, jump in and be the Bellman, park the cars, or sweep the lobby. Knowing and understanding your employees’ needs will help you better know and understand how to serve your guests. Also, remember that a positive guest experience is a direct result of how well you treat the team members around you.

- 2. Try to understand multiple perspectives.**
Think about what you say and how you say it. This not only means having empathy for unhappy guests when you’re trying to make things right, but also for your employees. It’s so important for the people who work for you to see you as a leader who treats people with respect.
- 3. Don’t be afraid to take risks—**
whether it’s learning a new technology or a new leadership technique. It’s okay to jump into something you don’t know with the intention of learning how to do it well.

Revinate Heroes is a series of articles profiling successful hoteliers who are moving the hospitality industry into the future.