A MESSAGE FROM RICHARD R. KELLEY TO OUR OUTRIGGER ‘OHANA

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Ivy Kwok Featured in Executive Housekeeping Today

By Dr. Richard Kelley

Ivy Kwok, Executive Housekeeper of the Outrigger Waikiki on the Beach, is the subject of the cover story in this month’s edition of Executive Housekeeping Today,* published by the International Executive Housekeepers Association (IEHA). This is an exceptional honor for an exceptional member of our ‘ohana.

To help prepare for Ivy’s interview with Laura M. DiGiulio, the magazine’s editor, Outrigger’s Nancy Daniels and Susan Sunderland gathered the following details of Ivy’s fascinating life and career with Outrigger Enterprises Group. This is really their article.

Ivy Kwok was born in China and raised from age 6 to high school in Hong Kong. She comes from a family of eight children—four boys, four girls—of which she is the seventh child. Her Chinese name is Sau Ping Kwok, but she adopted the name Ivy at English language school because, she says, “It has just three letters, is easy to write, and sounds good. It’s not because I’m poison!”

When her family moved to Hawai’i in 1973, Ivy used American television to attune her ears and speech to American English. A friend introduced her to the hotel industry and spoke of its great opportunities, pay and benefits. Ivy became a room attendant at the Outrigger West Hotel on December 23, 1973, two days before Christmas. She says, “It turned out to be a true gift because, 38 years later, I am well established in the housekeeping profession.”

She admits to having been intimidated at first by how labor-intensive this field is. But over time, as her skills and abilities developed, Ivy moved up the ranks at various Outrigger Hotel properties, going from room attendant to control clerk, inspectress, assistant executive housekeeper, and eventually, executive housekeeper.

Ivy’s ambitions were always career-oriented. Once she entered the hotel field, she complemented on-the-job training with academics. She enrolled in the 320-hour certification program for housekeepers at Kapi’olani Community College. This is a program IEHA-Hawai’i continues to support and endorse for those entering the field.

As Executive Housekeeper of the Outrigger Waikiki on the Beach, Ivy and her team are responsible for the cleanliness and comfort of 525 deluxe guest rooms and the hotel’s public areas. While on one hand it is a physical plant, Ivy views it as something much bigger: the “presentation of our brand and product. When a guest checks into a room, Outrigger is making its first impression and opening statement,” she says.

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Ivy’s role is to administer and oversee the housekeeping operations of the hotel. She also oversees the Outrigger Enterprises Group housekeeping labor pool that feeds workers into various Outrigger properties on an as-needed basis and allows for scheduling flexibility to optimize work hours.

Besides day-to-day operations, Ivy is currently involved in a major $18 million renovation that will take place at the Outrigger Waikiki from March through June. The work includes upgrades to all guest rooms, the entry and driveway on Kalākaua Avenue, and the beachfront swimming pool.

Coordinating with the Engineering department and suppliers has kept Ivy busy. “With new products and new fixtures, there are always adjustments in housekeeping and maintenance, as well as employee training,” she explains.

As Ivy sees it, today’s executive housekeeper must be a visionary leader. The professionalism, technology and environmental aspects of the job have evolved dramatically. Staying informed about new trends, best practices and ever-changing consumer demands are inherent in the role.

Among the innovative programs Ivy has implemented at Outrigger Waikiki are Body Saver time-and-motion studies for housekeepers; team-building cultural events that showcase Hawai‘i’s diversity; Ke ‘Ano Wa’a Hawaiian values training for employees; a recycling program that exchanges plastic bottles and beach items for cash that is donated to charity; and job shadowing for high school and college students wanting hands-on experience in hotel operations.

Emergency and disaster preparedness have become important areas of training as well. A sense of well-being is essential to the guest experience, in Ivy’s view. During past hurricane and tsunami warnings, Ivy was able to mobilize her team and manage guest evacuations confidently and efficiently. She even baked cookies for guests when restaurants were closed during one evacuation. But that’s Ivy. Her sense of responsibility for the welfare of guests and employees never wavers.

As Outrigger Enterprises Group grows geographically, so does Ivy’s perspective. While she acts locally to reflect Hawai‘i as a travel destination, she thinks globally as a leader. If there’s a far-off look in her eyes these days, it’s possibly because Outrigger is opening its first hotel in China in 2013. Could fate take Ivy full circle to the place of her birth? She is excited about the prospect of being part of Outrigger Hainan Island’s opening team.

Such opportunities and the endless possibilities for growth in the hotel field keep Ivy engaged and motivated. True to Outrigger’s corporate mission, Ivy focuses on three key audiences: guests, employees and owners. Getting positive results—“making them smile”—is what drives her.

The professional housekeeping field faces many of the same challenges as other industries—labor supply and demand; continuing education and training needs; integrating technology into what is traditionally a manual-labor practice; addressing environmental concerns and responsibilities; managing the rising cost of doing business; and basically learning to do more with less.

“It goes with the territory,” Ivy says. “You can’t be intimidated by the pace of progress and the force of change in our jobs. A foundation of good experience and...”

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the support of an inspired corporate organization, such as we have at Outrigger, help us to meet challenges head-on. With vision and innovation, we often even lead the way.”

“But a hotel is bricks and mortar,” Ivy adds. “There must be a corporate culture that brings the guest experience to life and helps create lasting memories.

A hotel is a destination within a destination. We must first be the essence of Hawai’i before we are a hospitality brand. Yet if we do our jobs right, one will be indistinguishable from the other.”

“Feedback on guest comment cards and online review sites like TripAdvisor frequently mention the friendliness and helpfulness of our housekeepers. I am encouraged by such reports because they validate what Hawai’i hospitality is,” she says. “It’s all about the customer relationship.”

As for trends, Ivy sees an impact to labor availability caused by an aging work force, plus increasing restrictions and rules about protecting the environment. These will affect the cost of materials, including cleaning solutions and processes. Health and sanitation issues will continue to gain public consciousness with implications for the hotel industry. Allergy-free rooms, for instance, are already in demand.

Ivy also sees technology helping housekeeping become more intuitive. Guest history databases, for example, are helping hotels anticipate guest needs even before they check in.

But working smart goes beyond the microchip in the guest room key and really belongs to the intellect and common sense of the employee, Ivy contends. “The dynamics of change in the hospitality industry will never stop,” she says. “It’s what makes this an exciting profession. But the next generation of executive housekeepers will need to be prepared to face tough issues from an ever-more-demanding consumer.”

Ivy faces challenges with an “open mind and willing heart.” It also helps that she has a proactive mentality and sense of urgency about getting things done.

Ivy Kwok’s illustrious housekeeping career is marked by many outstanding achievements and contributions—an “Ivy League” of noteworthy success.

As Outrigger Waikiki General Manager Robert McConnell puts it: “Outrigger Hotels are known for our unique Island-style hospitality. Our employees are our greatest asset. Ivy Kwok is a great example of that. Our entire team loves working with her. She is a true professional, a positive and proactive leader—and a genuine pleasure to work with.”

What are Ivy’s last words on excelling in her profession? She puts it succinctly: “Be prepared. Be ready. Be there!”

That says it all. Congratulations, Ivy, our cover girl! ✨

* http://www.readoz.com/publication/read?i=1046602#page1