Saluting our Champion Housekeepers

During the coming two weeks, Outrigger and OHANA will honor our Housekeepers across the Pacific. Especially this year, with many properties experiencing near-record occupancies month after month, we will proudly recognize our Housekeeping staff and thank them for everything they do to keep our rooms and public areas looking as great as they do.

Though they work quietly, far from the limelight, our Housekeepers do a magnificent job. They perform their duties flawlessly 24/7/365—all day, every day of the week, throughout the year, even on Christmas Day.

Regular readers of Saturday Briefing are probably aware that I have a special place in my heart for the Housekeeping staff. I am sure that this has something to do with the fact that I started my hotel career over 55 years ago folding towels in the housekeeping storage room of the little Islander Hotel on Seaside Avenue in Waikiki.

Readers may also recall that during Housekeepers Week, I often seek a metaphor for the unique role that Housekeepers play in the success of our hotels. This year, there is no question that we should look at the qualities of cyclist Lance Armstrong to put the accomplishments of our champion Housekeeping team into perspective.

It was inspiring to see Lance Armstrong perform in this summer’s Tour de France. This is the world’s premier bicycle race, lasting 20 days and covering 1,800 to 2,500 miles across the length and breadth of France, and even into neighboring countries (the route changes every year). Those who successfully compete must have unbelievable strength, skills, focus, and endurance as individuals. However, competitors must also be good team players and have a good support crew. No one wins this race alone.

In this year’s Tour de France, Lance Armstrong again proved that he is a world-class athlete by besting the field and winning the race for an unprecedented seventh time!

The qualities demonstrated by Lance Armstrong are strikingly similar to those I admire in the members of the Outrigger and OHANA Housekeeping teams. Let’s look at some of these attributes:

Strength, Focus, and Endurance: No less than Lance Armstrong, Outrigger and OHANA’s Housekeepers are dedicated, with a work ethic that drives them to excel. Lance Armstrong’s life is no walk in the park. He is constantly training, building his strength, and honing his skills to perform flawlessly. If he lets up, any day, even for a minute, the competition is ready to overtake him.

That sounds a lot like the hotel business. The challenges are never-ending. You must constantly be on the alert and can never relax. Housekeepers must be willing to work hard. It takes a great deal of strength and stamina to tackle 16 rooms a day and make them look spic and span. Each day brings a new set of problems to be met and “hills to climb” and overcome. If we relax, the competition is ready to sprint past us.

World-Class Skills: Championship cyclists sharpen their skills to an astonishing degree, and so do our Housekeepers. If anyone doubts this statement, I challenge him or her to put on a Housekeeper’s uniform, organize a Housekeeping cart, go up to the floors, and make up rooms for an entire day. Unless you are in top shape, efficient, and highly skilled, you will not get past lunch, let alone make it through a full shift.

Teamwork: As I mentioned above, nobody wins the Tour de France alone. Champions work with their teammates and support staff to get the job done. A hotel housekeeping team operates the same way. Everybody helps everyone else, sharing the work to keep the hotel
on schedule with spotless rooms available when a guest arrives after a long and tiring journey.

Compassion: Lance Armstrong is an extraordinary human being who, personally and through the Lance Armstrong Foundation, has demonstrated great compassion and willingness to help others. I see those same qualities in our Housekeepers. At the annual Visitor Industry Charity Walk, I always see hundreds of our Housekeepers leading the pack and walking the extra mile to help the charitable organizations that do so much important work in Hawaii.

Honesty & Integrity: We expect the highest honesty and integrity of a person in the spotlight like Lance Armstrong. I am certain that the recent allegations that Lance used the red-blood-cell booster erythropoietin in his first Tour de France win will be proven to be false. He is too great a champion for that to be true. Similarly, we hold Housekeepers to an equally high standard of honesty and integrity. Every day, Outrigger and OHANA's guests leave their rooms, valuables, and personal effects in the care of our Housekeepers. In my over half century in the hotel business, I have rarely seen that trust violated.

Sense of Humor: I have looked hard to find out if Lance Armstrong has a good sense of humor. I was not able to find out for sure, but in light of everything he has been through — being raised in a broken home, surviving testicular cancer, sustaining multiple cycling injuries—I’ll bet he knows when it is best to look on the lighter side of a difficult situation. Housekeepers have to have a sense of humor too. In fact, one of the reasons I like visiting the Outrigger and OHANA Housekeeping departments is because I always find laughter and humor there. Just like racing on the roads of France, in the hotel business, things often do not go exactly as planned. Arrivals and departures can be unexpectedly early or late. Sometimes the laundry delivers stained towels (or does not deliver at all). Occasionally the plumbing stops up just before the end of a shift.

Whenever something like this happens, our Housekeepers, like true leaders, approach the situation with patience—and a large dose of humor. They know that no one lasts long in the hotel industry without the ability to look at the bright and funny side of everything that comes their way.

So when I think of Lance Armstrong and our Housekeepers, I see champions with remarkably similar characteristics. But when it comes to our Housekeepers, I don’t need a stopwatch or a bunch of yellow jerseys to know they’re winners. By any measure, the Outrigger and OHANA Housekeepers are always winners, and in my book, they all deserve gold medals every day of the year.