Saluting our Olympic-class Housekeepers

By Dr. Richard Kelley

Over the next two weeks, at Outrigger hotels and its affiliates, we are celebrating an extended International Housekeepers Week and honoring our Housekeepers around the Pacific and Indian oceans. We proudly recognize our Housekeeping staff and thank them for everything they do to keep our rooms and public areas looking as terrific as they do.

Although they work quietly, far from the limelight, our Housekeepers do a magnificent job. They perform flawlessly around the clock, every day of the week, throughout the year, even on Christmas Day. Using the slang of today’s Internet world, we can count on them “24/7/365” – and they always turn in a championship performance.

Regular readers of Saturday Briefing are probably aware that I have a special place in my heart for the Housekeeping staff. My first job in the hospitality industry was washing and folding towels along with my sisters, Jean and Pat, in the housekeeping shed behind our parents’ Islander Hotel on Seaside Avenue in Waikiki in 1947.

Readers will probably also recall that during Housekeepers Week, I usually seek a metaphor to describe and capture the unique role that Housekeepers play in the success of our hotels.

With the Olympic Games fresh in our memories, I’ve turned to athletics as a good way to portray the accomplishments of our gold-medal Housekeeping team.

Last month, it was inspiring to see over 11,000 top athletes from 205 nations enter Maracanã Stadium in Rio de Janeiro for the opening Olympic ceremonies. In the days that followed, we were dazzled by astonishing displays of endurance, skill and grace.

To me, the most incredible performance was that of Michael Phelps, the 31-year-old American swimmer who, in his fifth Olympic games, won five golds and one silver.

His win in the 200-meter butterfly made him the first person to win individual swimming gold in Olympic games 12 years apart.

That race also made him the oldest man to win individual swimming gold, breaking a 96-year-old record set by Hawaiian surfing legend Duke Kahanamoku who had just turned 30 when he won the 100-meter freestyle in Antwerp, Belgium, in 1920.
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But there is an even older record Phelps broke when he won individual gold in his fourth 200-meter medley. With this 13th individual Olympic title, Phelps smashed the previous all-time Olympic record – 12 individual wins – that legendary runner Leonidas of Rhodes set nearly 2,200 years ago in 152 BC!

The qualities of Olympic champions like Phelps are strikingly similar to those I find in the members of the Outrigger Housekeeping teams. Let’s look at some of these attributes:

DEDICATION AND STRONG WORK ETHIC. No less than Olympic athletes, Outrigger’s Housekeepers are dedicated, with a work ethic that drives them to accomplish their goals. An Olympian’s life is no walk in the park. They are constantly training, building their strength and honing their skills to perform flawlessly. If they let up, even for a minute, their competitors are ready to overtake them.

That sounds a lot like the hotel business. The challenges are never-ending. You must constantly be on the alert and can never relax. Each day brings a new set of problems to be met and overcome. If we don’t keep up the pace, the competition is ready to sprint past us.

The Housekeeping department is the core of any hotel, and just like Olympians, our Housekeepers can never rest on their laurels. They must be willing to work hard every day. It takes enormous strength and stamina to tackle up to 16 rooms a day and make them spic and span.

WORLD-CLASS SKILLS. Olympians sharpen their skills to an astonishing degree, and so do our Housekeepers. If anyone doubts this, 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 through a whole day.

WILLINGNESS TO HELP OTHERS. Darryl Seibel, director of communications of the British Olympic Organization, once said, “For most Olympic and Paralympic athletes, giving back is a part of their DNA. They recognize the sacrifices that others have made to help them...
Housekeepers ... << From 2 pursue and achieve their dreams, and many feel a strong desire to give back."

Michael Phelps used his $1 million Speedo bonus to establish the Michael Phelps Foundation, which, among many activities, is currently working with 28 Boys & Girls Clubs of America to promote healthy lifestyles in young people.

Two-time Olympic Swimmer Missy Franklin, a 21-year-old student at the University of California, Berkeley, and still competing as an amateur athlete, generously donates her time to support many charitable organizations.

I see those same qualities in our Housekeepers. They are always there to assist others, and at the annual Visitor Industry Charity Walk, I typically see hundreds of our Housekeepers leading the pack and walking the extra mile to help Hawai'i's charitable organizations.

**HONESTY AND INTEGRITY.** We expect the highest honesty and integrity of a person in the spotlight like an Olympic athlete. Similarly, we hold Housekeepers to an equally high standard. Every day, guests at Outrigger and affiliated hotels leave their valuables and personal effects in their rooms, in the care of our Housekeepers. In my 69 years in the hotel business, I have hardly ever seen that trust violated.

**SENSE OF HUMOR.** While Olympians are deadly serious during competition, they have a humorous side as well. Michael Phelps has shown remarkable relaxation and humor in interviews, deftly handling comments about
the body-hugging Speedo suits swimmers wear these days, as well as jokes about his size-14 feet and double-jointed ankles. On TV’s Saturday Night Live, he did a hilarious spoof of the “Michael Phelps Diet” – 12,000 calories a day!

Likewise, in numerous TV and personal appearances, Missy Franklin has shown exceptional poise and humor for a person her age. In 2012, she graciously took some ribbing about the colorful set of Olympic rings tattooed high on her right thigh as a symbol of international unity with other winners of Olympic medals. “AHH! All inked up. Can’t believe it! My one and only [tattoo]]” she tweeted, according to the *New York Daily News*.

Laughter and humor are also abundant in the Outrigger and OHANA Housekeeping departments, which is one of the reasons I enjoy my visits there. Just as on the playing field, in the hotel business, things do not always go exactly as planned. Guest 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 Olympians 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 team of judges holding up scorecards to know they’re winners.

By any measure, the Housekeepers in Outrigger-branded and -affiliated hotels, condos and timeshares are always champions, and in my book they win gold medals every day of the year!
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Talent development manager, Lea Panes, launders bathrobes with a housekeeping host

HR director, Shaun Murphy, GM Steve Solberg and property services director, Mohamed Jiffry, deliver linen to housekeeping closets

Asst. director of property services, Mr. Nair changes out pillowcases

Shaun Murphy surrounded by linen

Food and beverage director, Edwin Torres, gets into a groove

Steve Solberg delivering linen

Above: Guam Hotel & Restaurant Association International Housekeeping GALA celebration. Outrigger Guam Beach Resort’s “Most Valuable Housekeeper” recipients: Roberto Tanglao and Marlina Ragasa

Left: IT manager Michael Juco, purchasing manager Cano Cruz, Palm Café manager Bradley Murciano and executive chef wGene Soledad making up beds

Bingo and Waffles Day hosted by human resources and the executive office
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Proclamation signing by Guam’s Lt. Governor Ray Tenorio to proclaim Sept. 11-17 as International Housekeeping Week. Photo taken at Governor’s Office Cliffside.

Royal Sea Cliff Kona by Outrigger® housekeepers pose under a banner (hand carried from the Philippines) after a nutritious breakfast. Back: Carol Hanna, Soledad Urbanez, Myrna Elamparo, Bernaline Tangonan, Mary Jean Palafox, Daisy Oraa, Thelma Galigo, Maria Afaga, Rosita Tolentino, Rodola Tangonan, Elizabeth Quero, Rowena Gaspar, Leeann Frias, Kasey Polido, Kehau Copp and Kani Copp. Front: Julie Mangayayam, Magdalena Cuisito, Franklin Sabugo and Ronald Galiza.

Back: Elain Peng, Sophia Liu, Reyamunda Domingo, Fiona Hong, Bei Yun Zhou, Bei Yun Zhou, Yan Qiao Gao and Robert McConnell. Front: Elna Budiao, Lauren Li, Paz Rosal, Daisy Tong and Judy Lin.


Housekeeping hosts enjoy ice cream and popsicles hosted by the front office and property services teams.

The Housekeeping team “Chuukese Nation,” winners of the scavenger hunt.
Back: Elain Peng, Carol Ly, McConnell, Ivy Kwok and Gloria Daoang
Front: Myrna Pascual, Vivian Chen, Shao Ru Li and Li Qi Zheng


Back: Lily Lee, Ruthann Yamanaka, Thelma Fernandez, Kaipo Ho, Koon Lin Cheng, Dr. Chuck, Larisa Xu and Barry Wallace. Front: Hai Yan Hou, Joanna Huang, Li Xing Liang, Monica Wong, Hanna Liang and Shao Huan Liu.


Back: Larisa Xu, Wan Mei Li, Qiao Hui He, Koon Lin Cheng and David Carey, Lily Lee, Feng Min Liang, King Fong Lau. Front: Wo Shun Kam, Joanna Lee, Yue Ling Xu and Hanna Liang.