Saluting Our Housekeepers: “Ambassadors Extraordinary”

By Dr. Richard Kelley

Over the next two weeks, we will take some time away from our regular duties to honor our Housekeepers. We will give well-earned recognition to those who work tirelessly every day of the year to keep our rooms and public areas looking as great as they do, and we will thank them for everything they do.

Even though they work quietly, far from the limelight, the job our Housekeepers do is magnificent. 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 know that during International Housekeepers Week, I often seek a metaphor for the vital role that Housekeepers play in the success of our hotels.

This year, I believe the phrase “Ambassadors Extraordinary” really captures the spirit of our Housekeepers.

“Ambassador” is a title typically reserved for individuals whose skills and dedication, among other qualities, are truly outstanding. Typically, presidents, kings, and czars give this title to only the most highly respected individuals and ask them to take on the most important, critical and delicate tasks.

The word “Extraordinary” applies to people or actions that go far beyond what is usual, ordinary, regular, or established. The word also implies exceptional in character, amount, extent and degree; noteworthy, and remarkable.

Fortunately, we have a cadre of such extraordinary individuals working in the Housekeeping departments of every Outrigger, OHANA, and affiliated property across the Pacific and, with Outrigger Lodging Services, across the continental United States from Florida to California.

Every day, these “Ambassadors Extraordinary” accomplish exceptional, noteworthy, and remarkable feats in a wide range of activities.

The legendary Duke Kahanamoku was also an “Ambassador Extraordinary.” Almost a century ago, Hawaii was just a remote speck of real estate in the middle of the vast Pacific Ocean. Yet Duke was able to develop and improve his natural athletic skills to the point that he suddenly achieved international fame at the Stockholm Olympics in 1912 by breaking the Olympic 100-meter freestyle record.

In 1920, he proved his achievement was no fluke when he swam in the Antwerp Olympics and set a world record in the same event. In all, he won three Olympic gold medals and two silvers.

Later, he became an icon of sportsmanship and the unofficial “Ambassador” of Hawai‘i, leading a long and active life as a proud example of the best in character, honesty, compassion, dedication, integrity, personal sacrifice, and, when appropriate, humor.

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In my mind, those admirable qualities also are found in the members of our Housekeeping teams. Like Duke Kahanamoku, our Housekeepers are Ambassadors Extraordinary!

Every day our Housekeepers demonstrate:
- A strong work ethic
- Top skills
- A sense of responsibility
- A willingness to help others
- Honesty and integrity
- A sense of humor

Our Housekeepers are all blessed with this incredible set of qualities. Every morning they go forth to tackle a corridor full of guest rooms or the equivalent in public areas. By the end of the day, everything has to be perfect and ready for guests arriving from distant corners of the world. There are thousands of details that need attention. Only people with a strong work ethic and top skills can do this demanding job with consistently high performance day after day, month after month, and year after year.

Our Housekeepers also have a tremendous sense of personal responsibility for their jobs, their company and their fellow workers. They often work alone, focused only on the job at hand. Housekeepers take full charge of their assigned guest rooms or public areas. They take pride in what they do and do not need a supervisor looking over their shoulder to make sure they do it right.

Our Housekeepers are well known for helping others achieve their goals. They often make personal sacrifices by working odd hours and irregular shifts. They are also willing to tackle the really tough jobs that no one else wants to do. Generally, these are jobs that cannot be postponed to another day.

Think how guests would react if we told them, “We’ll make up your room tomorrow and touch up the lobby later this week!”

Along that line, our Housekeepers are compassionate and show it in many ways. They help others in our community through their volunteer service and fundraising. Every year, they enthusiastically turn out in large numbers for the annual Visitor Industry Charity Walk.

Our Housekeepers are legendary for honesty and integrity. Every day, our guests leave valuables and personal effects in the care of our Housekeepers. In my more than six decades in the hospitality business, I have hardly ever seen that trust violated.

Finally, like Hawaii’s unofficial “Ambassador,” Duke Kahanamoku, our Housekeepers know that being gracious and, perhaps, even adding a bit of humor to a situation is an important quality to keep at the ready.

State Senator Fred Hemmings, a former world surfing champion and member of the remarkable quartet known as the Duke Kahanamoku Surf Team, described a wonderful example of Duke’s graciousness and quick wittedness in the September 20, 2009, issue of Surfer magazine: “Sure, Duke was the Ambassador of Hawaii, and certainly of surfing, but I don’t think he thought of himself that way. He was gracious to each and every person he met just because that’s the way he was. I saw this even in the presence of obnoxious people. I remember

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sitting with Duke at an event when some belligerent guy comes up and says, ‘Duke Ka-wana-wana-waku,’ totally mispronouncing Duke’s name, which is an insult in itself, but the guy continued to say, ‘I met you in 1933. I was 3 years old. Do you remember me or what?’ Here it was 30-odd-years after this supposed meeting. Anybody else would’ve said, ‘How the hell would I remember you at 3 years old?’ But Duke smiled and said, ‘It’s nice to see you again.’ It made the guy feel 10 feet tall, his face lit up. Duke’s deeds made him the Ambassador.”

In the hotel business, difficult, awkward situations like the one Duke faced are an almost daily occurrence. Guests get grumpy. Some arrive early. Others check out late. The plumbing clogs up. Fresh linen from the laundry fails to arrive on time – or perhaps not at all.

When this happens, I’ve seen that our Ambassadors Extraordinary, like Duke, almost always approach the situation with a great deal of grace and patience, and a sprinkling of humor.

So, are our Housekeepers really Ambassadors Extraordinary?

Absolutely!

To accomplish everything they do, they must turn in extraordinary performances day after day. The only difference between them and the world’s international ambassadors is that our Housekeepers do not get their stories, photos, and achievements reported on the nightly TV news, on the front page of the Honolulu Star-Advertiser, or in an Internet “tweet.”

However, once a year, we do pause for International Housekeepers Week to recognize what great people they are and all the great things they do for our company, their fellow workers, and our guests.

So, to all of our Housekeepers … Domo Arigato, Fa’afetai, Kamsahamnida, Mahalo, Mauruuru, Salamat, Si Yu’us Ma’a’se, Thank You, Tika Hoki, Vinaka Vakelevu, and Xie Xie!

Have a great week! You’ve earned our respect and admiration!

More photos on pages 4, 5, 6, 7, and in next week’s Saturday Briefing
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Divina Garcia, Guo Hui Wu, Sun Kim, Yuan Ni Lin, Florencia Silapan, and Cha Yol Yi

Ken Asato, Dennis Nakachi, Kim Xiao, Amy Lee, and Herb Fernandez

Primie Marzan and Divina Garcia

Alvina Leon, Soo Tana, and Nora Weatherwax

1st row: Wai Choi Ho, Primie Marzan, and Grace Mello
2nd row: Divina Garcia, Yu Hing Shiu, Siu-Lan Fong, Hak Soon Song, Feng Zhen Chen, Agatha Kim, and Ho Soon Kang
3rd row: Ai Jin Li, Susanna Wong, and Qiqiaoliu Tong
4th row: Dr. Chuck Kelley

Sitting: Chao Hong Xu, Chung Wing Chee, Yat Sam Yip, Ernesto Rosete, and Welfredy Baoit. Standing: Alan White, Ruthann Yamanaka, and Dr. Chuck Kelley
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Mew Hing Wong chows down

Sitting: Loida Manuel, Ester Valoria, Esmeralda Ancheta, Carmelita Cascasan, and Cresilda Justo
Standing: Karen Villarmia and Ruthann Yamanaka

Brian Tumacder and Sean Ling - loading up

Koon Lin Chan, Yu Bing Li, and De Xian Liu

Karen Villarmia, Espie Sumibcay, Edna Salvador, and Janice Ng

Sitting: Marylene Lagasca, Demy Tamayo, and Cresilda Justo
Standing: Emilia Mangatoang, Ruthann Yamanaka, and Dr. Chuck Kelley
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Miligros Robiniol says, “Show me the Money!”

Danny Chan, Sek Chin Gong, Ivy Kowk, Yi Zhen Lee, Zhuo Hui Zhao playing the traditional Chinese game of Mahjong.

Sitting: Jie Zhen Li, Young Lee, Elain Peng, and Yu Ling Li
Standing: Barbara Lam, Ivy Kowk, Donna Leong, Bruce Schneider, Robert McConnell, and Ruthann Yamanaka

Sitting: Yi Zhen Lee, Yee Wen Wong, and Siu Fong Kwok
Standing: Ruthann Yamanaka, Lauren Li, Mildred Courtney, and Robert McConnell

Sitting: Francisca Lim, Paz Rosal, and Annie-Lu Navarro
Standing: Ruthann Yamanaka, Robert McConnell, and Barbara Lam

Sitting: Fiona Hong, Joann Liu, and Kwok Fai Young
Standing: Mildred Courtney, Donna Leong, Robert McConnell, Ruthann Yamanaka, and Sung Ki Kim
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Top l to r: Virginia Trinidad, Huan Qiu Li, Richy Reyes, Jeff Pascual, and Erlinda Barredo

Bottom l to r: Elvie Amor, Leonila Francisco, Linda Wang, Anita Tamiro, Juan Manuel, Judith Espina, Joy De Guzman, and Ramona Cirilo

Bottom l to r: Jin Soo Moon, Il Sun Choe, Jung Soo Kim, Hyang Suk Yu, Doreen Corpuz, Eric Chau, and Ying Shu Jin

Bottom l to r: Huan Qiu Li, Ann Law, Mandy Fang, Tina Huang, Ka Shing Lam, Yu Yu Zhan, Erlinda Barredo, Dom Melchor, and Anita Ramiro

Sitting: Xiao Lan Zhang, Estrelita Sagadraca, Daisy Tong, and Ruthann Yamanaka
Standing: Jin Soo Moon, Donna Leong, Robert McConnell, Punu Ortega, Bruce Schneider, and Kimberly Agas

Jin Soo Moon and Dustin Chen