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

Steering a Steady Course in a World of Challenges

By Dr. Richard Kelley

During the past week, key leaders of the Outrigger ‘ohana representing our properties in Hawai‘i and on Guam gathered in Honolulu for an outstanding three days of education and sharing of ideas and information. A similar conference for our properties in Oceania, Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean had been held in Thailand two weeks earlier. Both events were of the highest quality and demonstrated the breadth of knowledge and high-level capabilities of Outrigger’s management team. I had the pleasure of addressing the Honolulu conference. Following is an adaptation of what I said:

Aloha! I bring you greetings from the extended Kelley family. With us today are …
• My daughters, Linda Jane and Bitsy
• My son, Dr. Chuck
• My son-in-law, David Carey
• My sister, Jean Rolles

They join me in thanking you for everything all of you do every day throughout the year to make our company one of the world leaders in hospitality and, at the same time, to make our communities great places to work and grow.

I have a secret to share with you. I am convinced that after our time on earth, there must be a place for our spirits, our souls, to go. In that great beyond, wherever and whatever it may be, I am sure that some of the top hoteliers of the past occasionally get together and comment on the current status of the operations they left behind.

I can imagine Bill Marriott Sr., Conrad Hilton, Holiday Inns founder Kemmons Wilson, Roy and Estelle Kelley, and other notable innkeepers all sitting together on the “Hotel Cloud” comparing notes.

Bill Marriott might brag a little and say, “Look at what my successors have done with the little company my wife Alice and I set up in 1927. We sold A&W Root Beer for 5 cents a mug, and when we added tamales and chili to the menu we called our establishments Hot Shoppes!”

Kemmons Wilson might add, “As I said in my autobiography, success requires just two things. It’s half luck and half brains, but I’m still not sure which comes first.”

Roy might quietly say to Estelle, “It’s brains all right, but if you add a lot of hard work and great people, you get lucky more often!”

Yes, there’s a lot that goes into keeping a company in any industry growing and profitable these days. With all due respect to the hospitality giants just named, I think running a successful business, or almost anything, is tougher today than it has ever been before.

In a number of ways, we are once again living in what 19th century English novelist Charles Dickens might have described as “the best of times and the worst of times.”

The Chinese e-commerce giant, Alibaba, broke any number of records when it went public late last week. It was a wake-up call, not only for U.S. technology companies like Facebook, Apple, Google and Amazon, but for everyone.

One third of the world’s top 20 Internet companies, with names like Tencent and Baidu, are based in China. These companies may be thousands of miles and many time zones distant, but they’re just milliseconds away in worldwide impact.

At the same time, armies of mass murderers, cutthroats and anarchists marching under the impression that they are doing Allah’s will, have been rising out of the Middle East, slaughtering thousands of innocent people as they take over towns, cities and large swaths of whole countries.

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This week’s massive air and missile attacks on ISIS targets in Syria mark a new phase in what is likely to be a lengthy conflict.

Ebola and other new diseases capable of infecting millions are developing in central Africa. To date, about half of those infected with Ebola have died. With modern transportation, these virulent pathogens are only a few hours away from any place Outrigger does business.

It is not a pretty picture, no matter how one paints it. The possibility that the worst could happen should be a part of every plan and strategy.

However, remember that the guys and gals up on the Hotel Cloud also faced enormous challenges.

That was particularly true for Roy and Estelle Kelley. In the late 1930s and early 1940s, Imperial Japan had ambitions to expand and grow. It had already invaded China.

Few imagined that a U.S. export embargo, which kept Japan from importing U.S. steel and oil – yes, in those days the United States was an oil exporter! – which it needed to pursue its war in China, would spur Japan’s military leaders to simultaneously attack U.S. bases in the Philippines and Hawaii and British garrisons in Singapore, Malaya and Hong Kong.

I was just seven years old on December 7, 1941, and even today I cannot imagine the terror in the hearts of my parents as we watched the cloud of black smoke rise over Pearl Harbor and saw Lewers Street explode just two blocks away from where we stood on the balcony of our home in Waikiki.

Overcoming insurmountable odds, just six years later Roy and Estelle opened our company’s first hotel, The Islander on Seaside Avenue in Waikiki.

Our partner in Guam, Al Ysrael, who was in the Philippines when World War II began, had similar, if not even more difficult years during the war.

Like Roy, Estelle and Al in 1941, if today you, personally, and our company are to continue to grow, prosper or even survive, you face many, many challenges.

We are gathered in this room today to celebrate the 20th anniversary of Ke ‘Ånä Wa’å – The Outrigger Way – to share ideas and learn to work even more effectively and cooperatively together as we begin the next steps on our journey.

I have a couple of thoughts I’d like you to consider.

Take the time to read something every day to learn more about and understand what is happening in every part of the world and how it might impact you, your family, your company and your community.

For example, do you really understand how recent developments in technology are affecting the hospitality industry?

These effects are enormous and those technological advances are happening, if not accelerating, every day. You will hear about a few of these developments at this conference.

We can’t survive in these times by ourselves, alone. Teamwork, flexibility, planning, creativity and accountability are more important than ever.

The culture of our company as expressed in Ke ‘Ånä Wa’å and Inafa’maolek (The Outrigger Way adapted to Guam and its Chamorro language) should continue to guide us in Hawaii’i and Guam.

Other Outrigger operations have found that Ke ‘Ånä Wa’å, adapted to the culture in their geographic area, results in remarkably similar, powerful guidance for individuals and groups of co-workers every day.

As teens, my sister Jean and I visited dude ranches in Colorado, Wyoming and Montana. There, we learned about the culture of the American West.

To survive in the time of the pioneers in the often-rugged climate and geography of the West, American settlers had their own version of Ke ‘Ånä Wa’å, sometimes referred to as The Cowboy’s Code, which was defined by Zane Grey in his 1934 novel, “The Code of the West.”

A friend of mine in Denver named Rich Todd, whom I admire greatly, has adapted these guidelines as his personal guide to life. It is a timeless collection of wisdom, which I find inspirational as I start each morning in the crazy world we live in today.

So, in closing, I’d like to share with you that personal code. I hope that, like Ke ‘Ånä Wa’å, it will inspire you, as it does me, when Rich Todd says:

- Know what’s right. Do what’s right.
- Go “all in” and over-deliver.
- Practice kindness and empathy.
- I am only a steward. What I have is not mine.
- My children are a reflection of me.
- Remember my roots.
- Hard work brings success. Happiness is a choice.
- Surround myself with great people.
- The more I give, the more I receive.
- Get up to bat. Take great swings.

Aloha. God bless you all! ♪