

HY824

Technology Edition
Entering The
Everything-Data Decade



The Hotel Yearbook
Foresight and innovation in the global hotel industry



Operations

Personal Vs Personalization: Why Your Future Starts With Learning From Concierges



Tristan Gadsby
Co-Founder and CEO, Alliants

Tristan Gadsby of Alliants argues that the future of hospitality hinges on empowering staff with the right tools and knowledge rather than focusing solely on guest-facing technologies. Drawing parallels to sailing, he emphasizes that equipping the crew (staff) is more critical than just having the best equipment. He points out the high turnover rates in the hospitality industry and the resulting impact on service quality. Gadsby advocates learning from concierges, particularly Les Clefs d'Or members, who excel in making personal connections with guests, thereby driving higher revenues. By investing in staff training, integrating user-friendly technology, and unifying guest data, hotels can enhance service levels and profitability. He concludes that balancing contactless and high-touch engagement, supported by generative AI, will create a seamless guest experience and empower staff to deliver exceptional service.

From our office at Universal Marina on the English coast at Southampton, I've long been inspired by the sport of sailing. As a sailing skipper, I have learned that having the right equipment and knowing the environment around me are among

the most critical roles at the helm. What is the tide like? How strong is the wind? Are my sails even capable of getting me where I want to go? Yet, something is more critical than my tools or knowledge at the helm. It is ensuring my crew has the tools and knowledge they need to do their jobs. What's the point of having a beautiful boat if you don't have a knowledgeable and well-equipped crew to get you to a safe harbor?

If we take that page from the skipper's manual to ensure the crew has what they need, our industry must reconcile with an unfortunate truth. Too many guest-facing teams lack the tools, knowledge, and support to deal with their environment and elevate service levels that ultimately improve profitability.

Recent data reaffirms this truth. According to the US Bureau of Labor, approximately 1.7 million employees were hired in the accommodations and food industry during February and March 2024, while 1.6 million people left the industry at that same time. At a recent AHLA on-the-road show, their data showed that approximately 70% of front desk employees quit their jobs within the first 90 days of employment. Similar data is echoing across the rest of the world.

This data is concerning because

the cornerstone of exceptional service delivery requires long-term experience, all while our customers are questioning the value of the service they spend their money on. This problem had me asking one question more than any other.

Which should come first: Investing in the hotel, its offerings, and technology that "personalizes" directly to guests... or investing in your teams and their tools to make the act of service so personal the offerings are more memorable?

I found myself circling one group of people the more I tried to find an answer that applies to all hotels no matter their classification: the concierges of the world, specifically Les Clefs d'Or members. My team and I were recently proud to partner with the global concierge organization at their annual Congress in Bali, Indonesia, where we explored this very issue together. The answer we collectively found to the question can be summed up in a quote by Richard Branson:

"Clients do not come first. Employees come first. If you take care of your employees, they will take care of the clients."

So if hoteliers follow this advice, then what's the return? Together with Les Clefs d'Or, we discovered that hotels with Les Clefs d'Or concierges generate an average of 40% or higher ancillary revenues than those without them. Why? Because concierges take service so personally, they make the art of service an experience worth returning to. They know personalization has become cut and paste. They know personal connections are unique and lasting. They know their boat and environment better than the competent skippers who empowered and equipped them.

During our time together at their international congress, we focused on three areas for the future with this answer in mind that will help all staff, whether you have a concierge

desk or not: How can we invest in and spread the concierge mindset across the industry, how do we balance contactless and high-touch engagement technologies, and how can generative AI turn any guest-facing team into superheroes that can automate the ordinary so to deliver the extraordinary.

In this hotel yearbook, we pragmatically break down the how-tos for each of these areas so you're correctly set up for success and can lead your property toward higher profitability and a safer harbor.

The future of profitability is rooted in the traditions of the concierge

According to our partners at Amadeus, their Traveler Tribes research shows that the #1 traveler of every generation is to make memories. And even better, they will spend a premium on those memories. Global ADR and occupancy have slowed while experiential spending is rising, so we must now look beyond the room as the main profit driver. This trend is why we believe our future as an industry is rooted in the traditions of the concierge and expanding their service mindset across all teams. Concierges are, after all, the masters of curating lifelong memories and making service exceptional.

For example, when a concierge focuses on making a personal and honest connection with a guest, that connection creates a lifetime of profit and loyalty. Therefore, a talented concierge's guests will follow them no matter what hotel they work at. No reward points or direct "personalization" is needed. They make service that personal.

During the Les Clefs d'Or Congress, the art of blending technology with the tradition of service was at the heart of everything. In our education day, we outlined a few best practices when looking toward the future of where to first invest in your teams:

Don't cut training. Invest in soft skill development like empathy and active listening. Most of your staff are new to the industry and need the upskilling.

Invest in technology that can support your teams as if it were consumer-grade in usability. Given the above point, the tech should be simple enough to self-learn.

Do away with fragmented guest data in your CRM or PMS that is accessible only to a select few in your operation. When investing in future tech, look at the solutions that help your teams understand the guest's context and needs through connected data. Software that unifies your guest profile data across all siloed systems into a single source of truth is essential.

Primarily relying on tactics like automated pre-stay room upsell emails doesn't cut it anymore.

Content is king, so your tech needs to enable your operators to curate content about your offerings on the proper channels and at the right time from pre-stay through departure. Digital itineraries and content management tools should also be commonplace here.

Lastly, remember what Richard Branson said. Your staff are your greatest profitability asset and should always come first. Listen to them and their needs and act accordingly so they can elevate service levels to new heights.

Focusing too much on "personalizing" your assets over your people can ultimately make your guests feel they've been reduced to a membership number. So, instead, give your guest-facing teams and concierges what they need to act with a service mindset alongside the tools to remain consistent. Afterward, you can easily future-proof the growing guest demand for a balance between contactless and high-touch



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Historically, major brands worldwide adopted contactless solutions, digital messaging, and other technologies without fully understanding the customer. Digital messaging without unified profiles to give context to customer desires massively eroded the value of messaging to make service personal. Implementing contactless check-in kiosks instead of first looking into digital check-ins via mobile devices did nothing to help check-in queues. Most importantly, stitching together the tech through individual systems meant haphazard integrations that needed more integrity.

The way towards the future here is a simple path forward. This time, “simple” can be achieved with tech that balances everything for you underneath a single platform. By having one holistic system that can offer digital engagement and contactless tech flowing through unified profile management, you immediately have a seamless experience that works. For example, the technology already exists to web provision digital room keys onto someone’s smart watch or phone, all while staff text the guest along the way without ever swiveling between

applications.

A seamless digital hotel experience like this is expected to work as efficiently as tech in a guest’s home. Through an integrated singular platform of contactless and digital engagement at your hotel, you give your guests the flexibility to choose in real-time whether or not they want to have white glove service or not engage with a single soul from arrival through departure.

The short truth about the future of using generative AI

Without belaboring a topic that has already saturated our entire industry with cautionary tales and wishful thinking, we have learned one blatant fact about the future of generative AI. It has nowhere near the capability to replace staff and directly engage with guests beyond simple low-hanging questions.

However, it can effectively collate data and spit out insights and suggestions to guest-facing teams as their sidekick, turning them into superhumans of personal connection and service. Use generative AI tech to turn the commonly used buzz phrase

“work smarter and not harder” into an actual reality for your teams—hard stop.

In closing, when leaders act as competent skippers and empower their teams to take care of their guests with the right tools and knowledge, your service becomes more personal while you watch your profits roll in as naturally as a tide. As the old sailing adage goes, you cannot direct the wind, but you can trim your sail so as to propel your vessel as you please, no matter which way the wind blows. applications.

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Hospitality Tech
Industry Calendar
2024-2025

HITEC® 2024 Charlotte
Jun 24 – 27, 2024
Charlotte Convention Center

**HSMAI Americas - Commercial
Strategy Conference**
Nov 25 – 26, 2024
Charlotte Convention Center

**HITEC Technology Investment
Conference**
Jun 27 – 28, 2024
Charlotte Convention Center

2024 Hotel Data Conference
Aug 7 – 9, 2024
Grand Hyatt Nashville

Skift Global Forum 2024
Sep 17 – 19, 2024
The Glasshouse, New York

HEDNA Asia Distribution Conference
Sep 23 – 24, 2024
Siam Kempinski Hotel Bangkok

FHS World 2024
Sep 30 – Oct 2, 2024
Madinat Jumeirah Conference &
Events Centre

**HSMAI Asia - Digital Marketing
Conference**
Oct 10, 2024
Phuket

Hospitality Tech Expo
Oct 15 - Oct 16, 2024
Excel London

ITB Asia
Oct 23 – 25, 2024
Marina Bay Sands Singapore

The Hospitality Show 2024
Oct 28 – 30, 2024
San Antonio, TX, United States

Cvent CONNECT 2024 - Europe
Nov 5 – 7, 2024
Hilton London Metropole

**International Hotel Technology Forum
Asia 2024 (AHTF)**
Nov 12 – 13, 2024
Pan Pacific Singapore

Hotel Technology Forum (HTF) 2024
Nov 18 – 20, 2024
Rancho Palos Verdes

The Phocuswright Conference
Nov 19 – 21, 2024
JW Marriott Phoenix Desert Ridge
Resort & Spa

**HSMAI Middle East - Commercial
Strategy Conference**
Nov 26 – 27, 2024
Conrad Dubai

**HSMAI Europe Revenue Optimization
Conference**
16 Jan, 2025
London

**HEDNA Global Distribution
Conference: North America**
Jan 27 – 29, 2025
Catamaran Resort Hotel and Spa

ITB Berlin 2025
Mar 4 – 6, 2025
Messe Berlin

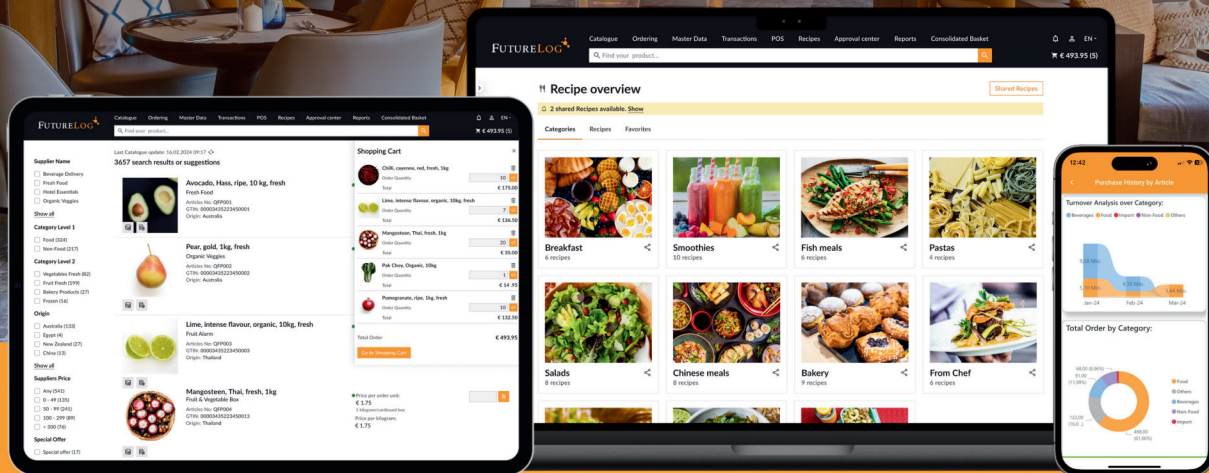
**International Hotel Technology Forum
2025 (IHTF)**
Mar 18 – 20, 2025
Lisbon

HITEC DUBAI
May 27 - May 29, 2025
Dubai World Trade Center

HITEC® 2025 Indiana
Jun 16 – 19, 2025
Indiana Convention Center

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- Denis Karalić, ACHAT Hotels

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