



# “FIND YOUR CULTURAL FIT”

## *Adam Rowledge FIH SJS is a rising star in UK hotel management with a strong will to take the industry forward*

Recent research has shown business leaders tend to peak at the age of 39. The study by Leeds Beckett University and Pareto Law examined 100 influential business figures from Bill Gates and Mark Zuckerberg to Oprah Winfrey and Margaret Thatcher. Rising at 5.30am, getting six hours' sleep and starting a full-time job at 22 are some of the things influential business leaders have in common. Judged against this research, Adam Rowledge is clearly a high-achiever. A daily commute into London from Sussex means he is up at 4.20am. In any case, with two children under the age of five, getting more than six hours' sleep is all but impossible. Still only 32-years-old, he won the Young Manager Award at the British Travel & Hospitality Hall of Fame last year. The organisers said: "Adam is notably a natural leader and an inspiration to young people coming into the industry." With an impressive history of hotel experience behind him, there is plenty to look forward to. We caught up with Adam to hear his views on the hotel industry today.

### HOW ARE YOU COPING WITH THE 'CAULDRON OF COSTS' AFFECTING UK HOTEL OPERATIONS AT THE MOMENT?

We've been incredibly successful at growing our revenue so whilst the costs have been increasing, we've still been really profitable. Benjamin Franklin said there are only two things in life that are certain: death and taxes. Business rates are a tax, plain and simple. You've just got to deal with them but clearly it's having a significant effect on many smaller operators and whilst other industries may be able to absorb them easier, we already have such a high cost base and we really need more relief in the form of a tourism VAT cut to help compensate.

The increase in the National Living Wage is important because we need to pay people an appropriate rate of pay. There are so many companies paying as little as they think they can get away with, when what we should be doing, especially if we are to change the perception of the industry, is paying as much as we dare afford.

You have these companies like Aqua Italia,

the restaurant group exposed in January for using tips to top up the minimum wage. So many moan about how difficult it is to bring people into the industry or to keep them. If you are using tips to top up the minimum wage, what do you expect? It's counter-intuitive.

We are very supportive of pensions auto-enrolment. It's important to help people to plan for their future and we offer enhanced employer contributions. In lots of other industries that we're competing for talent with, there are already established quality workplace pensions so if we need to attract people to come into hotels or restaurants, of course we should invest in that.

The apprenticeship levy is a cost that has affected many companies. Due to the size of our business we do not have to pay the levy but still invest heavily in apprenticeships as I believe strongly that this way of learning is what we need to develop our team and up-skill them throughout their careers. Umbrella Training are our partner and they really help us to find talented candidates, so it's a great investment.

### ARE YOU LOOKING AT EFFICIENCY SAVINGS?

We've been re-negotiating contracts with our suppliers; carrying out supplier reviews;



## ADAM ROWLEDGE FIH SJS

**RELATIONSHIP**  
Married with two young children

**FILM**  
Good Will Hunting

**MUSIC**  
House and electro

**HOLIDAY**  
Hong Kong

**BOOKS**  
Peter James, author of Sussex-based crime thrillers

looking at the aggregation of marginal gain for every single thing. For example, if we can save a few pence on every bottle of shampoo, what does that give you over a year? Or one pence on every pillowcase you launder. We're undertaking a major project at the moment, looking into our methodologies and making our processes more efficient. Where are we wasting time or resources? Are we missing opportunities because the process is too complicated? Where is our storage of such and such commodity located? Should it be in one place or in ten places in smaller amounts?

We're doing all the work ourselves, but experts have come in to provide Six Sigma training (see box p28). The management team have completed the green belt training and our 46 staff members have taken yellow belt training. Serena [Georgian House owner] and I started working on it in May last year. It's an ongoing thing.

### WHAT IS YOUR APPROACH TO DISTRIBUTION?

There's a lot going on. Expedia have just started taking meetings bookings. There's a new OTA called Hotel Bonanza that's only charging 8% commission; we're in the process of signing up with them just like many other

hoteliers; it will be interesting to see if they can get consumer traction.

We work closely with our OTA partners. We use them more when we need them and less when we don't, just the same as with any other distribution channel. It's different strategies for different businesses, but I think people sometimes forget that you still have to do all the other stuff, such as pay-per-click and other digital marketing.

### HOW IS RECRUITMENT AT THE MOMENT?

There is no set way of doing it. You have got to look at what works well for different roles. Like sales distribution, you've got to look at all of the right channels, whether it's ex-armed forces or women returners. We still advertise on caterer.com and through colleges and universities. We just recruited someone from the Edge Hotel School into a sales and marketing role; we worked with the School on a consultancy project last year. She graduated in September and started work with us in January. You have to play the long game on some of these things.

It's really important to work with organisations such as Springboard and the Institute. We are pro-active. We actually head-hunt some people through social media.

People talk about head-hunting for senior roles but actually why not for a receptionist role or F&B supervisor?

You've got to be creative. A few years ago, you put a job advert up and you'd get, say, 100 applicants. Today you might get half that number. People are less responsive when you contact them. You invite them for an interview and some don't turn up. You have to sell your business to them. It's much more of a two-way process these days but the onus is on the employer during the initial contact.

We talk a lot about the challenges of recruitment in our industry but retention is just as big an issue. If we all focused on working as hard to retain people (by developing them, investing in them, engaging with them and creating a great working environment, as well as paying them a fair wage with attractive benefits) as we did on recruiting them, we'd be a lot better off as an industry.

### WHAT ARE THE KEY MOTIVATIONS AND REWARDS OF BEING A GENERAL MANAGER?

I am very fortunate at Georgian House. We have an amazing culture to make people really feel welcome and to look after them, whether that's guests or the team. Yes, we

## Six Sigma

Six Sigma is a set of techniques and tools for process improvement currently being used by Adam Rowledge and his team at Georgian House. Six Sigma originated in the manufacturing industry and was embraced by companies such as Motorola and General Electric, but has been adopted by Starwood Hotels and Resorts since 2001. It seeks to improve the quality of the output of a process by identifying and removing the causes of defects and minimising variability.

Each Six Sigma project carried out within an organisation follows a defined sequence of steps and has specific value targets, for example: reduce process cycle time, reduce pollution, reduce costs, increase customer satisfaction, and increase profits. All team members are involved in the Six Sigma process and they are awarded different coloured belts, in a ranking system similar to martial arts like judo.



## Adam Rowledge FIH SJS at a glance

Adam Rowledge FIH SJS is the general manager of Georgian House, the 60-bedroom family-run boutique hotel in Pimlico, London. The 32-year-old won the Young Manager Award at the British Travel & Hospitality Hall of Fame last year. The organisers said: "Adam is notably a natural leader and an inspiration to young people coming into the industry."

The award was given for achieving 17% revenue growth at Georgian House, receiving five-star status from Visit England, and increasing the Quality in Tourism score from 66% to 80%. The hotel also moved from number 68 to number 11 on TripAdvisor for Guest Accommodation in London.

Rowledge was awarded a Master Inholder scholarship on the Cranfield Talent Development Programme in 2015 and an Acorn Award in 2012. He started his career at Hotel Du Vin in Henley-on-Thames in 2007 then took the position of front of house manager at Hand Picked Hotels' Nutfield Priory Hotel and Spa before moving to South Lodge Hotel in March 2011. He also spent a year as rooms division manager at The Hempel London.

Adam sits on the Supervisory Board of the Institute of Hospitality and is the chair of the Sussex Branch. He is ambassador for the Institute's Mentor Me scheme.

have to be successful commercially, but we really have to focus on our people, invest in them, give them training, give them great experiences and help them be successful. It's nice to get a pat on the back or a bonus for turning a profit, but it's not as emotionally rewarding as helping and investing in someone's life. Our reception manager Kia Hellens won Front of House Manager of the Year 2017 with Boutique Hotelier. We've done some fantastic things at Georgian House; getting our Visit England five stars; the Springboard Award; becoming a Fellow of the Institute; joining the Supervisory Board; seeing people achieve, people who I have mentored. That is a key satisfaction of the job. I've worked at some great hotels, as you know. I am not saying that they pale into insignificance, but Georgian House is by far the role where I have felt most motivated. Finding

that cultural fit was the key for me.

### WHY IS THE INSTITUTE OF HOSPITALITY IMPORTANT TO YOU?

I joined in 2010 because Michael McKay FIH, the general manager I worked for at Nutfield Priory was a Fellow and I really respected him. He made me want to go and find out more. It's given me a lot of development opportunities just within the Institute itself, by joining the Supervisory Board, for example. We are doing the best we can to make the Institute the best it can be. As the chair of the Sussex Branch I am reaching out to members and potential members in the area and helping with their development and bringing people into the industry through the schools and colleges in Sussex.

*Interview by Ben Walker AIH*