

POWER PROFILE



Photo: Lau Wai

Leading by example

David Udell, Asia-Pacific group president for Hyatt Hotels, is not afraid to dig in and offer his broad experience to guide the team, writes **Chris Davis**

HIGH-FLYERS

From an early age growing up in Stamford, Connecticut, where his mother effortlessly turned every gathering with friends and neighbours into a special event, there was little doubt in David Udell's mind that his future career would be in the hospitality industry.

Having made good on his childhood ambition, Udell has spent more than three decades in Asia where he has held a number of senior positions with Hyatt Hotels Corporation, including his current role as Asia-Pacific group president. He is responsible for 26,000 employees, working in 61 managed, franchised and owned properties in 12 countries.

"I often feel there are similarities between the hotel industry and show business, because every day requires your best performance," says Udell, who is based in Hong Kong. "This makes the industry demanding, yet extremely rewarding."

Udell can still clearly recall the excitement he felt as a 12-year-old on a family holiday when told by his mother there were specialist schools where he could study hotel management. "I was one of the few children who could go on a beach vacation and return home without a suntan because I spent the entire holiday wandering around the hotel talking to waiters and asking questions about how the business operated," he says.

He graduated from the Cornell School

of Hotel Administration, New York – considered by many, he says, to be "the Harvard of hospitality programmes" – and began his career as a corporate management trainee at Hyatt Regency Singapore in 1982.

Moving on 34 years and having held senior management positions at Hyatt properties in Bangkok, Seoul, Hong Kong – where he moved to in 1996 as general manager of the Grand Hyatt Hong Kong – and Tokyo, he says he has become an attentive student of Asian cultures, but still has plenty to learn.

"My leadership style draws on the analyses of challenges and opportunities viewed through the lens of my personal cultural references and experiences."

A good example, he says, would be explaining to a hotel partner in Japan the step-by-step processes needed to take a hotel business from A to B, compared to the broad strategy outline preferred in Hong Kong. "There have been a few jolts, but I would say my cultural experiences have been rewarding," he says.

As the hotel industry in Asia moves through a phase of technology and staffing transformations, foremost on Udell's strategy list is ensuring that guests' needs, expectations and comfort remain central amid rising operating costs. Other key challenges include raising brand awareness in an increasingly competitive market, and attracting and retaining a talent pipeline of the "best and brightest".

While an admirer of the five-star tradition and its management style, Udell

notes that today's operating environment requires the hotel industry to be open to new ideas. For instance, he doesn't subscribe to the "martyr" style of management where a manager is reluctant to delegate responsibilities. He also believes in assisting individuals to realise their career aspirations in a work environment where they are able to flourish, and in improving work-life balance in the sector.

"This is tough because a hotel is a 24/7 operation," he says. "But we are finding ways, such as offering split shifts."

Whether it be in existing properties or the string of mainland Hyatt hotels scheduled for opening in Changchun, Chengdu, Shenzhen and Luoyang, Udell says a key aim is to ensure there are clear com-

munication channels in place so that everyone works together. Particularly vital is that he set an example.

"You have to be authentic and practice what you preach to make sure that everyone, regardless of their role within the organisation, is able to appreciate the importance of what they are doing," he says. He also uses the analogy of a dragon boat team rowing together, emphasising how each participant – including him – contributes their skills and knowledge to achieve collective benefits for the whole team. "I see myself in the boat rowing in time with the others."

For the full story visit www.cpjobs.com/hk/highfliers

HONING HOSPITALITY

David Udell lays out what it takes to be a leader in the hotel business.

- Stay humble** "As a leader you shouldn't be shy about asking for help. Rather than seeing it as a weakness, those being asked will feel their contribution is valued."
- Laugh at yourself** "Don't hold back on self-deprecating humour – it shows you are an approachable person that others can warm to and connect with."
- Lend an ear** "Good communication and the ability to listen help you build stronger relationships, network more efficiently, and obtain feedback that helps you be more successful."
- Take an interest** "Anyone that wants to make a career in the hotel industry needs to be curious – about the industry and the latest trends, about learning something new or different, and about people in a warm and respectful way."
- Show determination** "The hotel industry is a 24-hour-a-day, seven-days-a-week, 365-days-a-year operation, so there is no getting away from the fact you have to work at different times. The only way to do this is by having the commitment and passion for the industry to succeed."
- Be social** "The hotel industry is a people business so genuine interpersonal skills are an absolute must. You need to be able to engage with a diversity of colleagues and guests from all walks of life in an engaging and empathetic way."

NEWS BITS



Top Canada CEOs earn more in half a day than average worker will all year

OTTAWA – Minutes before lunchtime on the first working day of the year, Canada's 100 highest-paid CEOs had already earned more than the average Canadian will earn in all of 2017, according to a new report.

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives says CEO salaries have soared to record levels in recent years, with the top 100 CEOs earning an average of C\$9.5 million (HK\$55.5 million) in 2015.

OECD data regularly suggests that Canada, along with the US and Britain, ranks among the countries with the most extreme gap between CEOs and the average worker. *The Guardian*



Gender pay gap among twenty-somethings shrinks to 5 per cent in UK

LONDON – UK women in their 20s have seen the pay gap halve to 5 per cent, but just as in previous generations, the discrepancy compared with men's earnings widens when they hit 30 and start a family.

The report by the Resolution Foundation compared historical hourly pay of different generations of men and women over the course of their careers.

It found that, for people in their 20s, the gap was 16 per cent among those born between 1946 and 1965, 9 per cent among people born between 1966 and 1980, and 5 per cent among those born between 1981 and 2000. *The Guardian*



Macy's to close stores and cut jobs as weak sales hit hard

CINCINNATI – Macy's says it is cutting more than 10,000 jobs and plans 68 store closures after a disappointing holiday shopping season. The department store chain also lowered its full-year earnings forecast.

The retailer said Wednesday that sales at its established stores fell 2.1 per cent in November and December compared to the same period last year. Macy's pointed to changing consumer behaviour and said its performance reflects the challenges that are facing much of the retail industry.

Macy's said the job cuts represent about 7 per cent of its workforce. *AP*

Photos: Thinkstock, Reuters, Bloomberg

FEATURE

French workers win 'right to disconnect'

That 10pm email from your boss? It's your right to ignore it. And that Saturday ping from a colleague with "just one quick question?" A response on Monday should suffice.

If you're in France, that is.

French workers rang in the new year with a "right to disconnect" law that grants employees in the country the legal right to ignore work emails outside of typical working hours, according to *The Guardian* newspaper.

The new employment law requires French companies with more than 50 employees to begin drawing up policies with their workers about limiting work-related technology usage outside the office, the newspaper reported.

The motivation behind the legislation is to stem work-related stress that increasingly leaks into people's personal time – and hopefully prevent employee burnout, French officials said.

"Employees physically leave the office, but they do not leave their work. They remain attached by a kind of electronic leash, like a dog," Benoit Hamon, Socialist member of parliament and former French education minister, told the BBC in May 2016. "The texts, the messages, the emails – they build up and colonise the life of the individual to the point where he or she eventually breaks down."

France has had a 35-hour workweek since 2000, but the policy came under scrutiny recently given France's near-record-high unemployment rate.

The "right to disconnect" provision was packaged with new and controversial reforms introduced last year that were

designed to relax some of the country's strict labour regulations. The amendment regarding ignoring work emails was included by French Labour Minister Myriam El Khomri, who reportedly was inspired by similar policies at Orange, a French telecommunications company.

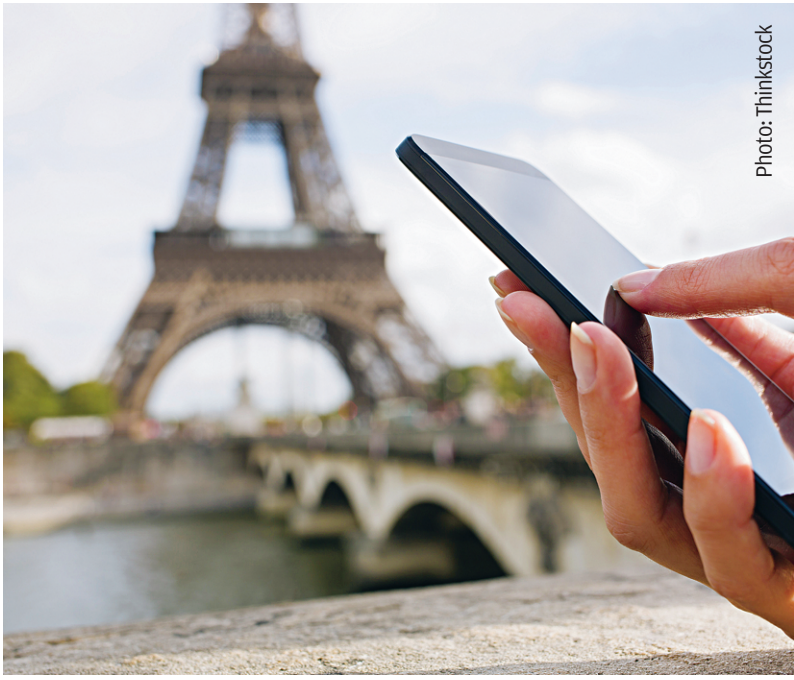


Photo: Thinkstock

"There are risks that need to be anticipated, and one of the biggest risks is the balance of a private life and professional life behind this permanent connectivity," Orange director general Bruno Mettling told Europe 1 radio early last year. "Professionals who find the right balance between private and work life perform far better in their job than those who come into work shattered."

The legislation passed the French lower parliamentary house last May. It was not the first time such a bill had been proposed, as *The Washington Post's* Karen Turner reported. Similar legislation banning work-related emails after work hours had been introduced in France and Germany before but never made it to law.

The move received criticism from some who worried that French workers would get left behind by competitors in other countries where such restrictions did not exist. Still others objected to government interference.

"In France, we are champions at passing laws, but they are not always very helpful when what we need is greater flexibility in the workplace," Olivier Mathiot, chief executive of PriceMinister, a Paris-based online marketplace, told BBC News last May.

Mathiot told the news site its company had implemented "no-email Fridays" and

felt the problem should have been handled through education, not legislation.

However, supporters of the bill said it would be an important move toward minimising work-related stress among French employees, which has been linked to a wave of suicides at some companies.

"At home the workspace can be the kitchen or the bathroom or the bedroom," Linh Le, a partner at Elia management consultants in Paris, told BBC News. "You're at home but you're not at home, and that poses a real threat to relationships."

French companies are expected to comply with the law on a voluntary basis, and there are no penalties yet for violating it, BBC reported.

In the spring, news of France's "right to disconnect" legislation prompted some discussion about whether anything like it could be viable in the United States.

Hosts on the *Today* show didn't think so when they discussed the incoming French law on a segment in May – while simultaneously riding stationary bikes in support of "Red Nose Day", an unrelated campaign.

"That [law] would never work here," host Matt Lauer told his colleagues, as they all sweated and pedalled through the entirety of their live television broadcast. *The Washington Post*

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Printed and published by South China Morning Post Publishers Limited.
Morning Post Centre, 22 Dai Fat Street,
Tai Po Industrial Estate, Tai Po,
New Territories, Hong Kong. Tel: 2680 8888

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