

Speaking a Customer's Language

Surprise and Delight Your Clients

By Tim Cotroneo

One of the first things a salesperson learns is to speak to the needs of your client base. For Pat Donovan, this means speaking English, Spanish, Dutch and Papiamento.

Papiamento is the native language on the Caribbean island of Aruba. In 1995, Donovan arrived as the new Director of Sales at the Radisson Aruba. Donovan's original intention was to spend two years working on the island before heading back to the states. "Back then, if someone were to tell me that I'd still be in Aruba 17 years later, I would have said they were crazy," Donovan said.



St. Paul, MN-native Pat Donovan has called Aruba home since 1995.

Donovan quickly acclimated to an island lifestyle where professional sales and socks-optional attire are one and the same. Today, Donovan works as the Director of Sales at the 481-room Westin Resort Aruba. Donovan fits seamlessly into a business

environment where his co-workers hail from 20 different countries. Donovan finds this melting pot of talent to be a huge asset, since the Westin's client base checks in from all over the world.

Taking the Call – Caribbean Immersion

The professional stepping-stone to Donovan's Aruba path began in 1992 with a sales position at the Radisson hotel in Orlando, FL. South Florida is where Donovan first tapped into the breadth of knowledge gained from two Spanish classes at St. Thomas University in his hometown of St. Paul, MN. "Our professor was from Chile. I guess I learned more Spanish than I realized. Whenever we would receive a call at the hotel from someone speaking Spanish, they would hand me the phone," Donovan recalled.



As Sales and Marketing Director at the Aruba Westin, Donovan's ability to speak four languages comes in very handy.

When Donovan interviewed for the position in Aruba, he learned that his predecessor lasted only 8-months on the job. The Radisson put Donovan through a cultural

immersion process of tests and surveys to ensure that he wouldn't bolt back to the states after the initial honeymoon period of living on an island in the Caribbean.

"I was so busy on the job that I never felt the normal homesickness. In addition to developing a network of friends here in the hotel industry, not a day goes by that I don't meet people from the United States. After two years working at the Radisson, I signed on for an extended contract," Donovan said.



Each of the Westin Aruba's 481-rooms have an ocean view.

Sharing What He's Learned

A career in international hotel sales has been good to Donovan. After moving just down the beach to his current position with the Westin, Donovan planted deeper Aruban roots when he purchased a home in 2004. Comfortable in his surroundings and confident from his years in the hotel industry, Donovan is open to sharing what he's learned.

"Hotel sales are all about anticipating your guest's needs. We get to know a customer's likes and dislikes. This can range from knowing his or her favorite beverage, to acknowledging if someone suffers from allergies, to accommodating a guest if they prefer a higher or lower floor. The good thing about working at the Westin is, regardless of the floor, everyone has an ocean view," Donovan said with a smile.

The Aruba Triangle

For Donovan, hotel success happens when you satisfy the business triangle composed of your corporate owners, co-workers, and hotel guests. Donovan revealed a fairly

simple formula for success in the hotel business. “Happy employees make for happy guests. When customers are happy, they keep coming back. When your rooms are full, your owners reinvest in your property,” Donovan said. Aruba has the highest vacationer return rate of any island in the Caribbean.

Donovan believes that “surprise” and “delight” are two words that translate into returning business and great testimonials. “We strive to find what is important to a guest during his or her vacation or business stay. I recently met with a returning guest who was pleasantly surprised we remembered they were from Massachusetts and that we placed them on a desired higher floor facing the pool. The guest also was impressed we knew they liked Chardonnay wine,” Donovan said.

Surprise and delight are words that work well in any language, whether it’s English, Spanish, Dutch, or Papiamentu. The words are a vital element in Pat Donovan’s business philosophy, whether he’s meeting with a guest in person or if someone hands him the phone. “Going back to when I was asked to speak Spanish on customer calls at the hotel in Orlando, I believe when you’re given a task, you take care of it,” Donovan said.

Aruba’s national slogan is “One Happy Island.” With satisfied employees, hotel guests and business owners, it’s easy to understand why.

www.westin.com/arubaresort

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