

## Transcript of the Chairman's Lecture, regarding the Butler profession, at Harvard University (November 2006)

**MC:** Professor Ferry is the world's foremost authority on butlering. He founded the International Guild of Traditional Butlers some 15 years ago and is now the chairman of the International Institute of Modern Butlers. He's written three books on the profession, the British Butler's Bible; Butlers & Household Managers, 21st Century Professionals; and Hotel Butlers, The Great Service Differentiators. He's written for many industry journals, such as Hotel Business Magazine and Hotel Executive. I saw one of his articles in Hotelonline called "Besting the Guest from Hell" and asked him to come here to speak to us about that. So, Professor Steven Ferry!

(Applause)

I am honored to be here, thank you for expressing an interest in the profession. I didn't actually prepare much to talk about, because I wasn't sure what we were going to address. I am happy to talk about Besting the Guest from Hell, but that will only take about 10 minutes!

I was thinking you might want to know about butlers, and also their relationship to the hospitality industry.

Let's deal first with besting the guest from hell. Has anyone worked in the hospitality industry before?

(Show of hands)

Very good—I tend to be of the philosophy that if you view things as fun, they will be fun. Having worked in the hospitality profession, I do find many elements to be fun. But there is one aspect that can be a royal pain, and that is the Guest from Hell. This is the kind of person who says: "I've had better service in a Motel 6" or "Get me the Manager." They strike fear, or perhaps more disappointment, into the hearts of those who are trying simply to do a good job. I don't think one should have to put up with influences like this and so I wrote an article about The Guest From Hell, and I wrote a follow-up one as well, saying how the problem could be handled.

I took as my cue for the solution a butler's administrative tool of old, called a Black Book. This highly confidential database contained information about employers. One never shares information with anyone about one's boss, but when it comes to being a butler, one has a right to know with whom one may be working in the future. So if one were applying for or been asked to take on a position, the best thing to do was to consult the Black Book and find out if that boss had any peccadilloes or irrationalities that might make one's life less than pleasant.

On the same basis, some hotels do have a type of Black Book in which they blacklist some guests. The drawback is that they do not share this information with other hotel chains. I believe that a third-party organization could or should be set up to make that information available for all member hotels and chains. The way I define a Guest from Hell is in part by defining what he or she is not. An individual who occasionally has a

specific grievance that can be resolved equitably is not a guest from hell.

A Guest from Hell makes a career out of lodging complaints and has an ulterior motive: to have all or part of their stay comp'd. I first came across this in a big way when I was helping open up a new hotel with butler service. A gentleman and his entourage occupied the presidential suite and two adjoining suites for a week. Openings are very important to management and owners, they'd like to enjoy some success after what is generally a significant outlay of funds and sweat equity by hundreds of people in time frames often measured in the years. So I became alert when some little red flags began to flap briskly in the breeze being shot by various employees. One of them was an account of this gentleman asking the butlers to provide breakfast at 8:00 am and provided them with a certain list of items that he and his family wanted to eat. Then he called Room Service and asked for a 7:30 am breakfast with a different list of items. When Room Service arrived, he complained they were early and had brought the wrong items; when the Butlers arrived, he said they were late and had brought the wrong items.

This set the butler and room service departments in a dither and they didn't actually spot the illogic behind this. The gentleman kept behaving in this manner and predictably, when the time came to check out, he reeled off a long list of "grievances" and demanded his whole stay be comp'd—a considerable amount. The General Manager wasn't prepared and so was obliged to comp the stay, or at least a good part of it. Whereas if the procedure that I recommend were instituted, at the first sign of trouble, the hotel would have contacted the data distribution agency to determine if this person were blacklisted and receive the specifics: time, place, form and event. What exactly happened, where, when, what did the person do, and what were the consequences?

If he'd done that, he would have been prepared when the guest arrived, because he would have had a printout of these specific transgressions. So when the guest said, "I don't want to have to pay for any of my stay," the manager could have said, "I am sorry Sir, but that is not acceptable, you can sue us if you like. Here is our statement of your activities while you were in our hotel, and the inconsistencies."

That original article I wrote had the most response of any article I have ever written. Hotels obviously focus on the bottom line and this does impact the bottom line.

So what does this have to do with butlers? Well, the whole idea of a butler is that he resolves things or handles situations and communications very smoothly, no matter how difficult they may be. And that is one of the things I spend at least a day training butlers on, whether in a private setting or in a hotel: how to resolve tricky situations. What do you do, for example, if a husband and wife are arguing and then they want to pull YOU in on it? And the wrong thing to do—you have to be subtle about not taking sides. If you try to cover up for the gentleman because he was busy with another lady, and the wife is enquiring about this, what do you do? You can't cover up or say, "Well, I don't know," when you DO know. And you can't say: "Well, I am sorry but he was..." because that would get in you in bad with either one or the other. So you really have to remain neutral.

Q.: So what do you say?

"I'm sorry, Madam, but I really couldn't comment on that." And if she persists, as she generally will, you say, "I must respect your privacy in the same way that I respect your

husband's; if you were in a similar situation, I would also give the same reply." And then you have to add, "All of which is not to say that I am covering up for anything or not covering up for anything; it just means that I absolutely cannot comment." Or a simpler way of saying it is, "I am sorry Sir, but hotel policy requires that I do not make any comments in situations such as this."

If you try to cover up, you'll be caught in the lie eventually, and you'll lose the trust of either one or the other.

So, that is one example, but you are often confronted with tricky situations and you have to handle them smoothly so as to put people at their ease. Another example would be if a guest were caught stealing something, slipping something in their pocket. You can't angrily demand, "Yo, what are you doing?"

(Laughter)

Because that guest is still a guest and you want to put them at their ease. So you find some way of mealy-mouthing your way around it, so that it doesn't actually upset the guest but at the same time, the hotel doesn't lose its property. The most egregious example I heard—I was training just now in Turkey...by the way, I do want you to shout back at me and ask questions!

Q.: Yes, well how do you deal with situations like this?

When they're stealing? Well, one way is to say, "It's very kind of you to offer to get that cleaned...or serviced..." (whatever the item is), "but we're actually having someone clean/service that tomorrow, and perhaps I can take it off your hands and not put you to the bother..." something of that order. In other words, with a butler, you do not call a spade a spade.

Q.: How does the butler differ from a concierge?

That is a good question. Well actually, the concierge is strictly 'front of the house' whereas the butler is in the suite, with the guest. He can also do the concierge functions. But in a way, the butler is creating a 'home away from home,' or a 'mansion away from the mansion,' more appropriately. And so he is interacting very much more with the guests being much more in their private lives.

In fact, I've brought a nice quote here that talks of the valet—not the person who parks your car, but who looks after an employer's clothes. And so he is obviously in the bedroom, or in the suite, a lot more than most other people and tends to know more about the boss than anyone else, including their spouse, over the long run. This is a quote from Samuel and Sarah Adams, *The Complete Servant*, from 1825.

"As the valet is much about the master's person, and has the opportunity to hear his off-at-hand opinion on many subjects, he should endeavor to have as short a memory as possible and, above all, keep his master's council."

Another quote, from a sermon in 1926 by Canon Richard in England provides another view of the butler or valet's relationship with his Master.

"The Master loses his heroic qualities in the eyes of his valet who knows him too well."

So there are two ways of looking at it: Yes, you do see the boss, even in a hotel setting, acting and looking in a way that no one else would ever see him. And so he tends to lose his luster a bit. But that doesn't mean that you then lose your good opinion of the person or your wish to serve him.

Q.: So what exactly does a butler do?

Good question. We can take a little trip down memory lane, or perhaps not memory lane but certainly the historical record. The word BUTLER itself comes from the Latin word "buticula" which means a bottle. And this was a word that also applied to the person who was bringing the bottles around. I suppose, when you've had enough "vino" you probably can't tell the difference!

So, the butler started about 2000 years ago but he wasn't the butler then, he was just a waiter, a person who brought the wine around.

About 1,000 years ago roughly, in England, the butler actually looked after the boss' animals. And presumably having some intelligence, the boss finally thought, "Maybe I should have someone looking after me, too." And so the butler graduated to making beer and looking after the wine. The butler made the beer because in those days, the water wasn't sufficiently hygienic to drink, and so everyone, including children, drank beer. It actually wasn't that bad a lifestyle, if you like beer—even if it is warm, English beer.

Then he started to serve at the table and over the following centuries, the duties or requirements for the butler's position increased. He started to become responsible for the male staff and eventually for the whole household or estate. What that meant was, hiring and firing, managing staff—and they were pretty mean when it came to discipline. In other words, perhaps 50% of women in England worked in private service. If they were caught, for instance, in the wrong place after a certain time of day—in the front of the house instead of in the back of the house, they could be let go. Having been fired, there was really only one profession left to them, and that was the oldest one there is. So it was a tough life.

The butler became responsible for managing up to several hundred staff—400 staff roughly would probably be the biggest estate numbers—in running an estate, including the successful execution of large events—dinners and so forth.

During the First World War, many domestic staff left to join the war effort. As a result they saw there was a wider world out there than just the estate in which they were forced to work. And so very few came back to service and the butler began to take on more duties—again we're talking about private households. He did a lot of the work himself. It was a very hands-on position, as well as managing staff.

More recently, the butler has expanded to the point where, at the very high end, the butler administrator as he is called, or the estate manager, it a gentleman or a lady, who looks after up to 30 estates, including airplanes and ships. In other words, it's a senior executive position, which is well remunerated and high-paced. And that would be the top end of what a butler is today. The bottom end would be somebody who cleans the house, cooks the meals, drives the car—very hands-on, no real executive function going on, more a houseman.

In the hospitality industry, the butler started to appear probably in 1989, and it was an experiment by the Bellagio in Las Vegas whereby they took the waiters, in the big suites they had for their high rollers, and delivered food service throughout the meal, rather than just doing room service. They developed it from there a bit and then the Lanesborough in London started running with the ball and so now we find that the Hotel Butler has a certain amount of functions. But it is still very constrained or limited compared with the private service butler.

Has anyone here had any butler service? (A few hands are raised.)... That would make sense...have you experienced it yourself or seen it in action? (Response from someone in the audience, unintelligible, she is French.)...Is that your experience, too? (Response: No...a male person in the audience speaks).

Okay, so he was a traveling butler, went around wherever the boss was.

(More response from the man in the audience. Apparently this butler managed several homes.)

That would be quite a challenge, where you're managing five estates but don't have a butler in each location to run the day-to-day affairs. In other words, ideally you'd have a butler in each location, and then you'd have an Estate Manager who'd run all of them. Otherwise you're running from one estate to the other, trying to get things ready, cleaning up the place you've just left—that's a lot of work!

The reality of what a butler is can vary widely. It can either be somebody who calls himself a butler—and this is especially bad in the hospitality industry. You take a pool attendant and rename him the "Pool Butler" - which does happen, or it did, certainly. It's a Nineties marketing phenomenon but you still see vestiges of it today. You have a baby butler, who looks after babies, a computer or technology butler, etc. There's even a fireplace butler! And all they are doing is siphoning off the prestige of the profession without adding much to the guest experience. Actually, they're detracting from it, because the guest then thinks "Well, if that's butler service, I'm not impressed. And the next time they then see a hotel offering butler service, they will not be particularly persuaded on that account to visit that particular hotel.

What we've done in order to resolve this is create standards for the hospitality industry whereby we rate hotels according to these standards. They are either rated a 0-butler or a 1-butler and it goes up to 5-butlers, pretty much paralleling AAA or Mobil standards but applied to the butler and what kind of services they provide.

And the 0-butler is of course the joke butler, he doesn't qualify at all. It's actually interesting—we're compiling a list of hotels right now that offer butler service, we're up to about 100, and we still find hotels crawling out of the woodwork so to speak, saying, "Oh, we provide butler service, too."

So, it's a bit hard to say how many butlers there are in the world, but certainly how many hotels offer butler service. And of course they run the whole gamut from 0-1 up to 5-butlers.

Did I answer your question about what a butler does? (Yes.)

I could go into more detail on what a hotel butler does, if that's a focus for you? (Yes.)

(Question from the audience...possibly regarding the function of a valet?)

A valet is a person who looks after a gentleman's clothing and helps to dress him. A butler has many other duties, which can include being a valet, too. I don't know if you're familiar with Jeeves and Wooster? Jeeves was a valet, a good old Man Friday, a Jack-of-all-Trades, really, but one of his functions was being a valet.

So, what is a butler? We've talked about some of the duties, but one key thing about a butler is his mindset, and that's one thing that I certainly focus on when I train them.

Who's familiar with the movie, Remains of the Day? (some people are or have read the book.)

(Various unintelligible responses)

I'll let the Queen's butler answer, since she put it to him. She asked, "Is that really what it is like?" after she read the book. And he said, "Yes, Ma'am." (Laughter)

But, we have to bear in mind that that's what it was like about 70 years ago. You didn't have a life, particularly, as a butler or anyone else in private service. And obviously people burn out long before they get to 30, 40, 50 years on the job today.

This is actually a very interesting book and movie, with brilliant acting and casting—I can really recommend that you see it if you haven't already. It was written by a Japanese gentleman who was looking for an analogy or a metaphor for the Japanese culture of Bushido, which is their warrior culture based on honor and duty. The profession he found that most approximated it was the British butler.

What the film depicts is a butler who cannot do anything other than his job. Everything else just falls away. Even his father dying in the middle of a banquet didn't deserve any more than a few minutes of his attention, and then he went back to his job. The housekeeper, whom he could have struck up a relationship with, obviously in a seemly and proper manner, he couldn't bring himself to make the move! He just couldn't bring himself to go beyond the formal execution of his duties. So he had absolutely no life of his own whatsoever.

He also put all his money on one horse, and it was the wrong horse. That's really what the author was trying to explore. In other words, you have a duty; you dedicate yourself to somebody, but that particular somebody doesn't actually happen to be worthy of your support. Not because he was a cad or anything like that. But Lord Darlington backed the wrong horse as an English lord when he backed the Nazis. That was his own downfall but it was also a great disappointment to the butler, who devoted his entire life to someone who turned out to be a dude in the great scheme of things.

The lesson I take away from Remains of the Day is that you have a duty and you have a dedication and a loyalty, and that's still very much a common thread for a butler, even in a hospitality setting.

(Question from the audience.) ... Why is it always the butler who did it?

Well, certainly the butler is omniscient—not omnipotent—and he knows everything. So

the likelihood is that he probably did everything, too!

There are few jokes in the butler profession but one cartoon I did see shows a butler convention with fifty butlers in a large hall. In the middle, splayed out with a knife through his chest, is one of these butlers. A detective is kneeling beside the body and he looking up at his assistant. The caption reads: “I hate starting Monday mornings off like this...” (Laughter.)

An interesting point that Sir Anthony Hopkins made—he plays Stevens in the Remains of the Day movie—is “It is sometimes said that butlers only and truly exist in England. Continentals (which means Europeans), are unable to be butlers because they are, as a breed, incapable of the emotional restraint that only the English race is capable of.”

Bear in mind that this is a movie. It’s probably not politically correct and it’s not even true. He’s working on the supposition that the genes you wear, as donated by your parents, determine your future and your character and so forth, which of course isn’t totally correct. But there is a skill that one can acquire as a butler, if one doesn’t already have it natively or naturally, and that is the ability to be there. If you are not able to be there, then you are not able to observe. If you’re not able to be there calmly, no matter what is going on around you, you cannot predict or anticipate, because you’re not observing. And you can’t even communicate effectively. Has anyone tried to communicate to someone whose attention is somewhere else?

Yes? Okay! Well, one doesn’t really impinge, one doesn’t really get one’s message across—and the “listener” certainly isn’t picking up your transmissions. So, it’s a waste of time. In actual fact, there are a lot of things that devolve from the ability to be there. Intelligence, for instance: the ability to determine similarities, differences and identities, which could be a definition of intelligence or IQ. How on earth could you determine something is the same as something else or similar or different to, unless you are there and able to observe all its characteristics? How can you observe what is going on with the boss so you can properly service him if you’re not there, your attention is somewhere else?

Many things tend to throw one’s attention out of present time. It could be drugs, it could be problems one has, it could be something one has done that one doesn’t want to talk about, it could be upsets—there are a number of things. But if any of those things are obtruding, that person isn’t there; his attention isn’t in the room with you. And you can count on him not being a good service provider. He won’t hear what the boss says, he won’t observe when the boss needs some assistance, or anticipate that he wants something in 5 minutes time, for instance.

So, the butler then has to be someone who is able to be there. I don’t know if anyone has seen the movie Being There? No? You did? (Yes.) It was an interesting movie; it’s not an example of what I’d like a butler to be. It features Peter Sellers. But it was amazing to see that if you’re just there, listening, and you don’t get involved in trying to be interestING but you’re just interestED, it’s amazing what effects you can create. And the movie Being There certainly shows that.

(Question from the audience.)

As a butler, you want to be invisible.

(By just listening, and not saying anything, he got all this.... (Comment from the audience...))

That's right, you remember the theme very well. But a little more about interesting versus interesTED. A butler is always interesTED. And if this is the butler (draws on easel), "interested" is always an outflow of attention. And if you look at it from the perspective of the boss, he is receiving an inflow, he is being interestING.

What happens, particularly in America in the hospitality industry, is that the flow short-circuits. The service provider is actually being interesting—and the flow loops around like this...(draws).

The way that's manifested is, you're sitting down at a meal and you want to enjoy it with some other ladies and gentlemen. Your attention is on the food and each other and maybe your environment. But what will happen, generally speaking, is that the server will come up and constantly interrupt. And multiple servers will, perhaps even the Maitre' D. You laugh—you've probably had this happen, right?

(Person in the audience shares his experience along this line.)

Exactly, and then when you have the Maitre' D coming up and the Greeter or whatever they're called, and then you've got the busboy and the person who brings the water and the bread. It's always, "Hey, look at me, look at what I'm doing, look at how I'm serving you, don't you think it's cool?" All the attention is on self, the server, as opposed to calmly observing what the guest is doing and if the glass is close to empty, refilling it without making a song and dance about it, interrupting the entire table to say loudly, "Would you like more water?" Rarely does a waiter wait until there is a break in conversation so they can ask what the guests need or want, if it's not immediately evident.

In other words, as a butler you're providing an invisible service with your attention fully on the guest. And if you're doing that, things just appear for the guest, and he never realizes he ran out of coffee, for instance. He never realizes that his plate is being cleared. He hardly even notices that the next course just appears. And at the end of the meal, it's like a very good conversation: you don't notice the time passing. Well, it's the same with the meal. You just have a wonderful time, and the next thing you know, you're leaving. And that would be the ideal level of service.

Butlers have had 1,000 years in which to develop the ideal level of service. Do you know the expression, "A guest, like a fish, stinks after 3 days?" Well, all right, maybe you have experienced it, on either flow, as a host or maybe it was you as a guest who started to stink after a few days. Well, imagine the aroma of a butler who has been with an employer for 50-60 years! You'd be pretty rich! But the relationship does not founder in this way because butlers have worked out what they need to do in order to service somebody and not get in their hair. And the simplicity of that is, you are supplying invisible service. And you're always calmly being there, observing and anticipating and providing service.

(Question from the audience...something to do about what to look for when hiring a butler?)

That's a very good question. The only person I know from Harvard is doing very well for

himself, so I am sure he would hire a butler. I hope you're all thinking along the same lines!

There are a number of tools. The simplest one of which is, just look at and listen to the candidate, is he or she being interested or interesting? Is it all about himself or is he just calmly sitting there, listening to what you're saying and responding—and not responding at huge length and boring the pants off of you? That would be one thing.

Another thing, also derived from the early research of an American humanist, Mr. L. Ron Hubbard, would be to determine what the candidate's emotional tone is. There's a certain scale that exists and if you can spot the emotional level of the individual, whether it's on the lower band or the higher band, the person to hire would be the higher-band person. Because someone who is more upbeat—that's another way of putting it—is enthusiastic or strongly interested at least. Somebody who operates at that level is (usually) a competent individual and able to do any job well once trained on it. But somebody else who is miserable and never smiles...as a matter of fact, I had a client once, and I told her "You need to let your butler go." She asked why. And I said, "She's a miserable old ...something." And she said, "What a relief, you're the first person who's ever said that! You're right!" And a few days later, the butler was gone. I was just using that basic concept—if someone is miserable, that's all they project and the trustworthiness level is low and the ability to get things done is low. One just can't be like that when servicing someone else—unless, of course, one's boss is a miserable old something or other, in which case they'd be able to commiserate handily.

So, that would be my main suggestion. But one point I would like to emphasize is that you can, with most people, train them to be a good butler and to develop the ability to be there, to have a presence. It takes training on specific drills that we could even do right now, actually, and which I consider fundamental to the proper execution of the skills of the profession.

(Another question from the audience, unintelligible but appears to have something to do with the Institute of Modern Butlers, what is the background?)

Certainly. The Institute was started just a few years ago with a couple of colleagues, because we realized that there were no standards being set in the industry and we needed to set standards and raise them by bringing people up to those standards. Our purpose is not just to provide standards for our own particular industry, but also to raise standards in the service sector as a whole, using the butler model. And again, we're not necessarily looking at the stuffy old British butler of old, but at the basic concept behind the butler and providing superior service.

In the old days, there was an apprenticeship system: you'd start off as a hall boy, polishing the shoes of the butler and the under butler, and you'd work your way up to third footman, to second footman, to first footman to under butler, and finally, by the time you were a butler, you were good at it.

Well, that system blew out after the First World War. Since then, ex-military, tend to gravitate toward being a butler, especially those who were the batman or the valet for their officers. You couldn't necessarily expect a person like that to be a senior executive or a butler administrator.

Schools have been set up, there's probably about half a dozen around the world, to

provide training for periods of 2 - 12 weeks. Trying to train an executive caliber person in that sort of timeframe is more than challenging, let alone on the basic techniques of being a butler or the mindset or communication skills. So this approach is a good stopgap measure.

An initiative we've started just now is, I just drove back from Cornell University yesterday actually, and they're very excited about training their graduates as butlers and then providing an internship and a position. And when we talk about a position here, we talk about the senior butler position, and their income range is quite significant. So it's definitely a desirable career path when you're talking about servicing the wealthiest families in the country or in the world.

(Another question from the audience.)

We don't train in a school environment. We train only on location—whether it's a private household or a hotel or a resort. The reason for this is, classroom training is fine, but where it really counts is when you go to the environment and pick up the tools and you inculcate these into the minds of the students so they can actually use them: because this is a very practical-oriented industry. If you can do it on-site, you can handle a lot of barriers. If you just sit behind your desk, they'll get a lot of theory but can they apply it? So we always train on-site.

(More questions from the audience about this model)

Well, no butler schools train for the hospitality industry, they only train butlers for private service. It's generally speaking an individual who wants to become a butler who goes to these schools under his or her own steam. Someone who is already a butler wouldn't go to those schools, because he already has the skills and information. So you'll often find people who are mid-career and want to make a shift and a few people who've singled out butling as something they would like to do, who go to these schools.

What I do is train people on-site who are already operating as butlers to some extent or who've been hired as butlers but don't know how to be a butler. That's in private households and also in hotels.

As a matter of fact, I just came back from a hotel on the Mediterranean coast of Turkey, where I trained 25 butlers. And I'd hate to think of what it would be like trying to train them only in a classroom environment. But we start off with classroom training and then we move into the villas and the residences that they serve in and then work through the whole process. When a guest arrives, how do you tour them through their villa. Generally you'll be told: "...and here's the bathroom and here's the toilet..." and the sort of nonsense you don't need to know. What IS important is, where the dickens is the light switch? I've spent 15 minutes in a hotel room looking for a light switch. So it's that kind of an important thing that you need to train people on.

Q: Do you also do consulting?

Yes, we do consult as well.

(More question from the audience, not audible.)

We charge \$1,500 a day and have a sliding scale for lengthier assignments. We usually

provide a package that includes consultancy: touring the place and recommending how to improve the layout, the space, the material, the equipment, as well as the services that could be provided by the hotel. Then we provide the training and follow-up as well, a consultation to make sure they stay on track. Did that answer your question?

(Yes.)

(Another question from the audience.)

No. Generally speaking the butler is a male. But the first female butler on record was in 1735. She was trained by a vicar in England and his family, and since then there have been quite a few female butlers. In the hospitality industry the female butlers are actually better, from the guest perspective, because gentlemen generally don't have a problem having a lady in the room, especially if she is attractive, and female guests feel more comfortable having a lady in the room rather than a gentleman. Although some ladies prefer gentlemen! Many of the ladies I have helped train make very good butlers.

(Another question from the audience.)

Well, certainly New York, Los Angeles, Beverly Hills would be the hot spots in America, but throughout the US there are butlers. And there are a many butlers in America, England, of course, and many in the Middle East.

In terms of the hospitality industry, butlers are becoming more and more common throughout the world—whether it's in Bali or Australia or Russia, you name it, there are hotels opening up with butlers. Because they realize that—I mean, the hospitality industry is predicated upon service. And if you consider that the butler represents the pinnacle of service delivery, then it's a no-brainer really for butlers to be introduced into the hospitality service. And so they're seeded throughout. Again, I really don't know how many there are, we have about a hundred listed already.

(Question)

Oh, absolutely and certainly in America you have to educate them, because you don't have the butler here as a tradition, generally speaking. There was one hotel where the butler service was almost eliminated because they didn't tell the guest, "This is what we can do for you." The guests could not take advantage of a service they didn't know about, and therefore weren't impressed with the butler service. So an educational effort is definitely required: that particular hotel resolved the issue by creating a DVD that they send to guests before they arrive, saying, "This is who we are, this is our butler service, and this is what they can do for you." And after that the service began to deliver on its promise.

There are issues, for instance in Muslim countries, especially in places like Saudi Arabia, where a male butler can not see the ladies, the Sheikas who are often in a state of undress to some degree in their villas. So you have to knock first so they can scurry around and put on all their clothes before you can come in and service them (without looking at them). As a result, the communication between the guest and the butler is severed to some degree because the butler can't, for instance, look through a peephole to see if the guests are ready for their next course.

So there are definite cultural differences that make the butler not that welcome in

some cultures. But that is where a (good) butler would recognize the differences and accommodate the guest accordingly.

We're getting towards the end of our time—any other questions?

(Yes—question from the audience.)

Well, ideally, if opening up a new hotel, I'd want to have a month. And that includes a last week of a soft opening and a hard opening. You know what that means? A soft opening is where you pretend to open but the guests are hotel executives and so forth. And the hard opening is where the actual grand opening occurs. So the training should really run through all that on a QC basis. And again, I do about a week of mindset/communication, a week of classroom skills & learning and then a week of practical exercises in the suites. And that's the general line-up. Obviously if you could do longer, it would be better, but then again you run into budget constraints.

Any other questions? No? Well, I hope I have provided some useful information about butling. Certainly any 4-star hotel which aspires to be a 5-star, or a 5-star wanting to remain that way, should be interested in instituting butler service, because it adds so much more to what the guest receives from the hotel.

(Applause)