

Marriott exec: Lead by leaving your desk

Ed Fuller is more than a frequent flyer.

Fuller, a Laguna Hills resident, has logged 10 million airline miles working for **Marriott International.**



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Many might say it's part of the job of being president and managing director of international lodging for the hotel chain; for

Fuller, it's the only way to lead.

The Florida native started with Marriott in 1972 as management trainee. He's been in his present role since 1990 and has overseen expansion of the brand from 16 hotels in six countries to 400 properties worldwide. He's spent so much time in the air, his name is painted on the side of a United 747 jet.

When protesters took to the streets of Cairo in early February – where Marriott has two hotels – Fuller flew in by private plane from Jordan to quell concerns of local management. For five days he saw tanks rumble through city streets, and at the height of the political unrest, Fuller said, kitchen staff picked up knives to back up unarmed security staff.

would take more than two years to complete. It was here he learned consistency was key to meeting Marriott brand standards.

It's what I call the 'billboard' effect. Leading with your most prominent brands creates a positive impression.

On getting customers on board with what you are selling:

It was important that Chinese travelers get to know Marriott, so when they wanted to travel, the choice would be something familiar, he said.

"People go to what they're comfortable with," Fuller said. "It was a clear canvas and we could start to paint."

Experience has taught me that, far from being irrelevant, solid relationships are the real bedrock of business success. They help you solve problems and resolve contentious issues amicably. Relationships are especially important in emerging economies, where a handshake often serves as a valid contract and where written documents are a necessary, if unwelcome, part of doing business with Americans and other Westerners.

On hurdles with international clients:

Choosing language carefully is always important, Fuller said. When setting up a hotel in Portugal



Ed Fuller, president and managing director, International Lodging, Marriott International

Fuller wasn't back in the U.S. for long when he turned around and flew to Bahrain, where demonstrators were protesting - and where the Marriott has two properties.

It's that boots-on-the-ground approach that Fuller champions in "You Can't Lead with Your Feet on the Desk," his guidebook for aspiring business leaders. The Register caught up with Fuller in between trips at the Marriott at Fashion Island, where he talked about his experiences building the hotel chain abroad.

Here's an excerpt of the conversation as well excerpts from Fuller's book:

On expanding Marriott:

"What we found is we had a lot of property in the U.S.," Fuller said. "It was time for us to really commit to going into the international market."

From the book: *We wanted to do business in these countries because of the spectacular potential for growth and because of a little known fact about the lodging business: When travelers book rooms abroad, they look for hotel brands they recognize or have patronized in their own countries.*

Vigilantly upholding our standards is part of the value system the Marriott family established early in its 83-year history and has maintained ever since...In a world where everyone is maneuvering to gain an advantage, inconsistency is intolerable.

On where to start:

Fuller said one of the first markets they set up shop in was China - a project that

learned the name given to spas at Marriotts in the United States translated to "raised from the dead," in Portuguese.

Fuller said using local resources and learning the details of a culture is vital to avoiding missteps.

The attitudes and behaviors of employees and customers raised abroad are, to a large degree, determined by their culture of origin. To create a positive relationship with them you need to develop some familiarity with their cultures. Often, what you might perceive as their inappropriate behavior is a product of prejudices rooted in history.

On building relationships with people in foreign countries:

Never touch someone's head in Thailand. Showing the soles of your shoes is offensive in some Middle East countries. Don't hire a Japanese manager to run a hotel in Korea. Fuller, a self-proclaimed history buff, said it's important when building relationships to understand the cultural history of a people to avoid conflicts.

He said he has had to learn customs throughout his travels in Europe, Asia and the Middle East - the key is being willing to learn.

"As long as they know you are trying, you can build some great bridges," Fuller said.

You must consider the other person's interests and needs.

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