

ENTRUSTED TO HOST

Ethical stewardship in contemporary hospitality



MILAN RANKOVIĆ & MAXIM SAYAPIN

Милан Ранкович

**Entrusted to Host:
Ethical stewardship in
contemporary hospitality**

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Большинство книг о гостеприимстве посвящены сервису. Эта книга - ответственности. За каждым безупречным впечатлением гостя скрывается реальность, которую почти никто не видит - давление, ответственность и решения, принимаемые в режиме реального времени. Entrusted to Host - это откровенный взгляд на лидерство изнутри одной из самых требовательных отраслей в мире. Написанная двумя экспертами индустрии HoReCa с совокупным международным опытом более 40 лет, книга сочетает личные истории, практические управленческие наблюдения и честные размышления о реалиях, формирующих современное гостеприимство. И хотя в ее основе лежат два разных профессиональных пути, она звучит как единый, цельный голос. Для профессионалов индустрии гостеприимства, молодых специалистов, всех, кто хочет лучше понять настоящую сторону этой профессии, а также руководителей, работающих в условиях постоянного давления, эта книга предлагает взгляд, который остается практичным, приземленным и бескомпромиссно честным.

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Entrusted to Host: Ethical stewardship in contemporary hospitality

Introduction: Let's Call a Spade a Spade



As one of our mentors used to say, there are two toughest professions in the world—in hospitals and hospitality. It is a clever play on words, but there is truth in every joke. His entire family worked in healthcare, from nurses to medical professionals, while he dedicated his life to the service industry. At a closer look, the parallels between these fields become strikingly clear. Both require an unwavering commitment, grueling hours, high-pressure environments, and an innate sense of responsibility. The difference is that in a hospital lives are saved, while in our profession experiences are crafted that can define them. And in both cases, people place their trust in experts, expecting their well-being to be taken care of—one physically, the other emotionally.

Like most crafts, knowledge in hospitality can be passed down, and most skills can be taught. Yet, more often than not, those who enter this field are born into it—whether through family legacy or an innate calling. They thrive in environments where human connection is paramount, and service is more than just a job. However, even those with a natural aptitude for hospitality need a guiding compass to navigate a market riddled with complexities. This is a world where the margin for error is slim, and a single misstep can tarnish a brand's reputation or derail one's promising career. In a profession where continuous learning and professional development are not just encouraged but essential, staying relevant requires adaptability and a relentless pursuit of growth. What is more, beyond mastering aptitude, one must also confront the stark realities of the trade.

The passing of renowned chef and storyteller Anthony Bourdain in 2018 reignited discussions about work-life balance, the unrelenting expectations placed on hospitality professionals, and the gap

between effort and reward—especially for those in middle management. Yet, despite the momentary uproar, those conversations quickly faded, leaving many to wonder: Where do we find real answers? How do we acquire the right skills while preserving our well-being? And, most importantly, when is enough enough? With too many questions and an overwhelming abundance of conflicting answers, finding reliable guidance in this business is a challenge. The key lies in cutting through the noise to identify the knowledge and strategies that truly make a difference.

Throughout our careers, we have been on the hunt for resources that offer meaningful insights into the craft—guides that provide practical wisdom alongside an honest depiction of what it truly takes to succeed. However, most publications on the subject tend to fall into two extremes. On one side are the overly academic textbooks—dry, technical, and packed with corporate jargon. They meticulously break down operational standards, leadership theories, and service models but fail to capture the realities of the day-to-day grind, the emotional weight of the job, or the personal toll it takes. On the other side are the glossy manifestos of luxury hospitality—romanticized tales of five-star service and white-glove experiences, where guest satisfaction is treated like an ancient, mystical art. These works showcase brands with so-called secret formulas for success but never address how professionals navigate real-world challenges. They paint a picture of service that is so polished, so perfectly curated, that it feels more like an unattainable fairy tale than the messy, exhilarating, and often exhausting reality of the trade.

As professionals who have lived and breathed this business for several decades—across different cultures, countries, and career paths—we wanted something different. A resource that reflects the real struggles, strategies, and sacrifices involved in building a career in this field. One that does not just explain service as a concept but provides a practical guide to thriving in the trade. That is why we decided to put our experience into writing—to bridge the gap between technical knowledge and practical understanding. We want to provide genuine insights, hard-earned lessons, and battle-tested wisdom to help professionals at any stage of their careers. So, we asked ourselves: what have we learned in our careers so far? This question serves as a guiding light throughout this book, inviting readers to explore challenges and triumphs that shape our experiences in this dynamic industry.

Our goal is to strip away the fluff, the corporate buzzwords, and the generic advice that plague so many hospitality resources. Instead, we focus on the core truths and strategies that actually matter—what it is really like to work in hotels, restaurants, and service-based businesses. How to survive and thrive from your first job to climb the hierarchical ladder. Lessons from the field, mistakes we have made, challenges we have faced, and how we turned setbacks into successes. How to navigate a changing landscape, the evolution of this sector in the twenty-first century, and where we believe it is headed. We are not interested in painting an unrealistic picture of the profession, nor are we here to recycle what has already been said in countless management textbooks. Instead, we want to offer something valuable, something real—a guide for those serious about making this line of work not just a job but a lifelong craft.

Let us also approach this as genuine self-reflection. We ought to call out the good, the bad, and the ugly—without sugarcoating the hard parts. This is a field that deserves respect, but it also needs a wake-up call. It is filled with moments of brilliance, where service becomes an art and leaves a lasting impact on guests. But it is also plagued by outdated traditions bordering on absurd novelty, inefficiencies, and a culture of burnout that too often goes unchecked. If this profession is to move forward, it needs a fresh perspective, a willingness to challenge the status quo, and leaders who advocate the need for a mindset shift—one that blends timeless service values with modern business acumen. What we have put together is not just about how to succeed in hospitality; it is about how to transform it—whether that means improving operations, redefining service, or building a workplace that values people as much as profit. And we are here to show how to do it.

This book is written from multiple vantage points—operator, advisor, and observer. At times, the narrative will shift between personal narrative, direct guidance, and broader industry reflection.

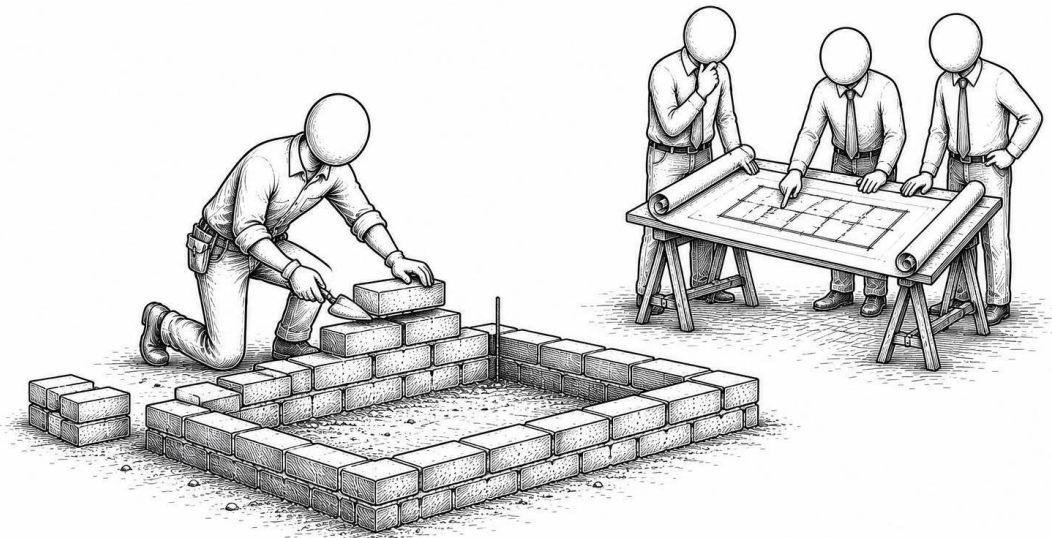
This is intentional. As our experiences have not been identical, but they have been shaped by the same industry, the same pressures, and often, the same questions. The shifts in voice reflect that reality. At times, we have also chosen not to make that distinction explicit, allowing the reader to gradually recognize the voices, draw their own conclusions, and, perhaps, discover the authors through the pages rather than being told upfront. Consider it a small exercise in observation - a skill that tends to reward those who practice it.

That same intent extends to how this book is structured. We begin with context, establishing the foundations that shape our perspective and judgment. From there, we move through the realities of the industry—its pressures, contradictions, and underlying dynamics. Only then do we turn to what can be done, grounding ideas in experience rather than abstraction.

So here it is—the guide we wish we had when we were starting out. A no-nonsense, straight-talking perspective on what it really takes to thrive in this dynamic world. We hope it challenges you, inspires you, and—most of all—equips you with the tools to build a meaningful, successful career in this ever-evolving profession.

Anamnesis

Maxim the Capricorn: Building What Others Only Theorize



Hello, honorable reader. My name is Sayapin Maxim Alexeevich, and I appreciate your interest in my journey, inviting you to share the experiences that shaped my life and career. By lifting the curtain to my “kitchen,” I hope to establish trust and credibility for my observations and statements in this book.

As a second-generation hotelier, I was born in Moscow (Russia) and raised into a family for whom hospitality was more than an occupation. My father, an award-winning chef, immersed me in colorful stories of international culinary competitions, hotel openings, and large-scale catering events. My mother, a nationally recognized expert in food production and educator, illustrated how structure, consistency, and leadership can transform underperforming establishments into thriving places driven by creativity. Remarkably, my younger sister is studying public relations, marketing, and the commercial aspects of our industry, while my better half works in hospitality, specializing in sales and coordination for large luxury properties.

Over the years, I have perceived my life as divided into two major passions: sports and hospitality. Despite never turning my athletic pursuits into a full-fledged profession, I remain closely connected to the world of competitive sports. Swimming laps in a chilly pool or preparing for endurance events has always been more than a pastime—it refines discipline, mental focus, and resilience. These qualities have proven invaluable in hospitality, where running large-scale events, coordinating multinational teams, and realigning struggling operations demand the same steady focus as sports training.

My life recently acquired another dimension: fatherhood. This profound experience refocused my priorities, underscoring how essential it is to foster both professional excellence and personal fulfillment. It introduced a deeper sense of responsibility, moving beyond operational targets toward

empathy and balance. Watching my child grow affirms that genuine hospitality thrives on sincere compassion for others—a principle shaping my management style, interactions with guests, and approach to team leadership.

Upon graduating from a sports secondary school with distinction, I earned a bachelor degree in international hotel management from a French hospitality business school, gaining insight into core industry disciplines. In parallel, I completed a bachelor of science with honors in business management from a Russian academy for tourism, integrating methodical planning and financial rigor into fast-paced environments. To expand my understanding of fiscal strategy and analytics, I pursued an MBA in finance and accounting at a university in the UK. Along the way, I gained specialized credentials, such as high-tier awards in managing food safety, wine production, and cigar service, and obtained a project management certificate that proved valuable in numerous situations.

My professional path spans two decades, across several facets of the industry—from hotels, restaurants, and catering to aviation—as well as multiple countries: Russia, France, China, the United Arab Emirates, Canada and the Caribbean region. Each of these settings exposed me to a wide range of cultural traditions, service philosophies, and operational norms. One of the most formative chapters of my career was in the food services division of a national airline, where I managed premium lounge operations and oversaw catering for thousands of guests daily. Our dedication yielded multiple accolades, including recognition for delivering the region's leading airport lounge experience, and I was honored with personal and team-based awards that validated our commitment to excellence and thoughtful innovation under high-volume conditions.

It was also in that environment that I met Milan, a colleague who became a close friend to my entire family. His determination, intelligence, and open-mindedness were apparent from the start, and we soon discovered a shared enthusiasm for sports, hospitality, and continuous self-improvement. Over time, we collaborated on various projects, exchanged bold ideas, and supported each other's growth. Milan is now co-author of this book, and I regard him as a talented and ambitious professional whose journey remains an inspiration to me and many others. His presence in my story underscores how strong working relationships often blossom into genuine personal bonds, strengthening the sense of community we all strive to foster in this industry.

I began my career washing toilets, peeling onions, and diligently checking in large groups of guests—gradually developing the resilience and know-how required to lead multicultural teams across geographically diverse locations. These efforts have evolved into a successful track record of pre-opening and launching operations, executing property-wide renovations and rebranding, and managing profitable venues. Projects ranged from large-scale to intimate, corporate to private, balancing refined quality with broad quantity. They took place in bustling cities as well as on remote islands, each location shaping a flexible approach to delivering memorable experiences.

Through these undertakings, I discovered that introducing a new concept—whether it is a menu redesign, a cutting-edge digital interface, or a full-scale renovation—succeeds only when the team fully embraces it. Clear communication, well-structured training, and defined benchmarks translate boardroom visions into reality. The hours can be long and the demands relentless, yet watching formerly disconnected parts merge into a unified guest experience is immensely rewarding.

Over the years, I have been privileged to receive several awards and recognitions, reflecting not only my individual contributions but also the combined efforts of the teams I led. These honors include induction into a gastronomic association, a newcomer recognition award in career and academic contributions during my early years in Canada, service as an expert board member at a national hotel award, and participation in multiple international professional competitions. Each accolade has fueled my drive to keep pushing boundaries, aim for superior service quality, and embrace innovation within a swiftly evolving industry.

Reflecting on these layers of learning—my upbringing, international ventures, sporting endeavors, and fatherhood—my dedication to hospitality continues to deepen. I regard it as an

industry that demands integrity, teamwork, and an unwavering commitment to guest satisfaction. It is also a field where financial diligence can coexist with genuine warmth, and where operational standards serve as stepping stones for meaningful human connections. Ultimately, hospitality revolves around elevating every interaction, from a simple greeting at check-in to the carefully orchestrated details of multi-day events.

Thank you for joining me on this personal and professional journey. Milan and I hope our experiences resonate with your own aspirations. In the pages that follow, we invite you to explore the lessons, frameworks, and insights gained from our individual paths, and we trust you will discover valuable perspectives here.

Milan the Cancer: Feeling What Others Overlook



Hello, esteemed readers! It fills me with immense pride and joy to share my story with each of you. People often find themselves curious and ask, “Who is Milan?” The answer, while seemingly simple, encompasses a rich tapestry of experiences and values: I am a humble individual hailing from a quaint little village known as Jezestica, which is nestled within the picturesque town of Bratunac. This charming locale is where my journey began—shaped meticulously by education, driven passionately by my interests, and grounded firmly in the values instilled in me by my loving family.

My upbringing ingrained in me the profound understanding that education is not merely a privilege but a vital foundation for a fulfilling life. Alongside this, I learned that integrity, honesty, and strong moral values are integral components of who we are, handed down from our families and communities. For this, I owe a great deal of gratitude to my remarkable mother, Stanojka, and my dedicated father, Slavko. They brought me into this world and taught me to appreciate its many beauties.

Both of my parents were high-school graduates who worked tirelessly in a variety of jobs while simultaneously managing our family farm. Their unwavering dedication and hard work provided my sister and me with opportunities that we might not have had otherwise, opening doors to a brighter future.

I could easily fill an entire chapter with the invaluable lessons I absorbed by watching my parents work diligently day in and day out. However, I will keep it concise. They imparted to me the importance of hard work, honesty, and resilience—qualities that I carry with me to this very day and that continue to shape my character.

I am a proud husband and father, and my greatest accomplishments in life stem from my family. They are my unwavering motivation and the reason I strive to push myself and work diligently every day. Their presence brings immeasurable light and happiness into my life, making every challenge

worthwhile. In addition to my role as a family man, I am also an accomplished sportsman, having achieved significant success in the world of karate, where I proudly hold a black belt in full contact karate.

My formal education journey began in Bratunac, where I attended elementary school and continued through high school. It was during these formative years that I discovered my deep passion for technology. This passion ultimately led me to pursue a career as a computer technician. I found immense joy in problem-solving and innovation—skills that would serve me well throughout my professional journey.

As I traversed the path of gaining experience, a journey that I am excited to share in this book alongside my esteemed colleague Maxim, I navigated various positions within the hospitality and catering industry. This journey has continuously challenged me, pushing me to climb the ladder of business life. So, once again, the question arises: “Who is Milan in the business world?”

My work life has been a rich tapestry of diverse experiences, with each role contributing uniquely to my growth and development from waiter and through operational leadership to business development manager.

At each stage of my career, I learned something new, developed essential skills, and proved myself in every role I undertook. Each position provided a valuable lesson, allowing me to grow and adapt in an ever-changing industry.

One of my proudest moments came when I graduated as an engineer of operations management from the prestigious University of Belgrade. As I write this, I hold the esteemed position of general manager of business development. This role enables me to leverage my extensive experience while continuously pushing the boundaries of what is possible within the industry.

Reflecting on my journey, I recognize just how far I’ve come and how each experience has shaped who I am today. I am excited to share the lessons, insights, and wisdom I’ve gained along the way. Each chapter of my life has molded me into a person who values integrity, cherishes family bonds, and fervently strives for excellence. Thank you for allowing me to share my story with you!

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