

Good morning. It's good to be together again.

This is our first gathering under our new organizational structure. So, I want to extend a very special welcome to everyone, especially those of you attending a general managers' meeting for the first time.

As some of you know from past meetings, I want today and the rest of the week to be fun. Business wouldn't be business without colleagues getting together, loosening up and sharing war stories.

At the same time, I consider this one of our most important meetings ever. In fact, it is intended to be a watershed ... a dividing point. It will set the foundation for how I want us to operate now and in the future.

In one sense, I don't like starting out seriously. That can set a somber tone for the entire meeting. I don't want that to happen. Remember ... we're going to have fun.

On the other hand, my opening message is extremely important. So listen, and listen carefully. Then file the information away mentally and act on it back at your hotel.

I'd like to begin by telling you what I'm NOT going to discuss at length today.

The first is quality of service.

Frankly, there's been enough talk about that. I can't imagine anyone in this room not having a sense of what it takes to serve guests properly. Believe me, though, if you're not sure, you'd better speak up. There will be no finger-pointing. I just want the job done and done properly.

And while I'm at it, one further comment about quality. If it doesn't exist, there generally are six reasons why. Either employees haven't been taught how to do quality work; they don't have the proper tools; they haven't been properly rewarded for their efforts; they don't care; or perhaps a combination of ... "all of the above."

The sixth reason – and the most important – is ... inattention by management. Whether it involves observing employees at work or developing a sound modernization program, having quality operations ultimately is up to us. And when it's not there, we must examine the way WE – the managers – run the business.

Another thing I won't spend much time on today is the intensity of competition caused by oversupply. You all know that. Many of you are experiencing it firsthand. Suffice it to say, we're in a real dogfight.

Things are supposed to improve in a few years, when demand catches up with supply. But I'll clue you in on something. Even if that happens, we can never let up. Not now. Not ever. Someone out there is always ready to make a buck. And they'll gladly do it at our expense.

Having told you what I don't want to talk about today, now to the things I DO want to discuss.

Business gurus say good leadership comes from having a vision and sharing it. I believe that. It's far easier for people to follow if

they know the destination. So I'd like to share with you ... my vision.

It isn't wrapped in some catchy phrase or slogan. It's nothing out of the ordinary, and certainly not stirring. It's so fundamental that it's almost boring. But I believe in it deeply. And it will drive everything I do, and the things I want you to do.

My basic direction is for us to be ... good businessmen and good businesswomen in running our hotels. Nothing more, and certainly nothing less. If we are good business people, then much of what we must do simply will come ... naturally.

What makes a good businessperson?

Books have been written about that. And WE could talk about it all day, too. But because we don't have that kind of time, I will simply say this:

To me, a good businessman keeps his focus on why he's in business. And that is ... to make money, either for himself or the stockholders.

He's totally consumed by that goal, constantly looking at ways to improve product quality, keep customers coming back and increase sales in the least expensive manner. He not only has plenty of common sense and an inquiring mind, but also a fundamental understanding that people who are led well, perform well.

Equally important, a good businessman doesn't spend his day at a desk poring over reports. Or relying solely on second-hand reports from his staff.

Instead, he periodically gets out and kicks the tires to see what's going on. That's when he finds out if the operation is realizing its full potential. If employees know their jobs and are working hard. If managers are managing. And if customers are being treated properly.

More could be said, but I think you get the point. I want us to be good businessmen and businesswomen. That's my vision. And it will serve as a foundation for all that we do.

Beyond my vision, I have certain expectations about the way I want us to operate. These expectations are important because they will help us fulfill that vision. I will share them with you now.

First and foremost, I need you to take more responsibility for generating hotel revenues, whether it involves the lounge or meeting rooms. In other words, I don't want you waiting on Omaha to come up with ideas to make money. I want ideas from you.

Above all, I want action. And it must be purposeful. Not action simply for the sake of action.

Consequently, before embarking on something, ask yourself if it is needed. What are the benefits? What all is necessary for implementation? How can it be measured? Can it be done cost effectively? Is employee training needed?

Once you've gone through that exercise, you're ready to act.

And let me remind you, action doesn't stop with implementation. Instead, you must constantly evaluate and measure, tweaking here and there as needed. Such follow-up is

absolutely essential. A project doesn't take care of itself. That's why we're around.

Food and Beverage is a perfect example of what I'm talking about. It doesn't take a new promotion from Omaha to bring in customers. You can do that through your own ingenuity and initiative. And if you're not real creative, don't be afraid to ask your employees. Many times they are brimming with ideas, and want to share them. But maybe you're hesitant to ask because after all, you're the manager, and they're the subordinates. Thinking like that is wrong. Don't ever let your ego get in the way of good judgment.

I should point out that some of you already are operating in a strong, entrepreneurial manner. That's why your hotels are so successful.

But now, I want EVERYONE to operate that way. I want ALL of you to be entrepreneurs. To think aggressively and independently. To be self-reliant.

You also must operate with full awareness that total accountability for results rests with you. What Omaha or the

regional office provides is just something extra that will help you achieve success.

As you assume increased responsibility, I think it would be helpful if you developed the mindset of an owner. That is, operate as if YOU owned the hotel.

Believe me, that will make a difference in how you approach things. It's like living in an apartment versus owning a home. Owners nearly always take better care of things.

The same is true with business owners, especially small businessmen. They cut through the bull and glitter. Something is either right or it isn't. When it isn't, they aren't spectators sitting along the sidelines, leaving the job to someone else. THEY do something about it. After all, they know the difference between staying in business or losing it ultimately rests in ... THEIR hands. So they look to themselves ... and do what is necessary.

So be an owner, if you don't already think that way. Our hotels can never be anything we as managers don't aspire to achieve.

A second expectation I have is for you to treat your employees as you would like to be treated. In other words, be good to them. If YOU can't do that, then you have no place in my organization.

In asking you to be good to your people, I'm not directing you to run a popularity contest. I will not judge you on that. You know as well as I do that management decisions sometimes conflict with what employees want. But you can be good to your people by treating them with respect, and by being firm, fair and consistent with them.

Also, give them room to get the job done. Pay attention and lend a hand when necessary, but don't hover over them. And when they do a good job, recognize them for it. You know how you feel when I say something good about you. YOUR employees are no different.

My third expectation is related to the second. And that is ... we are all going to operate as a team.

We need to be able to depend and count on each other's special competencies. When you think about the people we work with, the people we depend on, it's plain to see: in an organization this big,

without one another, we won't go far. But as a group, we can be something great. We must reach toward our potential together; nothing else is good enough.

As your coach, how the team operates ultimately is up to me. And what I say is what we're going to do. But let me make an important point here.

Did any of you see the movie "Hoosiers"? It's based on a true story about a small-town Indiana high school basketball team. The team overcame great odds to win the state championship.

In the title game, it all came down to who would take the last shot.

During the huddle the coach directed one boy to shoot. The team objected. They wanted the star player to take the final shot ... and they were deep in their conviction. After all, they were the ones playing on the court. Or as we sometimes say, the ones closest to the work. They knew what they could do.

As it turned out, the coach went with the players' judgment ... and the team won.

Now again, that was a movie, and we all know how Hollywood can embellish.

But my reason for sharing that story is that even though I'm the coach, I don't always have all of the answers. And I'm not always going to be right.

So I want your input, and I'll actively seek it, especially on tough decisions affecting the region. Your skills and expertise bring an important dimension to decision-making.

Consequently, it only makes sense that you have an opportunity to influence management decisions affecting the region.

As your coach, I also have additional responsibilities.

For instance, it's important that I keep you informed about what's going on. I also need to help you grow, so you can realize your full potential.

When things go right, you can expect a pat on the back. When they go wrong, I'm going to tell you right then and there. That

way, whether or not you get a varsity letter at the end of the season won't come as a surprise.

Finally, when a player needs help – for whatever reason – the coach is ALWAYS there. And this point can't be emphasized enough.

A few minutes ago, I said I wanted you all to take on more accountability for your hotels' operations. And I do! But I don't want you to feel alone and isolated. We're a team, remember? And it's up to me, the director of operations and our regional staff to teach you what we want, and to help when you need it.

All of what I have just related goes into my coaching and team style. But I'm not the only coach here, and this is important.

You are all coaches, too, with a team back at your hotels.

And while I certainly am going to tolerate different approaches, I want my basic coaching style to be yours. This doesn't mean you have to cross the t's and dot the i's the way I do. But it DOES mean putting an emphasis on action through teamwork ... and treating your team properly.

My fourth expectation is I want us all to enjoy work and have fun. We must also make work fun for our employees.

People do best and are most creative when they enjoy what they're doing. And a lot of that comes from the kind of environment we as managers and leaders maintain. If we're positive and operate with energy and enthusiasm, you can bet our employees will, too. Indeed, I believe a hotel's success is in direct proportion to the vitality you bring to the job.

Of course, I recognize that today's pace and workload aren't always conducive to tranquility. In all honesty, there are times I'm ready to pull out my own hair.

But I'll tell you what helps me. I try to put things in perspective. I've learned over the years nothing is ever as bad as it seems. Nine times out of 10, the worst thing that could happen never does.

Also, I have personal outlets that help me relax and take my mind off work. If you have none, I suggest you develop some. Your mental state most definitely influences how you run your hotels. So do your best to enjoy work ... and life.

My fifth expectation involves what you must do to get ahead with Juan Mimosa. The easiest way to make an impression with me is to ... get the job done. Do that, and you'll get ahead.

You also need to know that I deplore internal politics. There's too much of that in corporate America today, even in our own company at times.

Being human, we can never totally get away from playing internal politics. And I include myself in that, too.

But no matter how much I like you, my responsibility to this company and our stockholders requires that I evaluate your efforts on the basis of what you've accomplished, not who you are, or what you've done for me.

The sixth and last expectation has to do with what I just mentioned: judging performance. Or put another way, accountability.

All too often business leaders stand up in front of a group of employees and say a lot of grandiose things. Everything sounds great, but oftentimes, intentions remain just that: intentions. There

is no follow-up to ensure that the company is operating the way they want it to.

Yes, they follow the numbers. But that can be so misleading sometimes. For example, the numbers may be good, but perhaps they could be even better through more effective management. Why settle for a “B” when you could earn an “A”?

I believe the fulfillment of my vision and expectations will help us earn an “A.” So I’m not walking away from what I’ve told you over the last 15 minutes or so. I have asked to be held accountable for the way I want us to operate. You can expect to be held accountable, too. Similarly, you should hold your staff accountable as well.

I should add, you can always count on at least one thing from me: if you tell me you’re going to do something, I will expect you to do it.

In one sense, I don’t like accountability. It always reminds me of the threat of a spanking if I didn’t obey my parents as a young boy. There is, however, another, more positive way to look at it, especially from your perspective.

Our new bonus plan gives you a tremendous opportunity to make some big bucks. By controlling margins and generating revenues, you can directly influence 80 percent of your bonus.

So if you do nothing else, work to help yourself. The bonus plan clearly puts you in the driver's seat to do that.

Finally, as you all know, our division's goal for gross operating profit this year is \$xxx million. My personal objective is to top that by \$xx million. I know we can do it!

But aside from making our yearly financial objectives, I'll tell you what would mean even more to me.

And that is, for us to make a meaningful difference in how our company does business, and how it moves forward. I want us to become the par excellence of good management – an example for others to follow.

Making financial objectives, of course, will always be our foremost goal. But practically anyone with some sense and gumption can make a business objective.

But not everyone can manage in an ENLIGHTENED way – a way that maximizes our potential – as a company, and as individuals. A way that not only makes work exciting, but meaningful, too.

Let me ask you all something. How often have you thought or complained, “if only the company would do this?” Or ... “let’s cut out the crap and get down to brass tacks?” Or ... “why isn’t the company fair and honest with me?”

I’ll bet many of you have had such thoughts over the years. And you’re not alone. I’ve had ‘em, too.

But that’s exactly what I’m getting at now. We made our financial plan last year, didn’t we? But could we have done better? I believe we could have.

So I’m saying to all of you now, let’s get down to brass tacks. Let’s take this company by the horns and move it. Let’s run it the best we can. And when we do, everything, including the financials, will fall into place.

As I look around this room, I see a lot of talent, energy and dedication. People capable of accomplishing great things. And people I'm proud to have on my team.

So let's do it. Let's make a difference. I **KNOW** we can.