

SHML Inauguration Welcoming Address

By Mr. Onno Poortier, Member of the SHML Board of Advisors, former President of the Peninsula Group Hong Kong, former President of "The Leela Palaces and Resorts"

Gemeindepräsidentin Mrs. Bühler, Industry Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure for me to be here today to say a few words in my position as an Advisory Board member of the Swiss College of Hospitality Management and to celebrate the opening of the College in this beautiful part of the Bernese Oberland.

I would like to welcome our new students who have chosen a profession which I consider one of the most exciting in the world.

Hospitality schools began in Switzerland in the middle of the 19th century. Global tourism influenced its remarkable growth and the development of Swiss supremacy in the hospitality tradition. A diploma with the Swiss College of Hospitality Management will lead to a career path in hospitality leadership. The school's curriculum is strengthened by close bonds with hotel industry leaders and our students' learning will be enriched in the field where they will gain experience in operating hotels. They will learn not only to be successful managers, they will also transmit the tradition of European hospitality well known of its high standards of individualized service.

Unlike any other profession, a career in hospitality leadership can lead to travel worldwide, meeting people of different cultures and races, and learning to speak different languages. Working in the luxury segment of the hospitality industry will provide the opportunity to meet heads of state, well-known personalities in the business, academic and entertainment world, and many others. Each moment and each day will be different and they will learn to adapt quickly to change. One moment will be spent in the hotel basement talking to Engineering staff about plumbing ... then 5 minutes later, welcoming a VVIP. It is all very exciting. A hotelier is required to be a diplomat and manager, a personality and trend setter, a counselor and a leader. After all, leadership is ultimately about creating a way for people to contribute to making "something extraordinary happen".

To our new students, you will have many challenges. This profession is not an ordinary 9:00 am to 5:00 pm job, which means a hotelier is required to work when friends,

partners and family are off during official holidays and weekends. Many in the hotel business meet their future spouse on the job, although this college will not guarantee this!

Please do not expect your first job to have the title of “Manager” or “Boss” after successfully graduating from this college. To the contrary, you will have to prove yourselves. Wherever you start in your hotel career, you will have colleagues who will explain how the system works. You will make mistakes, but you will learn to only make these mistakes once. Then will come a time when you are suddenly on your own at the Front Office or Restaurant during your shift and you will have to make your first independent decisions. You will be very nervous, but I can assure you that with experience you will gain confidence. Never loose your temper, remain cool, and remember the guest is nearly always right.

I started my own hotel management education and career in this country. I left my native Holland for Switzerland at the age of 18 years to improve my language skills and applied for a summer job right here in the Bernese Oberland in a village called Kandersteg. My family and friends expected me to return home within one month, and to their surprise I stayed for 18 years. My career led me to Asia, and to my own surprise I stayed for 25 years!

Early in your career, it will be important for you to choose the right category of hotel to work in. I chose the luxury category and for me, this led to some of the most memorable experiences in my life.

Let me give you an example. I worked in the Beau Rivage Palace Hotel in Lausanne. One of its regular guests was HRH Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands who was then the President of the World Wildlife Fund located in Morges, Switzerland and the Inspector General of the Combined Dutch Forces, Army, Navy and Air force. When I finally had to do my military service, I was assigned to his headquarters in the Netherlands only due to the fact that I had interacted with him before at the Beau Rivage Palace. At a later stage, his daughter joined him when he came to Lausanne. She is now HRH, Queen Beatrix of Holland. Several years later, I welcomed the Queen in my capacity as President of The Peninsula Group to our flagship property - The Peninsula Hotel in Hong Kong, one of the world’s finest luxury hotels, and the only hotel worldwide with a fleet of 14 Rolls Royces, helicopter service and its own landing pads.

My tenure with The Peninsula Group spanned my entire hotel career in Asia. I travelled nine times a year around the world as we developed Peninsula hotels in Asia, USA and Europe. I met Emperors from Ethiopia and Japan, Kings and Queens and Presidents, the Dalai Lama and Aga Khan, and interesting people of all nationalities ... including my accomplished wife! After we returned to Switzerland, we established a consultancy company called REMbrandT which focused on luxury hotels and continued to consult abroad. I maintained Board Director and Chairman positions with international Hotel

Groups including the Beau Rivage Palace Lausanne where I started my hotel career. For me, it has been truly memorable and rewarding career.

Most of you came from far away countries where the climate is different from what you will be experiencing here. Next month, the beautiful autumn weather will arrive followed by the first winter snow and you will experience first hand how the Swiss Alps prepare for the Winter Season.

You have chosen to obtain your hospitality education in a small and private school environment here in Lenk taught by professionals with proven track record in the international hotel industry, and I am convinced that you are in good hands. Especially for those students who came from so far away, I have been assured that the school will make sure that your favorite Asian dishes will be served in addition to the Swiss roesti and fondue.

This industry will give you plenty of exciting opportunities ... take them. There is no better reward than a satisfied and returning guest. Remember, a smile cost nothing but a smile is so important in this industry. The school will make every effort to arrange educational work experience, but it will be up to you to succeed. Study hard and the doors will open to the exciting world of hospitality.

In closing, I'd like to give you some advice for a successful hotel career. Be ambitious and obtain international experience with reputable hotels. The hotel industry is a business; therefore strengthen your education with a MBA degree and several languages. Plan your career in advance and choose a Mentor who can further your career. I had two Mentors, one in Europe and one in Asia. Network extensively and establish good connections. Maintain a visible and respectable public relations profile. Be diplomatic and be kind to people. Have fun and enjoy it. Marry a supportive partner or spouse, and if you wish an international career, plan to have children later in life. Throughout your career, remember that you have only ONE NAME and ONE REPUTATION. It is valuable and it will follow you, so always be credible and reputable.

I wish you every success and look forward to seeing you again at graduation. Good Luck.

Onno Poortier
www.REMbrandTpoortier.com