

"Throughout the organization at every level there are wonderful people who realize that we are on this journey together."

– CORRY OAKES



OWNER'S VOICE

WITH *31 Hilton hotels* AND A *\$1 billion investment* IN THE BRAND, CORRY OAKES AND OTO DEVELOPMENT BELIEVE IN THE POWER OF HAMPTON.

WHAT WERE YOUR EARLY YEARS LIKE?

I started right out of Wofford College with George Johnson's Blockbuster Video franchise in 1989. They began with three stores in Spartanburg, South Carolina, and stretched into 200 stores. I was hired on a Tuesday afternoon at 4 o'clock. I drove back to Atlanta, packed up my meager belongings, drove back up to Spartanburg, found an apartment, and worked until midnight on that first day on the job. It was a whirlwind, but it was a remarkable experience from that very first day.

At OTO Development, we want people to think like owners, talk like owners, and do the right

thing. We want them to be involved as a member of the community. We want that to stretch through the entire organization.

For me, that started with those early years with George, where I was a young, inexperienced person. When I successfully dealt with responsibilities, I was given more. I was also allowed to make mistakes. We have to give people the opportunity to grow and coach them up when mistakes happen. When we do that, people tend to be more engaged and care more about the result. It becomes more than just a job. I learned that early on.



His strength: finding hard-working, smart, collaborative people.

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TELL ME ABOUT YOUR LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT APPROACH.

In any business we think about, we start with: **A.** Pick the right business. **B.** Surround yourself with the right people. I would suggest that is our strength: finding hard-working, smart, collaborative people who are not too hung up on who gets the credit; people who will buy into dreams to make it happen. **C.** Have the right capital partner. We're lucky that our largest investor is the Johnson family. They've been through a whole lot of businesses and business cycles and provide real stability from a financial

standpoint. We don't have to make buy-and-sell decisions based on a fund life that is expiring.

We just had a conversation with a group of new sales team members from across the country as part of an orientation. We bring directors of sales and GMs into our corporate offices to meet everybody and learn about the resources we have to support them. We have to include one another and rely on one another because we are more skilled together than we are individually.



Team Members at the Hampton Washington, D.C./White House

HOW DO YOU HIRE?

Next to putting the hotel in the right spot, hiring is the most important decision we make. Will this person fit in our culture? Are they a team player? Do they have a bias towards action, or will they sit back and wait on someone to tell them what to do?

We grow people internally by giving them more and more responsibility. We've had tremendous career movement within our company. About 25% of people in our company who supervise someone else have been promoted from within.

WHAT DOES HAMPTONALITY MEAN TO YOU?

Hamptonality to me is creating an environment where people have fun, where things are professional without being stuffy, and where the environment works for a wide spectrum of the population.

We have to have a beautiful building, but it's about the team. Are you trying to find a reason to tell the customer yes? Are you trying to make a connection? That can be as small as a smile. It can be seeing a parent struggling with luggage and seeing a child crying and walking around the counter and offering the child a sucker or coloring book.

Hamptonality is finding a personal connection. When you see it, that's an amazing thing.

I participate in the daily huddles when I'm in our hotels. Recently at one, a lady walked over to me and said, "I just want you to know these people are remarkable." I asked her to tell me why she was staying with us. She got a sad look on her face, "I'm here to bury my mother. Yesterday at the funeral I looked up, and there's Candace from the front desk at my mother's funeral. I cannot tell you what that meant to me."

Hamptonality is about creating an environment where people feel like it's okay to do that sort of thing.

Travel today is so difficult on so many fronts. An hour ride in heavy traffic to the airport. You were nearly assaulted going through TSA. Your baggage was lost. The people working on the plane were surly. You had to pay extra for your bag. Your rental car smells like someone was living in it for a month. By the time you get to the hotel, you've had a helluva day. If we can be an oasis of calm and tranquility in the storm that is travel today, it gives people a real reason to pick us.

Team Members want to work in that kind of environment. They want to engage. They want to connect. In this world where we all walk around staring at our phones, finding those moments where you can make real connections is pretty rare.

WHAT IS IT LIKE DOING BUSINESS WITH HILTON?

Throughout the organization at every level there

are wonderful people who realize that we are on this journey together. They realize that if we as franchisees are not successful, they won't be successful. Hampton specifically has done a fabulous job keeping the brand relevant during massive changes to our industry.

At OTO Development, we have opened 71 hotels, and 31 of those are Hilton Brands. Twenty-three of the 31 are Hamptons. We are big believers. Our best returns and our best margins have been in the Hampton brand.

TELL ME ABOUT YOUR FIRST HOTEL

When [George Johnson, Todd Turner, and I] left Blockbuster, a week later we broke ground on the first Extended Stay in America. We didn't have a complete set of plans. While we were working on the plans, George's brother was grading the site. We were babes in the woods in the hotel

industry. Six months later, there were people in the parking lot waiting for us to open. We had a lot of demand generators for that product type with very little competition. We realized we had a big opportunity and eventually built the brand into 475 hotels.

Our thinking at Extended Stay was that we had to build a brand: *We've got to be in every major market, secondary market, and tertiary market.* We felt like we didn't have a brand until we were north of 200 hotels. With Hilton, we didn't have to do all that.



This Hampton Inn Washington, D.C./White House occupies the former Kiplinger Building. OTO saved much of its original details.