

# The rise of the old school general manager

 By [Guy Stehlik](#)

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There's been something fundamental missing in this last decade of hotel management: the unflashy, workaholic general managers, those who started their careers waiting tables, scrubbing kitchen counters and floors, climbing the ladder, slowly learning all of the necessary skills to eventually become the general manager.



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I grew up with this generation of lads and lasses, regarding them as true hoteliers. You would find them having a drink with a guest or welcoming a tour group, having a coffee with the PCO at the breakfast session, or even better, spoiling their entire team with a sampling of the latest menu.

In the past, the reputation of South African hotel general managers (and chefs) was so highly celebrated that they were quickly snapped up by international hotels and hotel groups, many moving to Dubai and Europe. Albeit a testament to the quality of our training in those days, this trend of moving away created a skills drain, resulting in a new generation of general managers who rose too quickly, skipped a few training steps, were over-promoted and found themselves at the helm of a hotel in a heartbeat as opposed to a lifetime, easily recognisable (when they emerge from behind their computer screen): young and sexy, well-dressed, flashy, living large, hotel 'bosses'.

At BON Hotels, we've decided to screen our GMs more thoroughly again. We are on a hunt-down for those old school grizzly GMs. While as we value the potential in our youth, too many shortcomings of these new-age general managers can be attributed to quick and easy promotions. I've encountered one too many young general managers who cannot calculate their Average Daily Rate (ADR) and Revenue Per Available Room (REVPAR). Yes, I understand that there are new burdens on today's general managers and administration demands have increased, but that should never be at the expense of a hotelier's ultimate judge – the guest.

Consider the last time you were a guest at a hotel. Did you meet the general manager? Did you even notice him walking around? I am reminded of wise words of one of my seniors during my training years: "If your guests are around, you should be around". Hotel management is not a 9 to 5 career, not in the least! General managers must be on the hotel floor during peak times: breakfast, check out, check in and dinner. An old-school hotelier wouldn't dream of clocking in at 9, filling his day with meetings, submerging himself in admin and packing up his desk at 5 to hit the gym. Surely, hotel wannabees know that they are signing up for a demanding lifestyle career?

Excellent hotel managers are those who are building amazing relationships with hotel guests, having a drink at the bar with loyal customers, making certain their staff are well cared for, and in return, their hotels are thriving. Yes, they may cost the hotel a bit more due to years of experience, but at BON Hotels, we bet our bottom dollar that the return on investment will be worth it.

## ABOUT GUY STEHLIK

Guy Stehlik is the CEO and founder of BON Hotels and Director of BON Hotels International West Africa. Having vast experience in all aspects of Hotel Management as well as having owned his own hotels, Guy created BON Hotels as an "owner-staff-community-guest" centric company to herald in and define an exciting new era in hotel management.

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