



FEATURES

Best Places to Work in the Meetings Industry

by Sarah J.F. Braley and Lisa A. Grimaldi | April 01, 2016

Commune Hotels & Resorts

Commune CEO Niki Leondakis has appeared in M&C's pages before. For our 2012 "Best Places to Work" story, she was featured as president and COO of honoree Kimpton Hotels & Restaurants. She left Kimpton in November that year, however, to become the top executive for San Francisco-based Commune Hotels & Resorts, which was established in October 2011, following the merger of Thompson Hotels and Joie de Vivre Hotels.



Community service:
Commune Hotels & Resorts CEO
Niki Leondakis (top) helps lead
an art project at a local orphanage
during a senior executive meeting
in Atilla Seminyak, Bali. Below, a yoga
session prior to the company's recent
leadership summit in Miami.

"There was a lot to do, because Commune was the result of a merger of two boutique hotel companies that had their own distinct cultures," Leondakis says. "My first order of business was to focus on defining the new company culture. To me, that's an essential part of the overall business strategy. A healthy and engaging culture, where the team members are happiest, is one of the vehicles for achieving your business goals."

Leondakis strove to create a sense of purpose at the company from the bottom up, holding many meetings and asking employees to define what they saw as Commune's greater mission. "We came up with something like 77 core values, and we distilled it down into themes," she says.

Ten tenets were identified, and now the company of 4,600 people -- 65 in San Francisco, 22 in the New York regional office, and the rest at 45 hotels and one ship -- runs on the Spirit of Commune values: celebrate individuality; be thoughtful; listen; laugh often; live with the heart of an innkeeper; be humble; continuously improve; seek balance; cherish our resources; and follow your angel, ignore your devil.

A number of company initiatives aim to bring these values to life. "Wellness Wednesdays" have been instituted in San Francisco, featuring a yoga teacher who also exercises a sense of humor. "On nice days we hold class on the roof deck," says Leondakis. "It brings us together and gives people who have tense jobs some moments of relief." Likewise, many Commune hotels host staff fitness classes and morning warm-up/stretching sessions.

Leondakis and her charges are starting to go through the culture-defining process once again, as the company processes its recent merger with Destination Hotels, marrying Commune's more urban oases with Destination's resorts. "We're going to go through a very similar process to what we did when I came to Commune, harnessing the ideas of all employees across both companies," says the CEO. By the summer, she expects the combined entity to have a new name, with a new set of core values in place by early fall.

One tenet will not change: "People matter most," affirms Leondakis. "If you just try to manage results, it's not going to be sustainable. Involve the people equation in all business decisions."