

# Hotel Management's 2026 Influential Women in Hospitality

By **Esther Hertzfeld** · Apr 1, 2026 08:00am

Hotel Management is proud to present the 2026 Influential Women in Hospitality, a renowned group of executives, operators, owners, developers and innovators whose leadership is reshaping the future of the hotel sector. These honorees represent the highest levels of achievement across the hotel space — from operations and finance to design, investment, technology and brand strategy. Each woman recognized this year has not only excelled in her role, but has helped elevate the industry through mentorship, innovation, community impact and an unwavering commitment to strengthening hospitality.



Sara Masterson

**Sara Masterson, president, Olympia  
Hospitality**

## **Help us understand on what sets you apart from other women in the industry—what has been your biggest accomplishment thus far in your career?**

What sets me apart isn't a specific experience or skill, but rather my focus on the "art" of hospitality culture as a measurable business strategy. I have built my career on the belief that a hotel's financial success is a direct byproduct of how deeply our associates feel connected to the organization's goals and their respective property's identity. We don't just manage assets; we work to ensure that every hotel – from a historic boutique hotel to a modern campus property – has a distinct and authentic personality that resonates with its specific community and is understood and embraced by its team.

As for my biggest accomplishment, it is really supporting a collective of efforts leading Olympia Hospitality through the transition to its current scale while maintaining a "people-first" and high touch culture. In an industry that can sometimes feel like a numbers game, my win has been proving that you can scale a management company without losing the intimacy, connection and touch that makes hospitality such a wonderful profession.

## **What was your first hospitality job? What sparked your interest in the industry?**

Growing up on Cape Cod, working in hospitality is practically a rite of passage. My first jobs in high school were at local resorts and restaurants, in a variety of line positions from housekeeping to server and front desk. I was initially drawn to the speed and energy of it. Every day was different – like its own puzzle to solve. I also loved being surrounded by a diversity of people – guests from all over the world and colleagues with completely different backgrounds – all working toward a shared experience.

That is how I started. But what kept me in the industry over the long-term was realizing that this business sits at an intersection of real estate, finance, operations, and human connection. We are managing significant investments and assets while simultaneously creating experiences through people.

## **Please describe what you do in a typical work day. What does your job involve?**

One of the great things about this business is that very little about each workday is the same. Each day changes but is anchored by a blend of strategy, culture-building and performance oversight. A day might include revenue and operating reviews, conversations and priority-setting with property-based and above-property teams, capital planning discussions, owner engagement, and long-term growth strategy work. I spend a great deal of time ensuring alignment – between ownership objectives, brand standards where applicable, hotel identity and property performance.

The role is about managing both the art and science of hospitality. The science is financial discipline, revenue strategy and operational rigor. While the art is culture – making sure our teams feel supported and empowered, and ensuring that whether a hotel is independent or branded, it has a strong sense of place and purpose.

## **Can you share insight about being a woman in the industry—what would you say have been some of your challenges and wins?**

Early in my career, it was common for me to be the only woman in the room, especially as I moved into above-property leadership roles. That dynamic can be intimidating, requiring confidence and preparation. I learned quickly that credibility is earned through listening and demonstrating results. This, combined with the 24/7 nature of hotel operations, can be demanding. The “always on” mentality can feel limitless, especially in leadership roles.

At the same time, I have found that being a woman in hospitality can be a meaningful advantage. Women make up more than half of the hospitality workforce and influence the majority of travel decisions across segments. I can lead with a genuine empathy for our largest associate and guest constituents.

A major win since I started in the industry has been seeing this space evolve to a point where leadership teams look more like the people they serve, allowing for more sympathetic and effective management.

## **What are the skills you utilize most in your role?**

Presence is one of the most important skills I use. It's about being fully attentive in a meeting, a property walk, or a conversation with a team member. It's also about having the emotional awareness to pick up on what is unsaid or unseen. In a portfolio our size, presence signals commitment.

Empathy and relationship-building are equally critical. Transitioning from "management" to "leadership" meant recognizing that performance ultimately flows from people. Financial acumen and revenue strategy matter – and I rely on them daily – but culture drives sustained results.

Curiosity is another key skill. Whether we're operating a franchise-affiliated hotel within brand standards, shaping the identity of an independent property, or leaning into evolving technology landscapes, staying curious keeps us relevant, adaptable and focused on continuous improvement.

## **What is something that has surprised you as you've served in your current role?**

I'm still surprised by human behavior – in the best way. Just when you think you've seen every operational scenario, something new emerges. That unpredictability keeps me humble and engaged.

I've also been struck by how much industry norms continue to evolve, and the increasing pace of that change – from technology adoption to changing perspectives on tenure and career. Where stability, or even predictability, was once the hallmark of success, agility is increasingly valued. That shift reinforces the importance of building organizations that can adapt without losing their core identity.

## **What advice would you share with a woman new to the hospitality industry?**

First, learn the fundamentals. Understand how a hotel and restaurant make money. Learn to read a P&L and how to flex. Spend real time in operations. Credibility in this space is built on competence from doing the work.

Second, give yourself space to explore. Hospitality offers exposure to marketing, development, revenue management, asset management, operations, finance and more. You don't need to decide your ultimate path immediately. And in fact, exposure across disciplines will open more opportunities for growth.

Third, invest in relationships. This industry runs on trust and connection. As responsibilities grow, resist the temptation to let your work become purely transactional, especially with your teams.

And finally, try not to think of work and life as opposing forces that need to remain balanced. Hospitality is a relationship business and many of the qualities that make someone effective at work – empathy, resilience, presence – are the qualities that matter at home. For me, it's less about dividing time evenly and more about being present wherever I am. Integration, rather than separation, has felt more realistic and more sustainable.

<https://www.hotelmanagement.net/operate/hotel-managements-2026-influential-women-hospitality>