

APRIL 2025

# Attentiveness, role models and Breakfast at Tiffany's

Interview by Timo Albiez  
with Janine Fink



Janine Fink (left), has worked in various 5-star hotels around the world and is now a self-employed Service Excellence Design Expert & Trainer.

**Dear Janine, thank you for taking the time. Let's start off easy:**

**Who are you actually?**

The question is not that simple! I'm Janine Fink, Swiss, mother of two and - a real hotel kid. I did my apprenticeship at the Savoy when I was 16 and then worked in 15 hotels around the world. I've seen everything from reception to housekeeping and spa management. Today, I help companies with training, coaching and consulting on all aspects of service excellence and bring my experience directly to the grass roots. For me, it's not just about processes or standards - it's about attitude, enthusiasm and genuine encounters.

**Immersed in hotel life at 16 - what drew you into it?**

In actual fact, it was my father! He used to rent a hotel in Arosa for summer conferences. The atmosphere just thrilled me straight away. Welcoming people, making their day a little better - I found that fascinating even as a child. This feeling of being welcome and being able to contribute something positive has never left me.

**And what was it like starting your career at the Savoy?**

I started as a commercial employee. Lots of office work, bookings, phone calls. But I was always close to the guests. Right from the start, I wanted to understand what was needed in the background to ensure that everything ran smoothly at the front desk. It was an exciting time because I learnt how important every single cog is in the big

clockwork of a hotel. No glamour, but a solid foundation for everything that followed.

**After that, you mean the big wide world?**

Well, at first it meant: «No career without French!» So I went to the south of France as a «stagiaire» - 16 hours a day cleaning rooms, room service, everything included - and all for free. Then on to Geneva, then Paris. There I ended up at Four Seasons - the accolade for hoteliers. Four Seasons had a huge impact on me: the attention to detail, the perfection, but also the incredible appreciation for every single employee. It was there that I laid the foundations on which I still stand today.

**And what came after your experiences in Paris?**

I was on the transfer list at Four Seasons: A new country, a new hotel every two years. Paris, Rome, Chicago - pure adventure. But there was also a rule: you were allowed to say «no» twice. The third time would have meant: Pack your bags! I started as a receptionist and worked my way up to various management positions. Every new place was a challenge and a huge learning opportunity. It was exhausting, but I loved every minute of it.

**Where did you like it the most?**

In terms of lifestyle, it is definitely Rome. This lightness, the dolce vita - it was a dream! You can just feel that life is being celebrated in Rome. Professionally, however, I learnt the most in Paris: attention to detail, absolute perfection in eve-

ry move. The French combine an almost strict precision with an incredible elegance - that has left a deep impression on me and still hold a firm place in my inner standard today. When it comes to leadership, my most formative experience was at The Dolder Grand in Zurich. Over the course of 15 years, I had the privilege of working under three General Managers - each of whom inspired me in their own unique way: one through his attention to detail, another with his visionary thinking, and the third by showing me the importance of teamwork and enjoying what you do.

**You are passionate about Four Seasons. What was or is special about this endeavour?**

Quite clearly: people were at the centre. Whether steward or general manager - everyone was respected and seen. This sense of belonging was incredibly strong. When you know that your boss is behind you, you automatically have more courage and passion in your service. And this feeling that you are not just a number, but part of something big, carries you through stressful days.

**Today you work independently as a service excellence coach, among other things. How do you experience the different companies in terms of service?**

Sometimes a little sobering. Many see service excellence as a marketing term and not as a practised attitude. There is often a lack of genuine interest in customers and employees. The customer can

immediately sense whether someone really enjoys service or is simply reeling off a script. When I visit companies, I often see that processes are optimised, but the heart is missing. And service excellence only works when heart and mind work together.

**Can you really learn this attitude?**

Yes, but it's hard work. The most important ingredients: Role models who exemplify service excellence and your own sense of achievement. When someone realises that genuine commitment not only brings joy to others, but also to themselves, their mindset changes. I work a lot with practical examples and let people consciously experience their own positive service moments. The point is that service is not something that I «do», but something that I «am».

**But this also includes dealing with difficult situations and complaints. What was your most challenging experience in this regard?**

I've experienced so many challenging situations that it's hard to pick just one. From closing down entire cinemas and boutiques in Paris, to flying in camels for a very upset sheikh (after customs refused to let his own through), all the way to a guest who was convinced there were ghosts in her wardrobe. Probably the most bizarre was the streaker on the rooftop of a luxury hotel, unknowingly giving the couple in the bridal suite a private - though not exactly appreciated - performance. By now, complaints and critical guests have actually become one of my favourite to-

pics – I even give training sessions on it. I love turning unhappy guests into fans of the very brands they originally complained about. In high-stress situations, real empathy is everything. You can have a hundred processes in place – but if you forget to be human, you lose.

**What can other sectors learn from the hotel industry?**

It's often the basics that are lost: Standing up when a person comes in. Making eye contact. Do not interrupt ongoing conversations. Listening before answering. We learn this right from the start. Many other industries underestimate how much these small gestures make a difference. It's not just about what you say, but how you make someone feel. The hotel industry thrives on this - and many companies could learn from this way of thinking.

**Your simplest service life hack?**

Full attention! Really stay with the person in front of you - no multitasking, no mind-jumping. This saves time and crea-

tes genuine appreciation. Especially in today's world, where constant distraction is the norm, conscious presence works like magic. And it doesn't just make the other person happy - it makes you happy too.

**Let's move on to the obligatory «Blue Paper questionnaire». What cocktail would you be?**

A Bellini. Sweet, sparkling, sunny - puts you in a good mood and always works. Like a little holiday in a glass!

**And if you were a party theme?**

«Breakfast at Tiffany's». With lots of pearls, evening gowns and champagne bottles in ice buckets - we really did have parties like that when I lived in Paris. Stylish and a bit crazy!

**And finally: What would the title of your book be?**

«How service excellence makes you happy». Honestly, it's not just a profession, it's a way of life. And if you understand that, you have a little recipe for happiness in your hand.

There's no better way to put it. Thank you, dear Janine! And if you would like to find out more about Janine's training and coaching sessions, dear readers:

**Janine Fink**

janine@finkdifferent.net