

Leading a New Era Podcast

Episode 1: Younes Atallah

David: Welcome to the first episode of Leading a New Era, the podcast from IHG that takes you behind the doors of the world's most prestigious hotels to uncover real stories of growth, belonging and success. I'm your host, David Littlewood, from the Talent Acquisition team here at IHG. In each episode, we sit down with a different general manager from IHG's luxury and lifestyle portfolio to hear first-hand what it takes to lead the high-stakes world of luxury hospitality. From career-defining moments to the unexpected challenges that keep them on their toes, our guests share their experiences that have shaped them both personally and professionally. Each week, I'm also joined by my co-host, Eunice Clements-Tweedie, our VP of Global Talent Acquisition and Strategic HR Partnering. Looking forward to catching up. How are you?

Eunice: Hi, David. I'm so good. Thank you. I cannot express my excitement at our coming podcast series, spending time with you, getting under the hood of some of our beautiful brands in the IHG portfolio, and of course, hearing more from our incredible luxury and lifestyle general managers.

David: Our first guest is Younes Atallah, General Manager at Regent Santa Monica Beach, California, with over 20 years leading luxury hotels across North America from Maui to Vancouver, and now California. Younes is known for combining strategic vision with a people-first mindset. He's built record-breaking teams, launched award-winning initiatives, and has a knack for turning big-picture ideas into real-world success. Whether he's overseeing a 750-room resort or fostering a vibrant workplace culture, Younes leads with empathy, energy, and a people-first approach to everything he does. He's all about bold ideas, brilliant teams, and bringing the best out of people. Let's get into it.

Eunice: Brilliant. Let's go.

David: Younes, how are things treating you in Santa Monica?

Younes: Well, good morning. It's just about 8:30 in the morning here, and the sun is just peeking over the hill behind me, and it will probably start hitting the ocean that I'm staring at. So, things are pretty good. It's a pretty good start to the day.

David: Thank you, Younes. Eunice and Younes, I feel like someone's tried to stitch me up here with a tongue twister, but we greatly appreciate you getting up at this early hour to speak to us today. Hopefully it wasn't too early, but it's great to see you and have you with us. Just before we get into the nitty-gritty of your career, we'd just

like to go through an early round of Early CheckIn. I'll kind of warm up quick fire this or that questions where no overthinking allowed. Do you want to kick things off?

Eunice: Yeah, sure. I think Younes is going to be really good at this. I just have this feeling. So, kicking off...

Younes: I'll do my best.

Eunice: Buffet or À la carte ?

Younes: Oh, À la carte.

Eunice: 100%.

David: Night in or night out?

Younes: Oh, it depends. But I'm going to go with night in these days.

Eunice: That's surprising. Snow or sun?

Younes: Oh, God. Sun. All day long.

David: Classic luxury or modern minimalism?

Younes: Or modern luxury. That's the Regent way.

Eunice: Oh, very nice. I like that. Do you see what he did then?

David: I do, I do.

Eunice: Very smart.

David: Sweet or savoury?

Younes: Savoury. I've never met a bag of chips that I didn't like.

David: Love that.

Eunice: Good answer. Spreadsheets or mood boards?

Younes: Spreadsheets.

Eunice: That surprises me. We'll get more into that later.

David: Club classics or classical music?

Younes: Club classics.

Eunice: Oh, I can feel the vibe.

David: We need to go to the club.

Eunice: We need to go. Okay. Careful how you answer. Podcasts or audiobooks?

Younes: Podcasts.

Eunice: Oh, he has the right answer.

Younes: Yeah.

David: There's quite a lot to unpack there, isn't there? What does a night in for you look like?

Younes: It's probably ordering in and hanging out on a couch and watching some good shows. There's a lot of good TV out there and I'm a little bit of a TV junkie, I'm not going to lie. And I have a really comfortable couch at home, so.

David: The club classics that you spoke to, what sort of decade are you listening to most?

Younes: Probably the '80s, yeah.

David: Great era.

Younes: I'm the youngest of four by a long shot and my sisters were all '80s kids. So, even in my younger years, I listened to a lot of that. Not by choice.

Eunice: So, you've got three older sisters?

Younes: I do.

David: Do your sisters have an influence over your sock and shoe collection? I know you've got a lot.

Younes: Oh my God. No, I developed that habit on my own. Did I tell you about my shoe and sock collection? How did you know?

David: You did, yeah, you mentioned it, yeah. So, Younes, let's talk a little bit about your journey. You've worked your way up in the luxury world of hospitality. How did it all start for you?

Younes: Honestly, I kind of fell into it. I always knew that I wanted to work in hotels. I grew up in a travel family. My dad, my parents owned a brick-and-mortar travel agency in Amman, Jordan. And for the very, very, very, very long time, and still to this day, the InterContinental Amman, the Jordan InterContinental was like the most iconic hotel in the city and still carries a lot of weight. I mean, it's been around forever and such a lovely property. Anyway, we, as a rite of passage, all the kids had to work in the travel agency during the summers and that sort of thing. And it stuck with really two of the four of us. But I knew I always wanted to work in hotels. And I ended up going to university in Florida and doing a hospitality programme at the University of Central Florida in Orlando, which is like the Mecca of travel and tourism. And I interviewed with a slew of companies. That's just kind of how it

happened. I wasn't necessarily seeking out to be in a luxury environment, and after 10 years, I just didn't know anything else. So, it really resonated and aligned very much with my values and the way that I view hospitality.

Eunice: So it's really interesting what you say and how I reflect on your past shapes your future. General managers are not born, and you know this, being one of them. And I just wonder, if you look back in your past, what has been your biggest learning curve that has shaped you to become the general manager you are today?

Younes: Yeah. One of the things that has worked for me and earlier on was the encouragement to say yes to things that maybe you would not have thought of or, and really kind of trust the process of mentors and leaders within the hotel, within your organisation. I very distinctly remember, you know, I started out assistant front office manager, you know, great, great entry level leadership role. And maybe 18 months in, it was recommended, "recommended," that I go to the laundry. When you're a young, fresh out of university person, I mean let's be honest, universities are great and formal educations are great but a lot of the academics will kind of pump you up to be a GM within five years. And in most cases, that's not the case. Sometimes it is, but... So to go to the laundry was very daunting. And I just said yes. And then I said yes again to other things. And then I said yes to a move to Houston. And then I said yes to this, that and the other. And so, I think that my biggest learning curve was two things. One is say yes and trust the process, and the other thing is you're going to make a lot of mistakes throughout your career and it's really a blessing to surround yourself with those who can give you the feedback and support you, but then uplift you. And those can be bosses and those can be former bosses. And, I mean, to this day, I have a few of my former GMs and hotel managers and directors and peers, directors of sales and marketing, et cetera, on speed dial.

Eunice: I love that, the yes advice. That's so powerful. I wonder what your biggest yes has been to date in your life. If you're happy to share that.

Younes: My biggest yes was a little bit out of necessity, but also a little bit of a leap of faith. It was actually this, the move to California. I moved to California in July of 2020. And I'll give you one second to let that sink in.

Eunice: Wow. What a year. Made the move.

Younes: Yeah. Exactly. And I say it was out of necessity because we were in an industry that was obviously very shaken up during the pandemic. I was in a great role, just a great, great spot. And Scottsdale, Arizona is just beautiful for anyone who hasn't been there. I highly recommend it. It's a stunning place to be. The pandemic happened and I got a call about this opportunity at a different company out here in Santa Monica, in this building, it was under a different flag. And I said yes,

and picked up and moved out here, sold a house during the pandemic, bought a house during the pandemic.

Eunice: Wow.

Younes: It was a very odd time, and I said yes, and that I'm glad I did. I wouldn't have it any other way.

Eunice: Did you say Scottsdale? Is that the Arizona Scottsdale?

Younes: Yes.

Eunice: Oh, I've been there. I mean, it's red dust, it's raw, it's dry, it's desert, and you're by the sea. So, it's very, very different.

Younes: It's very different. I think, you know, not to keep harping on the topic, but all these yeses, as David's kind of alluded to in the intro, all these yeses really allowed me to not only live in really great places on a personal level, but also to experience different type of properties, you know, in Florida, that's an east coast, US east coast beach resort. I worked in a corporate up and down hotel in downtown Houston. I worked at a ski resort in Whistler, British Columbia, a Hawaii resort, a golf resort. So, it really kind of gives you that ability to be around it and eventually say, you know what, this is kind of what I like, out of all of this, this is where I want to be, and this is where I feel most at home.

Eunice: Have you ever given much thought to where you get your courage from to enable you to say to all these very big, diverse yeses? Have you ever thought about that?

Younes: I think a little bit. You know, maybe not so deliberately, now that you kind of ask it, so on point. There's a keynote speaker, she's written a book and her name escapes me but it'll come to me, Michelle something. But she talks about her fears, conquering her top 100 fears. And one of the things that she says, both in the book and while speaking, is we're naturally wired to say what's the worst that can happen. That's what you do every day. What's the worst that can happen? And so how do you flip that script and say, what's the best that can happen? And I think that that's a pretty great shift in paradigm to – and honestly like I've been practising it these days to say, well, what's the best that can happen, and just kind of focus on that. It's that half glass full thing.

David: That's a pretty powerful platform to start your day with, I would say. And it sounds like there's so much texture in the experience that you've had and that element of saying yes, and the risk-taking that comes with that. It's quite inspiring where that can lead to with some of the stories that we're going to hear. But I also wanted to ask, you mentioned around your network and your mentors, is there any advice that they've given you that's particularly stuck with you?

Younes: I would say one of the biggest pieces of advice came from a mentor who's become a friend to this day, and it's think with your head and your heart. I think a lot of times, we become so pragmatic and so process driven and so tick box driven that we forget that we're really in the business of emotions. You know, we're not putting people on the moon, it's a feeling, what we do is a feeling. And so, it's this concept of think with your head and your heart.

Eunice: That's really great advice. Just reflecting on what you say, I think leadership is a privileged position to be in. How do you go about creating those opportunities, those yes moments for your team and those around you in the role that you play today? Have you given that much thought, or do you have any examples you can share with us?

Younes: I'm personally very passionate about it and I think a lot of my peers are passionate about it, I think this is why we do what we do, is developing that next generation. Because to your point from earlier, no one is born a GM and someone took a chance on us, on me, on your next guest, at some point, and you know what? We weren't ready. No one's ever ready for the next step. And so, it's kind of giving that encouragement to say, yeah, you're never going to be ready. I remember having this conversation with someone. They were like, you know, I had an opportunity to move, this was my move from Hawaii, from Maui to Scottsdale. And I said, oh my God, do you think I'm really ready for a 750-room hotel to be a hotel manager at a property like that? And he said, it was my regional vice president at the time, he said, you're never ready. No one will ever be ready for the next thing, but you've just got to jump in. And that gave me the safety to go for that, and I hope that I can pass that along to a lot of our young leaders and supervisors and so on.

Eunice: Powerful advice, isn't it, David?

David: Just jump in. I love that.

Eunice: Me too.

David: Okay. We're going to move on to our Spotlight – I love this section – and we're going to shift from you, Younes, to your hotel, giving our listeners a peek inside the curtains and chat about what you love most about the Regent Santa Monica and the secret corners and standout features that live within it.

Eunice: We have incredible brands, portfolio properties at IHG. You have run and managed many of them successfully. And I've been fortunate to stay in a few of them as well in the role that I play. I just wonder what makes your property, your hotel, your team so special and different from other properties in the area?

Younes: It's a loaded question. There's a lot here so I'll try to unpack it a little bit. From a physical perspective, which is the easy start to this answer, from a physical

perspective, our property is quite iconic in the destination in Santa Monica. We're a pretty significantly sized building right on Ocean Avenue, and so you really can't miss us. I think that that's one thing. We've also been part of the fabric of this community for over 30 years, and there's a lot of love from our local community for the hotel, for the property. Santa Monica is a unique city. It's 8.3 square miles. And I'm sorry, I don't know what that is in kilometres off the top of my head, but it's 8.3 square miles surrounded on three sides by our big brother Los Angeles and the ocean on the other side. However, the community within this area is extremely close knit and if we don't have the support of that community, you're pretty much guaranteed some headwinds. So, we're very lucky in the sense that we've been a big part of that. The other thing is because the building had been standing under, like I mentioned earlier, different names, now Regent, obviously, and everyone says this and they should say this because it's the absolute truth, the building is the building and without the people, it's just a pretty building or what have you. And so, one of the things that I think is incredibly unique is during the transformation of the resort from the previous flag into what it is today as the Regent Santa Monica Beach, 270 employees, colleagues returned to work for IHG and for the Regent Santa Monica Beach. And that is absolutely phenomenal. And, you know, you might say, well, 270 out of how many Younes? And it was 270 out of 310. So, we had basically 40 employees who did not return, and 30 of them retired. So really, we had 10 people who technically didn't return. Which really just speaks, I think, to the pride that our colleagues have, the belief in what Regent as a brand is and what IHG is about. Other unique features is, we have the largest size hotel rooms, guest rooms anywhere in this market. Our entry-level rooms are 720 square feet. And I do know what that is, it's 67 square metres. That's the entry-level size of our rooms.

Eunice: That's enormous. That's the size of a London flat.

Younes: Yeah, exactly.

David: You've done your research for this podcast, Younes. Thank you. And I know architecture is something that's close to your heart. I just wanted to know, what is your favourite thing about your hotel?

Younes: My favourite thing about our hotel. I think the feeling that you get when you walk into the lobby is very special. We have an atrium style lobby that goes four storeys high and with a glass rooftop. So it lets a lot of natural light in. And the way that the designers of our restaurant and public spaces wanted you to feel as if you were stepping into a luxury private Mediterranean yacht, and all the processes are sort of tucked away. So, the front desk is there, but it's not right there front and centre, and the concierge and, you know, some of these more transactional experiences, they exist and they're very important. They're beautifully appointed, but they're not like right there in your face.

David: By the way you described that, would you mind if I just close my eyes and you describe that again so I can pretend I'm there?

Eunice: I mean, I'm practically there.

David: We talked a little bit about culture at your hotel. And I know previously a word that you've used to describe it is caring. I just wanted to know a little bit more. What does that look like day to day within the Regent?

Younes: Here we have what we call our four pillars and our four pillars are taking care of the guests, first and foremost, that's why we exist. Taking care of each other, in whatever capacity, if it's helping on the floor, if it's someone's going through a rough day, if it's encouragement, whatever that might be. Doing the right thing, which we talked about a little bit earlier. And the last one is, we literally just say, own it. And that kind of speaks to, there is no, 'well, this is not my job', kind of attitude, or someone comes and I guess needs something or anything comes across your radar, across your desk, so to speak, you just own it. You don't pass it along. And if you're not able to do it because it's something technical or what have you, you'll still own it and make sure that it gets completed or it gets to the right person who will get it completed. And so, when we talk about caring, I really believe that when you put those things together and when you lead with your heart, your head and your heart, then you naturally end up showing care for people. We're not robots. Everyone has good days and bad days. We come and we're on stage, and then we go home and there's kids and homework and traffic and so many components that for these eight hours that we're on stage sort of thing, you know, we have to spend them looking after each other.

David: I love that, own it. No matter what level role, everyone is encouraged to take accountability. Which I guess is a roadmap into leadership. You also mentioned the word fun. And I know that your team have described you as fun, firm, and methodical. I just wanted to know, in terms of your leadership, which one do you lean into most out of those three?

Younes: Oh, fun, firm, and methodical. It definitely depends on the day and the situation.

David: That's fair.

Younes: Some days are firmer than others. But I think, I believe that I probably lean into the fun more than anything, especially sort of in a stabilised environment, if you will. I think you can be all of those things. I think, you know, again, in our roles as general managers, we have to do all of these things. You have to be methodical when you're sitting in a strategy meeting with your revenue and marketing and sales teams. You have to be firm when you're talking about things like, quite frankly, example from this week, grooming standards. Right? We have to be firm about our

grooming standards and about our look book. And we represent a brand that is very specific in how we present ourselves. And we have a beautiful uniform programme. So, everything has to kind of come together. And so, you have to be firm about these things. But I think I'm leaning into fun, and I just want to kind of, you know, just kind of stop there for a second because fun doesn't necessarily mean clowning around. Although, I mean, I kind of do sometimes, I'm not gonna lie, but like it doesn't necessarily mean that, or it doesn't necessarily mean just throwing a great party, which again, we do, but it means that, you know, to me, it's kind of creating that emotional security for your colleagues, for your team to really do their best.

David: I guess when we think about methodical, I guess we can go back to those spreadsheets we talked about earlier. I imagine that's when you channel that side of your personality, Younes.

Younes: Yeah.

Eunice: I like your dynamic reference to being in the hotel is like being on theatre, being front of stage, no matter how chaotic backstage might be, you need to be well presented, groomed, be fun, show your best forward to the guests. So, I've not heard that analogy before, so I might have to steal it. That was a very cool way to describe things.

David: Okay. It's time for our final quick-fire round that we like to call CheckIn and CheckOut. Here's how it works. I will name a typical hotel GM activity and all you'll need to do is say check-in if you love it or check-out if you would perhaps...

Younes: Oh my gosh. Is my boss going to be listening to this?

Eunice: Potentially, yes. So, be wise.

Younes: Very good.

David: Cool. So, let's play CheckIn, CheckOut. Here we go.

Eunice: Let's go. So, early morning lobby walkthroughs.

Younes: Check-out.

David: Being CC'd on every email.

Younes: Oh, check-out.

Eunice: Good response. Weekly revenue meetings.

Younes: Check-in.

Eunice: Nice.

Younes: Yeah.

Eunice: Menu tasting with your head chef.

Younes: I'm going to check into that one.

Eunice: Oh, me too. I'll be with you.

Younes: Yeah, yeah.

Eunice: Perfect.

David: Guest complaints that turn into glowing reviews.

Younes: Check-in. Another happy customer.

Eunice: Yeah, I agree. I think you're gonna be good at this one. Public speaking at events.

Younes: Check-in.

Eunice: Attending design meetings for renovations.

Younes: Check-in.

Eunice: Nice.

Younes: Yeah.

David: I feel like you would lean heavily into that one.

Eunice: And be good at it.

Younes: I do love that. I mean, the transformation, it was one of the – one of the funnest parts was, you know, this was again a very unique project because we were an existing hotel and I was lucky enough to stay on the project, and so to be part of those conversations was pretty cool.

David: Fantastic. Getting stopped in the corridor for a quick chat.

Younes: Check-out.

Eunice: Check-out. You surprised me, Younes. Okay.

David: He's a busy man.

Eunice: Busy man. There we go.

Younes: You know, I can sometimes be like person on a mission, and I can juggle a lot of things at once but interruptions are not generally my favourite.

Eunice: Okay. That's fair enough with context. I get that. Okay. How about overseeing holiday decorations?

Younes: Oh, check-in. Yeah.

Eunice: Yes! Love that.

David: Thought you might say that for that one.

Younes: I love Christmas.

Eunice: And Halloween.

Younes: And Halloween. All of it.

David: Last-minute owner visits.

Younes: Last-minute owner visits?

David: Yeah.

Eunice: Careful here.

Younes: Here's what I will say. I think it's extremely situational. I love my owner, and so, I'm going to say check-in. Because, yeah, I have a great owner so I would say check-in.

Eunice: Writing handwritten guest notes.

Younes: Okay. So, I'm going to check-in because I think it's so lovely, but I have terrible handwriting, it's like chicken. Every time I read a note, you know, I give it to in room dining and say, I'm really sorry for the guest who has to read this. But I think it's very lovely, and I do love it.

Eunice: And I have to say, having stayed at many of our hotels and have received many handwritten notes from our GM, they are gorgeous and welcoming and make me feel very special. Even if you don't write them yourself, they go down super well.

Younes: Yeah.

David: You survived our check-in round. Thank you so much for checking in, checking out with us. I feel like we learned quite a lot there in the last five minutes.

Eunice: We did. Yeah. For sure.

David: I wanted to ask you, I always find this question interesting, just outside of work, how do you kind of find space for your wellbeing, your passions, and how do you encourage your team to do the same?

Younes: I think we can all be a little bit better about how we go about it. I will say, fortunately, because of our location, even taking a 15-minute walk and, you know, getting a waft of this ocean breeze really resets the day. You know, you asked earlier about kind of spaces around the property, we actually have this little nook, it's one of our personal havens, which again is a Regent brand hallmark, is how do you create these kind of intimate personal havens for guests and for colleagues? And

so, we have this little personal haven that's on the sixth floor, just off of the elevator landing, but looks directly at the ocean. And you just sit there for five minutes and it does an amazing reset. You asked earlier, early bird or night owl, I mean that alarm clock, you know, you again were very gracious about the early start, I'd been up for probably three hours, had gone to the gym.

David: Did you do a boot camp?

Younes: I did not. How do you know all of these things?

David: I do my research.

Younes: I did not do a boot camp today. I did yesterday, but I actually worked out at the hotel this morning. We're very lucky, we have a lovely gym. And that kind of is a good segue about, you know, to how do you encourage our team. You know, we have a couple of things that we do here. All of our leaders do actually have access to the fitness centre of the hotel with compliments. Again, another Regent brand hallmark, see what I did there. With compliments as a benefit for being a manager or leader of the hotel, as long as it doesn't interfere with the guest experience, et cetera. We also have a colleague led committee. They're called the Uplifters. So Regent's, if you don't know, Regent's mantra and ethos is all about enabling uplifting experiences. And so the Uplifters, that's the role that they play from a colleague experience. And one of the things that they do is they do have every day a little wellness moment. And it could be a 15-minute walk, again, on the beach. It could be a morning stretch. It could be a meditation. And it's calendarized and they're pretty serious about it, and we have a lot of colleagues who have really become very, very engaged in that and they'll plan their breaks around it and so on.

Eunice: I wonder, being such an interesting leader with so much experience, if you often consider what the future of luxury hospitality might look like. Do you see any trends emerging? Could you maybe look into the future and predict some things we might experience either as guests or hoteliers? What's your thoughts around that topic?

Younes: I truly believe we all need to be paying a lot of attention to AI. It's a thing. Remember when like the internet was a thing in the mid '90s and it stuck? I think AI is something that we really need to be paying attention to, and I hope that the hotel community, IHG obviously specifically, but the hotel community in general doesn't just wait and see because we do a really good job when it comes to that, we just wait and see and then all of a sudden, we're a little bit behind the eight ball. So, I think that that's something that's going to hugely influence hospitality in general, including luxury hospitality. I don't think it's going to replace people. The role of the concierge is very, very much alive in luxury hospitality. So, I think that that's one thing that will probably shape the guest experience. The other thing, specifically to luxury

hospitality, the thing we should be paying attention to, it's been a trend and I think it will continue to grow as such, is experiences. Programming, experiences, what can I do? How am I entrenched in the destination and its community? Luxury travellers especially want to have, I think, a sense of belonging, whether they're in a destination for two days or two weeks. And so, it becomes almost our responsibility to create that for them, again, whether it's through internal hotel programming or... I mean, I'll give you one example. Santa Monica has probably one of the best farmer's markets in the US, if not beyond. It's really, I mean it's just absolutely fantastic. It's been written about. When you come, I'll take you there. They have a couple of iterations of it. And it's always very funny because the Wednesday and Saturday farmer's market in downtown Santa Monica, if you go on Wednesdays, you're with all the chefs, and if you go on Saturdays, you're with all the families. And so, you want to go on a Wednesday morning with a chef. And our chef does have that experience where he will take our guests to the Santa Monica farmer's market on a Wednesday, you know, he'll kind of go through the whole experience with them, pick whatever that they're in the mood for and actually cook it for their meal for later that day. And so that gives them not only the ability to interact with the farmers and producers and so on locally within the LA area, but to also have that. And that's just, you know, it's a couple of hours, but that's something that I think will continue to be a trend.

Eunice: Wow. Curated and memorable. And you can't – that's not off the shelf, and I think that's what makes it so special. Younes, there's a real term which is emerging, just as you were talking, I was just reflecting on upper luxury. What do you think that means in practicality terms? And do you think that's something that you do already, or do you think that's part of that future trend that will come?

Younes: I think it's a trend that's started, and I think that it will continue to grow. I think hotel brands and hotel companies and even boutique hotels that are maybe not affiliated with brands have started paying attention to luxury should never be a commodity, and I think that's the thing. And when luxury becomes a little too approachable, then you have to say, okay, well, what's next? And that's where this upper luxury or uber luxury kind of comes in. I believe there's two reasons to it. You always want that aspiration, like me as a consumer, now I can afford to do this, but I want to be able to do more, right? I think that's part of it. And I also believe that consumers, wealth in general, high net worth individuals really do have that desire, again, for exclusivity and for saying, I've stayed here, or I stay here. Loyalty to brands is a real thing. I'm loyal to a lot of brands regardless of, not just in hospitality, airlines, I've driven the same car brand for the last 15 years. There's this loyalty. But there's also, when it comes to this high net worth individual, they just want the best. And if the best hotel in a destination is X, then they're going to stay there. And I think that that's where this upper luxury comes in as an interesting concept.

Eunice: So well-defined. Thank you for that.

David: Very nice. Amy, I'm just going to check the time. Are we okay?

Younes: Yeah, I'm good for like another two hours.

David: Oh, well, we'll keep you for another two hours. Yeah, absolutely.

Younes: I mean, you all might need a martini, but – at this stage in the game.

David: It's getting around that hour.

Eunice: Younes, you're doing fantastic, by the way. You are a natural storyteller. I'm sure you know that already. Thank you.

Younes: Oh, absolutely. Pleasure. This is really fun. And this production is over the top. And I'm like, oh my God, what is it? This is like the Oscars. And when you live in LA, like I'm not going to lie, I get the reference. I mean, we see it everywhere on every street corner. It's kind of like this.

David: I'm glad it's been a good experience for you.

Younes: Yeah. Now I've made it.

Eunice: Love that.

David: So, Younes, it's been such a pleasure talking to you today. Thank you so much for waking up so early to do so, and sharing your stories and your insights. But before we let you go, can we ask you one final question? Looking back at your journey, is there anything you'd change or wish you'd done differently?

Younes: I think that even though we talked earlier about kind of past experiences and, you know, living in the past and kind of experiencing the past, I genuinely do not regret any decision that I've made relative to my career. I really, really don't. I think there were probably moments in time where I kind of, you know, questioned. But when I look at it in hindsight, there truly isn't any decision that I deeply think was not the right one. That being said, I think there were many moments in time or circumstances that I wish I could change, whether it was with a... You know, I'll actually give you one specific example, and it's career related. I had an opportunity to move into food and beverage. My background is mostly in operations and in housekeeping, which is kind of my home, and it really is because of the people in those areas. But anyway, I had an opportunity to move into food and beverage, and I turned it down. In hindsight, if there's anything that I would say I wish I could change or have done differently, it's to have the courage to say, yeah, you know what? It's unfamiliar territory, but I'm going to do it. And it's not something that I'm incredibly passionate about, but I'm going to do it. That probably is the one thing that I... Because fast forward, now I'm in charge of 11 food and beverage outlets. You

learn very quickly, talk about drinking out of a fire hose. So, yeah, that might be the one thing. But otherwise, I truly don't regret any decision that I've made in my career.

Eunice: That's so interesting because the start of our conversation, you shared all around your yes moments.

Younes: Yeses, yeah.

Eunice: That I didn't actually think there was a no moment. And almost your no moment was probably your biggest growth moment to enable you to springboard to your yes moments. Because it's circular, isn't it, those moments. So, that was a brilliant way to end our time together today. It's been spectacular and a true pleasure. Thank you so much. Really enjoyed getting to know you. David, back to you.

David: Yeah, it's been great. Thank you so much for your cooperation and your support as we've been building to this. It's been great to spend time with you and have you on this. So, thank you so much.

Younes: Thank you for having me. This has been a lot of fun, and all the best in the rest of the episodes and the rest of the series, and hopefully one next year.

David: That's episode one complete of Leading a New Era, the IHG podcast spotlighting GM's shaping luxury and lifestyle. If you're a general manager looking for inspiration or thinking about your next move in luxury hospitality, hit subscribe, follow along, and explore more from this series to come. Next, we're joined by Mary and Toha in Kimpton Los Monteros in Marbella, Spain. It's bound to be another great conversation and one you won't want to miss. See you then.