

Hilton



Let's spread the light and warmth of hospitality.

Now more than ever, we believe there is no substitute for the value of connecting and conducting business face-to-face. As in-person meetings experience a resurgence and groups are gathering again, Hilton wants to extend our gratitude and sincere thanks to event professionals working overtime to bring meetings and memorable moments to life. Thank you for putting in the time and energy to rearrange plans against an ever-changing landscape, and for your ongoing efforts to reassure everyone in the process.

While the world seeks out innovative ways to get together again, your peace of mind is top of our mind. Hilton EventReady with CleanStay pairs curated solutions, real-time resources and book-to-billing flexibility with rigorous cleanliness protocols to ensure successful events for your clients. We've also made significant investments toward our Travel with Purpose 2030 goals, outfitting all 6,700+ Hilton hotels around the globe with LightStay – our award-winning program to help hotels measure and manage their environmental performance. Used alongside our Meeting Impact Calculator, your clients can host more environmentally conscious meetings and make strides toward their own Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) goals.

Our footprint is rapidly expanding south of the border, including the gorgeous Conrad Punta de Mita in Mexico featured on the cover. We encourage you to visit this extraordinary hotel and explore our other resorts in the region highlighted throughout this piece for your next event.

Above all, relationships are essential in our industry, and we know transparency among hospitality partners is key. We pride ourselves on our ability to serve as a trusted partner when you need us most. When you're ready, Hilton properties worldwide look forward to teaming up to spread the light and warmth of hospitality together.



Frank Passanante



Gerilyn Horan

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Frank Passanante

Senior Vice President, Hilton Worldwide Sales Americas

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Gerilyn Horan

Vice President Group Sales & Strategic Accounts, Hilton Worldwide Sales Americas

A conversation with **Frank Passanante**

Frank Passanante is Senior Vice President for Hilton Worldwide Sales Americas, a position he has held since August 2018. He first joined Hilton in 1988, working there for 15 years, before transitioning to Interstate Hotels and Resorts, serving in several roles from 2003-2006. Frank returned to Hilton in July 2006. In his current role, he collaborates closely with commercial leaders to set a global B2B strategy across all selling channels.

Passanante sat down with The Meeting Professional to talk about a range of issues and topics, including EventReady with CleanStay, big, new hotels in Las Vegas, and the company's diversity and inclusion (D&I) initiatives.

The Meeting Professional: How have you coped over the past 20 months?

Frank Passanante: It's been a challenge. [But] there have also been a lot of positive moments and innovations that have happened during that time. We're moving toward the other side of the pandemic and look forward to blue skies ahead.

TMP: For you personally, what has changed in your outlook?

Passanante: The pandemic allowed everybody to recalibrate and reconsider their larger purpose. Fortunately, at Hilton, we work for a company with a solid set of values and purpose. I find energy and understanding by being more connected to the company's vision, "To fill the earth with the light and warmth of hospitality."

TMP: You talk about the culture of the organization. Do you think you're going to come out better in the long run?

Passanante: Yes – we didn't just want to get through the pandemic; we wanted to emerge even stronger. And we have. Our President and Chief Executive Officer Chris Nassetta always speaks about the critical importance of leading with culture and having a strong foundation – and that couldn't be more relevant today. You can't create a culture during a crisis, but you can certainly see what the culture really looks like during tough times. And at Hilton, our culture has only been strengthened. Confirming what we feel every day, we were recently recognized again as the No. 3 in the World's Best Workplaces

by Fortune magazine and Great Place to Work and DiversityInc's No. 1 workplace.

TMP: What can meeting planners expect from Hilton going forward?



Passanante: I'll start with the obvious, which are new destinations and venues. For example, the recently opened Resorts World Las Vegas, featuring Hilton Hotels & Resorts, Conrad Hotels & Resorts, and LXR Hotels & Resorts brands. We have a storied legacy in Las Vegas – and couldn't be more excited to be back on the Strip. In addition to Resorts World, we also opened Virgin Hotels Las Vegas, Curio Collection by Hilton, which offers an immersive and authentic Vegas hotel experience. It's very entertainment-centric, with a cool vibe, a great outdoor venue, beach clubs, and more. Hilton re-entering the Vegas market in such a big way as live events come back is just incredibly timely and exciting.

TMP: There's clearly a lot of confidence in Las Vegas as a meeting destination.

Passanante: Without a doubt. Our expansion in Vegas also came with many new meeting and event spaces – which is big news for meeting professionals. In addition to the Vegas news – a couple of years ago, we announced a new meeting-centric premier brand, Signia by Hilton. I'm happy to announce that the Signia by Hilton Bonnet Creek in Orlando is now open. And, we recently broke ground on our first new build, the Signia by Hilton Atlanta, opening in 2023. It's attached to the Georgia World Congress Center and

overlooks Mercedes-Benz Stadium. With all of these announcements, we're excited to demonstrate once again that not only is business back, but we're also back to the business of live events, and we're fully committed to debuting more meeting-centric venues for our customers.

TMP: You've been at the forefront when it comes to health and safety protocols. What more can we expect?

Passanante: The health and wellness of our team members and guests is our absolute top priority. It always has been and always will be. We led the industry by introducing Hilton EventReady with CleanStay. We put the necessary protocols in place to provide assurance to our meeting planners and end customers across all segments. Know that we are ready to welcome them when they are ready to travel. We're following the guidance of the World Health Organization, CDC and industry organizations – and will continue to do so as local and federal restrictions and regulations evolve.

TMP: Another topic that's been in the news is social change. Hilton has been at the forefront of diversity, inclusion, and equity, but are we as an industry doing enough? Where do you see the conversation going? How do we re-energize the conversation in a positive way to make significant advances on this issue?

Passanante: You're right, diversity and inclusion is essential to us. We've led in that area for a long time and published our goals, making reports readily available. Our chief executive officer is on the record multiple times talking about our commitments to gender diversity, gender equality, and ethnic diversity. It is a byproduct of the fact that we serve people in 122 countries and counting, with team members and guests who cross diverse populations. It's part of our culture and part of our fabric.

TMP: What's your outlook for the next couple of years in terms of the recovery for the industry?

Passanante: What we know right now is that every single day and every single month we see

incremental improvements. Our forward bookings from the group side have been improving month-over-month. There's a lot of pent-up demand. There's also a lot of energy right now after people put events on ice for the past 20 months and are now eager to get things scheduled. There's a tremendous amount of demand for meeting and event space in 2022.

TMP: What do you see coming from Hilton over the next five to ten years?

Passanante: We have clearly stated corporate goals and a vision. We have our Travel with Purpose platform, which outlines our environmental

and social impact goals. We have our CEO talking about our commitment to our core business, which is people serving people. We do that by expanding our network to provide hotels to guests everywhere for every occasion. Global expansion is still a huge part of our development goals. We've been listening "loudly" to our customers, and we're committed, just like so many in the industry are, to recovery. But we're not just interested in recovering. We're interested in becoming better and stronger on the other side of this.

TMP: Tell us more.

Passanante: One of the things that we're focused on is streamlining and simplifying the online shopping and booking experience for event planners to address some of the long-held pain points. Customers have forever wanted to search availability in real time for rooms and space, and they haven't been able to do that. We're making that happen! We've also been making some significant investments in capability improvements with our online channels. Customers can now go on Hilton.com and search in real time for group blocks. They can see whether a hotel has availability before they send an RFP, or they can directly book a small block of rooms in our hotels. In early 2022, they'll be able to add meeting space to those guest rooms. We can't wait!

To learn more about Hilton meetings and events, go to events.hilton.com

We were recently
recognized again as
the **No. 3 company
in the World's Best
Workplaces by
Fortune magazine
and Great Place
to Work and
DiversityInc's No.1
workplace.**