MELANIE BRANDMAN, FOUNDER AND CEO, THE BRANDMAN AGENCY

In everything she does, Melanie Brandman makes sure it’s first class. Whether it’s crossing the globe to handle the needs of international travel and lifestyle clients; being covered by the media for her tastes in fashion, design or creating new websites; or saving the planet and cultural traditions, it’s all done with an eye toward being the best. As founder and CEO of The Brandman Agency, the executive has leveraged her eponymous company to be more than a public relations firm. Like the woman it reflects, the agency is a touchstone for many within the industry; particularly at the luxury level. A former VP of corporate communications at IHG in London, Brandman has grown TBA from a single New York office to add locations in Los Angeles, London and Sydney. “The greatest challenge is knowing the buck stops with me, and that alone brings tremendous rewards. As my industry evolves, the greatest challenge will always be to ensure our company remains relevant...today and five years from now,” said the CEO. An early adopter within the digital and influencer spaces, Brandman also is the brains behind Travel Curator, a website platform devoted to engaging an affluent audience of global travelers. Readers of USA Today recently voted it one of the “10 Best Luxury Travel Blogs.” She herself received the Grice Lifetime Achievement Award for Public Relations from HSMAI, among other accolades. “The thought of not evolving keeps me energized to find new ways of doing and learning new things,” said Brandman.

LISA CHECCHIO, EVP & CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER, WYNDHAM HOTELS & RESORTS

With the passing of Labor Day, Lisa Checchio celebrated both her three-year anniversary at Wyndham Hotels & Resorts and her third year in the hospitality industry. Checchio joined Wyndham from JetBlue Airways, a move she described as a natural step for her career. However, it wasn’t something that could have happened without taking risks. “Someone took a chance on me, someone from the outside, to bring new experiences and ideas to the industry,” Checchio said. “As we are women in hospitality, and all of us who work in this industry, have to continue to take chances and seek out strong female talent, and also to be inspired by other industries.” This risk-taking mentality is something Checchio wishes to pass on to others in the industry, and she said female hospitality professionals need to take the initiative in seeking out other perspectives in order to rise in the industry. “It’s always wonderful when I meet people who reach out, ask to sit with me and mentor them. But it’s also my responsibility to seek out mentors, to identify those potential leaders who may not feel comfortable reaching out and asking for my time. I want to help them navigate not only Wyndham, but the whole industry.” Checchio also said that it’s important to care about what you are doing and where you are professionally. “The act of truly caring is infectious,” she said. “Always do the right thing, push one extra mile, in this or any other industry.”

DUNIA COOPER, EVP OF SALES, LA QUINTA INNS & SUITES

Donna Cooper has been leading sales teams for years, but early in her career she struggled to find a leadership style after noting her team members all had their own way of doing things. Rather than force a square peg into a round hole, Cooper set about changing herself before changing those around her. “I had to tailor my style to each of those personalitites,” she said. “Once I did that, everything fell into place.” For women looking to grow in hospitality, Cooper encourages them to seek out organizations that already have female leaders. “If a company only has men in senior leadership roles, it can be hard to change their mind. There are many companies that are forward thinking, and I encourage women professionals to seek them out,” she said. Cooper recognizes that senior leadership often wants to promote the best employees to leadership roles, but she also said that a company’s true success is determined by employees on the front lines. She has found that a growth mindset is a necessity for success, and boils down the requirements for success into simple terms: If you are interested in a position, be the obvious choice. “Learn as much as you can about the role you want, and do the job before it opens,” Cooper said. “People want to be directors, they want to manage people, and leaders should encourage them to do those things throughout their career.”

SARAH DINGER, EVP OF BRAND MANAGEMENT, MY PLACE HOTELS OF AMERICA

Sarah Dinger will always have a special place at My Place Hotels. In 2012, after more than a decade in various hospitality positions, Dinger stepped on board the nascent upper-midscale hotel chain’s platform as employee No. 1 and hasn’t looked back. In her half-dozen years with the South Dakota-based chain, she has helped founders Ron Rivett (Super 8’s pioneer) and his grandson, Ryan, move the needle of the brand’s growth, pushing it from one hotel to 44 (at pre-pandemic). With openings and groundbreaking occurring often at a relatively whirlwind speed (recently three such events were marked within 12 hours and across a few thousand miles), Dinger touts the fast. “More than 60 percent of My Place franchisees have executed multiple agreements, and the balance of them will—they just haven’t yet.” Dinger considers relationships a key component of the brand’s successful industry entry and acceleration. “It’s been my honor to witness the beginnings of each internal department and to work closely with each of their leaders to create value with the same passion instilled in me from the beginning. It’s through this work that I’ve realized how far-reaching relationships really are.” The executive sees herself as a role model for all the associates who have joined My Place. “While it’s extremely rewarding, a new and upcoming brand is extremely demanding. I strive to set the example for others that I want to see.” Dinger looks forward to celebrating many milestones with the company.