

YOU CAN'T LEAD

WITH YOUR FEET ON THE DESK



**BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS,
BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS,
AND DELIVERING PROFITS**

ED FULLER

President & Managing Director,
Marriott Lodging International

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EDWIN D. FULLER



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*To the International Pioneers, the 72,000 associates
of Marriott's International Lodging Division, my
mentors, peers, Thaddeus, and Heidi Ann.*

Marsha, Anna, and Josh, thank you for completing me.

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Foreword

Too many businesses today are out of balance. They are focused on short-term results achieved through impersonal transactional negotiations where deals are concluded solely on price with little or no personal interaction and no relationship-building. This is a big mistake. At the end of the day, it's the people in the organization and the *way* they do business that makes the difference.

“People First” has always been the bedrock of Marriott International, from the day in 1927 when my parents opened their nine-seat root beer stand in Washington, DC, to today as an enterprise of more than 3,500 hotels in 70 countries across the globe. By listening to, respecting, valuing, and celebrating people over our 83 years, we have created inclusive environments in which the talents and ideas of millions of our guests, employees, partners, property owners, and various other stakeholders worldwide have contributed to our “Spirit to Serve” culture and helped us earn an unassailable competitive advantage.

Whether you're the leader of a mega-enterprise, the owner of the local corner drugstore, or a young executive just starting out, your ultimate success will, more often than not, depend on the mutual respect and care you consistently demonstrate for the people around you. Usually, it's the salespeople who take the time to know their customers and

understand their needs who win the business. Similarly, it's the manager who consistently turns in good numbers and radiates energy and enthusiasm who often gets the nod for a promotion. But even more impressive is the manager who also knows his or her entire staff by name (without checking the nametag) and is spontaneously greeted with smiles, teasing, and hellos. For me, the relationship our general managers have with their teams is the litmus test of how well a hotel is run.

That kind of "relationships first" spirit is what has helped Ed Fuller, the head of Marriott International Lodging, grow the business from 16 hotels to 400, in 70 countries. It's also the major theme in this insightful and entertaining book. Ed shares scores of personal anecdotes from a 40-year corporate career, along with those of other leaders, that illustrate how deep personal relationships built on mutual respect and trust, and nurtured over time, can save a volatile business deal, inspire team members to greatness, ensure service excellence, bridge cultural divides, and create a long-term, profitable business.

Ed suggests how listening carefully to discern the other person's hidden motivations can help you find solutions to a seemingly insurmountable impasse, how you can set the ground rules for a productive business relationship even when you have nothing in common with the other person, and why having a solid core value system can support your efforts and outline the ethical boundaries within virtually any relationship.

As Ed emphasizes, relationships are the currency of every culture and they are rarely formed while sitting behind the desk. I still make it a point to spend much of my time on the road, visiting our hotels, meeting with industry leaders and calling on customers. This allows me to counter the notion

that big corporations are faceless machines. I also want to show our team in the field that I value their work enough to take time to check it out. At the same time, visiting with our customers year in and year out provides me with a strong knowledge base for making decisions.

So, get out from behind your desk, your phone, or your shop counter. You'll be amazed with what you learn, with the positive impact you can make, and by the opportunities that most assuredly will come your way.

—J.W. Marriott, Chairman and CEO
of Marriott International

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In creating this book for you there have been a number of contributors—some I have mentioned in the text of the book. I'd like to thank my mentors and peers who helped me develop my philosophy and concepts for this book. I especially want to acknowledge Marriott International's Global Pioneers whose untiring dedication enabled me to lead the growth of our business over the past 21 years.

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And finally, there are simply no words to describe my enduring thanks to Brenda Shelton, my right arm (and sometimes my left), who has taken this journey with me for the past 35 years.

I hope their encouragement and hard work will benefit you the reader.

Chapter 1 Ditch the Desk

*A desk is a dangerous place from which to view
the world.*

—John le Carré

No one would ever confuse me with George Clooney, but I have accomplished something that Ryan Bingham, the character Clooney played in the movie, *Up in the Air*, coveted. By accumulating more than 10 million frequent-flyer miles, I earned the right to have my name painted on the fuselage of a United Airlines 747.

I was logging around 700,000 miles annually during the 1990s when we were launching Marriott's international lodging operations, and a good deal of my travel time was spent in the friendly skies of United. One year the airline came up with a unique promotion to reward 50 of its most frequent fliers. And that's how the words, "Ed Fuller, Customer," came to be painted beneath the pilot's window on a United 747.

As president and managing director of the Marriott division that operates and franchises overseas hotels, I spend a significant part of my life flying in and out of the scores of foreign countries where we conduct business. And my 10-million-plus miles have taught me a lot about the value of getting out from behind my desk and building relationships that span cultural differences.

I'm not unique. For any manager, knowledge of other cultures makes it easier to navigate the complexities of today's multicultural workplace. Whether you are managing a clothing factory, a customer call center, or a stock-and-bond trading operation, it's the rare business that doesn't depend on a diverse group of employees, overseas suppliers, and partners. With all these stakeholders, some understanding of other

cultures is an important plank in the building of strong and productive relationships.

A case in point: For nearly 20 years, “Mohammed” had been a friend and business partner. We had shared journeys, meals, and considerable profits while weathering dozens of the disagreements that accompany any successful relationship, business or personal. Then came the day in 2009 when he glared at me and hissed, “Your company will be dead to me when you retire.”

Our association had begun when Mohammed, a successful entrepreneur in the Middle East, decided to build a hotel and needed the management expertise we at Marriott International could provide. Given our long and fruitful history, his outburst was a shock but not a total surprise. Even the closest of business connections can be extraordinarily fragile when the interests of the two parties collide.

For many business leaders, the word *relationship* evokes excessive emotionalism, and smacks of the dread *soft stuff*. But not to my ears. During two decades of establishing and directing the international operations of the Marriott hotel chain—a period in which we went from 16 hotels in six countries grossing \$325 million to our current 400 properties scattered across 70 countries and with revenues of nearly \$7 billion—I’ve witnessed the rise and fall of many an enterprise and many a leader. Experience has taught me that, far from being irrelevant, solid relationships are the real bedrock of business success. They can help you solve problems and resolve contentious issues amicably. Relationships are especially important in emerging economies, where a handshake often serves as a valid contract and where written documents are a necessary, if unwelcome, part of doing business with Americans and other Westerners.

Solid relationships are not formed overnight; however, and they are defined by culture and community. Different values and customs can sometimes make genuine connections difficult to build and maintain. In any event, it will take time and effort to cement a bond. And that doesn't happen behind a desk.

A strong connection may begin with untold hours of dining together and mingling at social events. But to reinforce a productive relationship, you need to demonstrate fairness and evenhandedness—which is more difficult than you might think in those cultures where win-lose solutions are deemed preferable to win-wins. And even then, the risk of missteps and misperceptions is never far away. It's hard work to be sure, but the rewards of getting out from behind your desk and building strong relationships face-to-face are many.

As my crisis with Mohammed demonstrated, however, even after years spent developing trust and confidence, a relationship can be damaged in one disagreeable moment. Our falling-out had its start in a financial dispute between Mohammed and his partners and our neutral stance on the matter.

In subsequent visits, I took pains to assure Mohammed of our respect and admiration and told him we had considered a variety of possible solutions. Nevertheless, he remained frustrated by his predicament, and he eventually told me that the real issue was our refusal to unquestioningly take his side in the quarrel. The depth of our relationship was the only thing that kept the partnership from breaking apart. It allowed us to get beyond the emotions and cultural differences that could have made the rupture permanent. Eventually, the dispute found resolution, but the need to ditch the desk and maintain the relationship remained.

The story of Mohammed resonates across the business landscape. In today's borderless world, the ability to create lasting connections is crucial to every business leader—and maintaining those cross-cultural relationships demands a pragmatic flexibility that isn't taught in business schools.

I wrote this book to share the lessons I've learned over 20 years—almost none of them spent behind a desk—developing and tending relationships in dozens of countries. I've also drawn on the experiences of other businesspeople and well-known figures whose leadership has produced tremendous results. Many of the personal insights and techniques I describe in these pages are the products of trial and error, with the emphasis on error. They have proven their value over many years, and I hope that you'll find them equally useful.

THE WORLD BEYOND THE DESK

Most business leaders need only drive to a plant in a neighboring county or ride the elevator to the ground-floor loading dock to see and appreciate cultural differences. In other words, if you are spending your days meeting with other managers or sitting at your desk doing paperwork, it's time to broaden your horizons and get closer to your business.

Building successful business relationships is no different than building personal ones. It demands meaningful engagement with another party. When I was assigned to build the Marriott International organization, my most challenging relationships were with some of the company's leaders: They had precious little time or resources for our fledgling unit, given that virtually all of Marriott's operations were based in the United States.

Worse still, our American focus meant that all of our policies and systems were geared to the requirements of our

U.S. hotels. That was a problem because what we needed abroad was often quite different from what we had at home. Standards had to be adjusted to meet local customer requirements. For example, we needed prayer rooms in Muslim countries, two equal-size ballrooms to separately accommodate men and women at weddings and other celebrations in the Middle East, more restaurants catering to local tastes and ingredients, varied types of food preparation, and flexible smoking policies, to name a few.

Initially, I did anything I could to get people at headquarters to think globally, including even offering to pay \$20 to anyone who used the word *global*. I'd happily pull out \$20 from my wallet when someone qualified, which wasn't often. Then I went to a meeting at which our CEO Bill Marriott Jr. used *global* six times in his presentation. When he finished, he turned to me and said: "All right, Ed, that will be \$120."

We also initiated what I called Iron Bird Tours that took senior executives on 10-day jaunts around the world to visit our hotels and resorts and those of competitors. The trips gave our top people the opportunity to experience different cultures—and customers. Executives could also participate in a four-week education program, one week of which was devoted to global issues. A week-long course in Costa Rica, for example, included a two-hour visit with the country's president, Nobel Peace Prize winner Oscar Arias. I led the Iron Bird trips for several years (more about that in Chapter 3) and taught in most of our executive education programs. Over time, my colleagues—and the company as a whole—began to internalize a wider global perspective.

Marriott traces its beginnings to a nine-stool A&W root beer stand that John Willard Marriott and Alice Sheets