

THE EXECUTIVE FIELD GUIDES · 02

# THE KEY PERSON OF VALUE

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*How more of your people become  
extraordinary contributors*

P R E M M A N A N D

*Human Presence Architect*

*Author of Becoming Extraordinary · Creator of SEVA OS®*

SUMMIT OF HOTELIERS · CROATIA · OCTOBER 2026

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## What Lies Beneath

*A hotel can account for what it costs to open its doors. It cannot yet account for everything its people may become capable of creating.*

The building is complete. The rooms, restaurants and wellness facilities reflect years of planning and investment. Leaders have been appointed, standards developed and employees prepared to deliver the promise.

Now the organisation has to bring that investment to life, day after day.

In German oak forests, researchers have observed something that usually remains out of sight.

During drought, mature trees can draw water from deeper soil and redistribute some of it towards the surface. Researchers found that young oak seedlings used this redistributed water; in one experiment, it accounted for approximately 29% of the water they transpired in a day.<sup>1</sup>

This is a natural movement of water, not deliberate care. Yet a young tree's access to moisture depends partly on conditions beyond its own roots.

Within a hotel, less visible conditions also influence how far people's capabilities can develop.

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*How much human potential is still unrealised within an organisation that has already invested so much in its people?*

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## The Investment Beyond the Job Description

People do not arrive at work with skills alone.

They bring experience, strengths, values, hopes and ambitions. Work means different things to different people; not everyone sees hospitality as a vocation. But most of us want our efforts to count for something. We want opportunities to contribute, learn and grow.

A new employee may arrive curious—asking questions, noticing details and trying to understand how things work.

Alongside the procedures, they learn another set of rules—often without anyone stating them.

What happens if I suggest a better way? If I admit a mistake? If a guest needs something the procedure does not cover? If I have information another department needs?

In one environment, those questions become opportunities to learn. In another, people discover that waiting for instructions is safer.

The same standards may be met in both environments. The opportunities for growth are very different.

Gallup's *State of the Global Workplace 2026* reports employee engagement of 7% in Croatia, compared with 12% across Europe.<sup>2</sup> These are broad workforce figures, not a verdict on Croatian hotel employees. Engagement is not a measure of a person's character or potential.

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*What might our people become capable of if their experience of working here encouraged more curiosity, confidence and meaningful contribution?*

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## The Birthday Nobody Scripted

During my years as a butler aboard *Voyager*, I served Nancy and David, returning guests who had sailed with the company seventeen times. Thirteen of those voyages had been with Captain Doug.

In our conversations, I had noticed the particular warmth with which Nancy spoke about the captain. Her connection with him was part of what made those voyages special.

On her birthday, the customary arrangements were already complete. I wondered what might make the day especially meaningful to her. Captain Doug came to mind.

I went to his office. He was away, so I mentioned to his assistant that it was Nancy's birthday and how fondly she remembered sailing with him.

Later, during the evening canapés service, David thanked me for Captain Doug's visit to their suite. Nancy appeared, still in her

bathrobe with curlers in her hair, embraced me and said she could not have received a better birthday gift.

Now consider how often similar possibilities arise unnoticed across a hotel.

Recognising them calls for curiosity about people, attention to what matters and judgement about what to do next. These are capabilities an organisation can help its people develop.

A **Key Person of Value (KPV)** is someone whose character, capability and judgement create meaningful value for others—enriching experiences, strengthening colleagues and benefiting the organisation.

The aim is not to designate a favoured few. It is to develop this kind of contribution in more people.

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## What Makes That Contribution Possible?

Consider the receptionist who recognises when a guest needs reassurance rather than another explanation. The housekeeper who preserves someone's dignity. The colleague whose observation prevents the next shift from repeating a mistake. Or the experienced employee who helps someone new understand *why* a decision matters.

**Presence** allows someone to give genuine attention. **Perception** helps them recognise what matters beyond the immediate request. **Curiosity** keeps them open to possibilities. **Integrity** makes their contribution trustworthy. **Judgement** helps them act within

appropriate boundaries. And a willingness to help others grow allows the value of their contribution to travel further.

None of these qualities depends upon a particular personality. A quiet employee may demonstrate them consistently; a confident performer may still need to develop them.

These qualities can deepen through experience, responsibility, reflection and support. People may discover abilities they did not know they had.

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*The opportunity is not simply to recruit more exceptional people. It is to help more of the people already employed become exceptional contributors.*

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## When One Person's Value Reaches Many

Imagine an employee who comes into contact with ten or twenty guests during a working day.

As that person's awareness and judgement develop, each encounter offers another opportunity for thoughtful service.

The employee notices that an arrival difficulty keeps recurring. They share what they have observed. Another colleague understands how to anticipate it. The handover improves. A manager no longer needs to resolve every repetition of the same problem.

What began as one person's development has increased the capability of others.

Ten or twenty encounters do not translate into a fixed financial return. They illustrate how far one person's developing judgement can reach.

Across an operation, better-distributed judgement may mean earlier problem-solving, fewer avoidable escalations, stronger collaboration and more management time for decisions that truly require it.

For guests, a technically correct response may resolve a request; a perceptive response may also restore confidence or strengthen a relationship.

The organisation can gain more from the workforce in which it has already invested. Employees may also discover abilities and opportunities to contribute that were previously beyond their reach.

Teresa Amabile and Steven Kramer's research found that progress in meaningful work can improve people's day-to-day experience of work.<sup>3</sup> Developing sound judgement can give service professionals that experience of progress, too.

What determines whether this continues—or stops?

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## The Rules Nobody Wrote Down

Training shows someone how a standard should be delivered. The working environment teaches them whether they are trusted to use their judgement.

When an employee brings a concern to a manager, the response matters. A thoughtful response makes it easier to raise the next concern. Public embarrassment may encourage silence until a problem can no longer be hidden.

A manager who supplies every answer may keep a busy shift moving. But if nobody else gets to think, the manager may still be supplying the same answers next month.

Liz Wiseman's work on *Multipliers* examines how leaders can expand other people's intelligence and contribution—and how even well-intentioned leadership can sometimes restrict them.<sup>4</sup>

Managers often make these decisions under intense pressure. The effect may nevertheless be unintended: **an organisation can diminish human potential without meaning to.**

Consider the employee who regularly steps in when things go wrong. They cover gaps, rescue colleagues and preserve the guest experience.

Their contribution is appreciated, perhaps even celebrated. But if the organisation continues relying on their generosity rather than improving the conditions that make those rescues necessary, a different result may follow.

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*The organisation may be rewarding their contribution while consuming their capacity.*

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This is where values become more than statements.

Respect is evident in the way people's time is treated. Trust is visible in the responsibility they can exercise. Integrity is tested when someone reports an inconvenient truth. Learning is revealed by what happens after a mistake.

None of this requires abandoning standards or allowing unsafe improvisation. Employees need clear boundaries, suitable resources,

useful feedback and opportunities to practise good decisions. They also need fair compensation, workable schedules, realistic workloads and the ability to recover.

Giving people greater responsibility without those conditions does not develop their potential. It may simply demand more of them.

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*The responsibility is to expand people's capacity to create value without diminishing the person.*

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And in a labour market where capable employees have choices, the consequences reach well beyond the current shift.

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## The Value of a Place People Want to Return To

For many Croatian establishments, seasonal employment makes this particularly relevant.

A hotel may invest in recruiting, introducing and developing a team, then face the cost and disruption of rebuilding much of it the following season.

A study of 196 Croatian seasonal hospitality workers found that higher earnings were associated with stronger intentions to return, while greater control over everyday tasks was associated with a greater willingness to recommend the job.<sup>5</sup>

No single study provides a formula for retention. But the findings reinforce the importance of both material conditions and meaningful responsibility.

Consider an employee who finishes a season with greater confidence, better judgement, new skills and evidence that their contribution mattered. The benefit of that development need not end when the season does.

The employee may return. They may recommend the organisation to others. Or they may take their developed capabilities elsewhere and still remember the establishment as a place that helped them grow.

Continuity matters to the employer; dignity, progress and opportunity matter to the employee.

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## What Leadership Makes Possible

Hospitality is about uplifting another human being.

Often it happens quietly: a welcome that eases uncertainty, a thoughtful response, a moment of dignity or reassurance.

A hotel can invest in every detail a guest can see. The human experience still depends upon what its people are able to recognise, decide and contribute in the moment.

Technical training remains essential. But judgement, awareness and the capacity to contribute also develop through experience in an environment where values are practised.

For a general manager, this is not one more task to delegate exclusively to HR. It is part of the operating responsibility of leadership.

The organisation can ask whether people are meeting its standards. It can also ask a more far-reaching question:

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*Are people becoming more capable of creating value  
because they work here?*

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Look for the evidence in everyday work: better judgement, earlier problem-sharing and colleagues helping one another. Over time, examine whether service consistency, guest feedback, avoidable escalations and return rates also change. These are signals to investigate, not proof of a single cause.

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## Executive Leadership Checklist

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*Are we creating the conditions in which more people  
become Key People of Value?*

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Use this with the leadership team. The purpose is not to identify a chosen few or launch another programme. It is to examine what working in your organisation makes possible for people.

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THE QUESTION TO TAKE BACK TO YOUR LEADERSHIP TEAM

*Twelve months from now, what evidence would show that more employees had developed capabilities they had not yet realised when they joined?*

***What is one organisational condition we can improve to make that development more likely?***

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- **Purpose.** Do our people understand how their work can improve another person's experience, beyond completing an assigned task?
  - **Potential.** Do employees have opportunities to discover and develop abilities they may not yet recognise in themselves?
  - **Environment.** Do our everyday practices encourage curiosity, initiative, responsible judgement and the confidence to speak honestly?
  - **Values.** Are dignity, fairness, trust and integrity visible in decisions made under pressure?
  - **Growth.** Are people becoming more capable and confident through their experience with us?
  - **Multiplication.** Are we helping people share knowledge, develop colleagues and turn individual contributions into stronger collective capability?
  - **Reciprocity.** Are fair treatment, recognition and opportunities for progress making this a place people value being part of?

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## The Value That Travels

An establishment's physical foundations may be complete. The development of its people need not be.

As people develop their judgement and help colleagues grow, more of the organisation's promise becomes available through everyday encounters.

The value travels—to guests, colleagues, leaders and the business. It also stays with the person who has grown.

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*If hospitality is about uplifting another human being,  
we must begin by uplifting the people who deliver it.*

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*An extraordinary organisation does not merely  
depend upon Key People of Value.*

***It creates the conditions in which more  
people can become one.***

## Notes and Sources

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- 3 Amabile, T. M., and Kramer, S. J. (2011). “The Power of Small Wins.” *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2011/05/the-power-of-small-wins>. Based on studies of knowledge workers; not proof of hotel-specific outcomes.
- 4 Wiseman, L. (2011). “Intelligence Multipliers: How Smart Leaders Double the Power of Their Workforce for Free.” *Leader to Leader*, 2011(59), 52–58. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ltl.456>. The title reflects the source’s language, not a numerical claim made for this playbook.
- 5 Laškarin Ažić, M., Rašan, D., and Prahin, I. (2022). “Measuring the Quality of Working Conditions and Behavioral Intentions of Seasonal Hospitality Workers in Croatia.” *Tourism*, 70(3), 369–382. <https://doi.org/10.37741/t.70.3.3>.

*The Nancy account is adapted from Premm Anand, Becoming Extraordinary (2026), Chapter Five, with the author’s clarification that Captain Doug visited the guests’ suite.*

*KPV is the author’s practitioner concept, not a validated personnel assessment or a guarantee of financial performance.*

AN INVITATION

# PREMMANAND

*Human Presence Architect*

*Author of Becoming Extraordinary*

*Creator of SEVA OS®*

*Founder, The London Butler Academy®*

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*I would welcome your thoughts on the human potential your organisation is already helping to develop—and on what more could become possible.*

*If you would like to continue the conversation, I would be pleased to share a complimentary copy of Becoming Extraordinary.*

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[premmanand.com](https://premmanand.com)

[connect@premmanand.com](mailto:connect@premmanand.com)