

## My life in hospitality Madeleine Calon

Head concierge, St James's Hotel and Club, London

There are many similarities between working in the theatre and in a hotel, particularly when it comes to the concierge desk.

Having worked as a freelance stage manager at the Bloomsbury theatre, London, no one knows this better than Madeleine Calon, now head concierge at the five-star, 60-bedroom St James's Hotel and Club, London.

"The skills I used in the theatre can be directly translated to those I use working as a concierge," she explains.

"There are a lot of similarities between having to react to something that doesn't go right during a live performance and thinking on your feet as we do every day in the hotel when, for instance, theatre tickets don't materialise."

Calon then goes on to describe how she recently rescued a family birthday treat when tickets for Lady Gaga at the O2 failed to turn up. "There was only one and a half hours to go before the show, so I sent the family on to the O2," says Calon.

"Meanwhile I rang around all my contacts and found some tickets, which I then personally delivered to the family who were at the venue."

Born and brought up in Liverpool – just around the corner from Penny Lane – Calon took some time to discover the joys of being a concierge. She loves the role because no matter how high up the management rung you climb as a concierge, you always



maintain contact with guests.

Calon left Liverpool in 1983 to study stage management, technical theatre and design at the Mountview Theatre School. However, after a brief stint at the Bloomsbury theatre, she found she disliked the uncertainty of freelance work and joined Harrods as a concessionary sales manager.

She moved into hotels in 1987 – initially as a guest liaison officer at the Cumberland hotel and then as guest relations manager at the Waldorf – and was immediately hooked.

"The best place to make contact with the guests was at the concierge desk and so I spent a lot of time there. I liked the fact that there is a family feel about the relationship between the concierge and guests."

As a result, Calon was appointed as assistant head concierge at the Waldorf in 1993,

Family Married

Age 45

Favourite holiday Bermuda

Drives BMW 5 series

Motto Service through friendship

becoming the first female concierge at the hotel, and steadily began her climb up the career ladder. She was appointed assistant head concierge at the Cavendish hotel in 1996, and in 2002 as assistant concierge at the Berkeley, where she was named Most Outstanding Employee 2003. That same year, she was promoted to manager, concierge services.

Arriving at the Berkeley – her first five-star experience – catapulted Calon into another world.

"It was a whole new learning experience as I went from booking airport transfers to arranging flights on helicopters and private jets," she recalls.

Calon joined the St James's Club & Hotel as head concierge in 2008 prior to it reopening following a major refurbishment.

"It was a real luxury coming in at that stage and being able to cherry pick my team of eight. I love the property – it is such a friendly place to work."



**HIGHS...** Being accepted into The Society of the Golden Keys in 1995, as the first female member from the UK, was a fantastic achievement as it is such an important association to belong to as a concierge.

"It immediately increased the number of people I can call on for help and advice to around 4,000 worldwide," Calon explains.

"Now I have no problem in booking seats at a much-sought after restaurant, no matter where it is, such as Le Caprice in New York."



**LOWS...** Calon says she hasn't really had any career lows, but adds:

"I just wish I'd been told by a teacher at school that working as a concierge is such a wonderful career opportunity."

### RECESSION-BUSTING TIP

● It is sometimes foolhardy to cut back on the extras – you should always meet and exceed expectations