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"Hospitality Not Only as Strategy, but also as Honesty, Humility and Humanity: Leadership Lessons from The Hoxton Rome's Daniela Cataldo"

*by **Danielle DeVine** | Leadership writer Professional Women's Association*

Daniela Cataldo is living proof that great leadership is not only measured by performance metrics, but also by presence. Her unique combination of sharp business instincts, discipline, and deep empathy has taken her from a 26-room family-run hotel in Capri to leadership roles at global hospitality icons.

In her early 20s, she moved to the Sheraton Skyline Hotel at London Heathrow and to the Sheraton Florence to gain large-scale hotel experience. Embracing a wider international path, she then spent 19 years in the U.S., including leadership roles at La Costa Resort & SPA in San Diego, The St. Regis San Francisco, The St. Regis New York, SLS Beverly Hills, and The New York EDITION. In 2021, she returned to Italy to lead the pre-opening and launch of The Rome EDITION, a 95-room luxury hotel housed in a striking 1940s rationalist-style building that once served as the offices of the Banca Nazionale del Lavoro. In 2024, she became General Manager of Ennismore's first Italian Hoxton hotel in Rome.

Under her leadership, The Hoxton Rome has continued to strengthen its identity as a cultural and community hub where locals and travelers blend in an atmosphere of creativity, comfort, art, music, and warm hospitality—hosting everything from art festivals to neighborhood collaborations, from great food experience to mixology events.

Meeting Daniela in her element at the Hoxton Rome, where she is both a commanding and benevolent presence, was the perfect setting for a wide-ranging conversation. From her path to leadership and her passion for Picasso to her own abstract painting practice, certain themes echoed throughout: honesty, loyalty, humility, the pursuit of excellence and an unwavering commitment to team spirit.

DANIELA CATALDO, *General Manager of The Hoxton Rome*

Though not a "figlia d'arte" in the traditional sense, as the daughter of hoteliers Daniela inherited the art of hospitality. With a love for mid-century art and a creative sensibility of her own, she leads with both precision and heart. At The Hoxton Rome, she doesn't just meet standards—she sets them, cultivating a workplace where both team and guests feel truly seen and inspired.

Who are some of the women who have inspired you most?

My mother, Nina, will always be the most inspiring woman in my life. She was born into a family of hoteliers and, together with my dad—her husband of 54 years—she successfully ran a boutique 26-room hotel and restaurant in our native Capri for nearly three decades.

She was the most genuine, faithful, hardworking, and altruistic person I've ever met. She knew exactly what she wanted for her family and her business and made it happen—working hands-on with her employees, mentoring them, and always leading with care and respect. Despite her full schedule, she always made time for her children.

I also deeply admire one of my former leaders in the U.S., Octavia, who was my Hotel Manager at The St. Regis New York when I was Director of Rooms. I still carry her empowering coaching with me—her fearlessness, her creativity, her caring attitude, her relentless drive to aim high, and her incredible ability to balance intensity with warmth. She's a risk-taker, a visionary, and highly competitive—for herself and for her team.

Finally, a historical and yet ever-present figure: Coco Chanel. She invented and reinvented herself against all odds and changed the face of fashion, empowering women through style and allowing them to free their inner selves through appreciating sophisticated elegance. Her courage, her aesthetic sensibility, and entrepreneurial spirit in a male-dominated era, her bold creativity remain truly timeless. An extraordinary woman whose intellect, work and legacy will always be part of the lives of those who appreciate style and elegance no matter the century

Describe yourself in three words.

Humble. Competitive. Passionate.

What do you think is the most important quality for someone to succeed in the hospitality industry?

Beyond all the strategic thinking and leadership skills, success as a leader should depend also on a huge amount of honesty and humility. Only with those qualities can you become a truly successful and trusted

leader that others genuinely want to follow. Anyone can have a title. But can anyone be someone others want to model themselves after? That's the real test!

You mentioned having a vision—what does that mean to you?

You must absolutely have a big-picture vision. Understand how the company works, be strategic, flexible, courageous, even aggressive when needed. But all of that needs to be grounded in humility, ethics, and honesty. Forgive me for repeating myself here, but I firmly believe that these qualities that people mistakenly describe as "soft skills" are the foundation of true leadership—besides making any person a great human being. That's how you earn true respect.

Did you have someone like that in your own life?

Yes—starting with my parents. I grew up in our family hotel in Capri, managing 26 rooms, a restaurant, and employees at a very young age. My father was a brilliant businessman—very competitive, but perfectly balanced by my mother's humanity and generosity. They taught me everything: to be ambitious but also respectful, hardworking, and humble. That foundation shaped my entire life and career.

Can you share an example of mentorship in your own leadership journey?

Just yesterday, I received a message from Washington DC from a former mentee. I had coached her not just on business and leadership, but on emotional intelligence too. She wanted to make me proud and let me know she had just become a General Manager. Another mentee of mine in New York has grown into the role of Hotel Manager at a luxury hotel. Another one has also climbed the ladder and become a hotel manager in one of the most iconic hotels in New York City. So yes, mentorship matters. It shapes people professionally—and personally.

What does PWA mean to you?

PWA is a powerful space for networking among brilliant women, learning from one another, and having fun while doing it. It's a space where we can support each other and showcase our passions and businesses. I need to make more time to attend the amazing events—and I plan to do better!

The hospitality industry, especially at the executive level, is still very male-dominated. Did you encounter any gender barriers on your path to leadership and how did you overcome them? You have worked around the world.

In the U.S., I didn't feel those barriers. Maybe because they're ahead of us in certain ways. I've always stayed true to my kind, empathetic nature while remaining highly competitive and willing to fight for what's right. So no, I didn't feel gender barriers there.

But when I returned to Italy in 2019, the difference was striking—especially in Rome. The industry still feels male-dominated. Here, I felt that if you're polite, humble, and hard-working, it's often interpreted as weakness. That mindset can be maddening.

Thankfully, I haven't had direct problems and kept going on at full speed ahead, head down, honest, focused, and effective. But the cultural atmosphere here is different from what I experienced in 19 years in the U.S.

What is your take on diversity efforts in hospitality?

Major hospitality players are setting diversity targets to increase the number of women in leadership roles—sometimes 35%, 39%, 40%. It's rarely 50%, but it's a start. At least there's recognition now that training and promoting women matters. Italy is catching up, but slowly.

What is the most rewarding part of your work?

There are so many rewarding parts! As a GM and executive leader, it's certainly rewarding to see your business grow and your metrics improve; that's the success that is measurable. But even more powerful is when your team truly responses to your leadership. When everyone is aligned, collaborative, and proud to work together towards the same goals – it's extraordinary, That spirit is what makes all the challenges worth it.

Budgets aren't easy. Targets aren't easy. But when the whole team works together, when they genuinely help one another, that is more rewarding to me that simply hitting numbers. A few days ago, one of my team members said "I am just so happy and so proud to work here." That kind of joy, that collective spirit, that's a priceless achievement.

How do you build that kind of team culture?

By leading by example! There's no shortcut. Especially with younger team members—they're smart, driven, and perceptive. They know if the culture is real or fake. Respect, recognition, gratitude—these things must be authentic. You can't fake care.

And that energy reaches the guests, too?

Absolutely. I often hear from guests how genuine and real the team feels to them. And I always tell them—it's not just my merit. I'm lucky to work with amazing people. But yes, leaders set the tone – as they should! That part is true.

Have you had a team that felt especially special?

Yes. I've had two standout experiences in Italy—here at The Hoxton Rome and previously at The Rome EDITION. Both teams are exceptional. I'm still in touch with some of my previous teammates (as I am with my teams from the past few decades around the world). That continuity, that bond, means so much to me.

What do you do when the team chemistry isn't there?

Sometimes people don't want to be coached. You try, but eventually, you must stop investing in those who aren't willing to grow. Leadership also means knowing when to let go.

Have you ever faced a moment that became a powerful learning experience?

Yes—more than one. One that stands out: when I arrived in San Francisco, my first unionized environment, it was difficult at first to gain trust. During a meeting with my GM, I said, "I'm getting along with the team, but I haven't yet earned their full loyalty and trust." She gave me a tiny book called "212°: The Extra Degree" and told me, "Show them that you're always willing to go the extra step for them."

To this day, I still operate by the "extra-degree" mindset. I even pass that book on to my teams. That one extra step—just like the fraction of a second that separates gold from silver—can make all the difference!

If you could invite three people to dinner—past or present—who would they be?

Picasso, Lady Gaga, and the writer Jeanette Winterson.

I have a big passion for modern art, the phase in the early-mid 20th century and would love to have Picasso at my dinner table. Since the first day I set eyes on one of Picasso's paintings in Los Angeles, I instantly fell in love with his art and I decided to read and learn everything about his life and his artist phases. He was such a genius who relentlessly created art from a very young age through the last years of his life. His evolution, his constant reinvention of his style, his refusal to conform, his confidence—it all inspires me.

I would also love to invite Jeanette Winterson is one of my favorite contemporary writers. Her work is surreal, provocative,-fearless, intriguing and she is madly in love with the use of words. Her books provoke the rational thinker in you and push you to open your mindset and to be mentally agile and accepting.

And Lady Gaga—what a force! She is a symbol of courage, excellence and versatility. She sings, writes, plays instruments, is a storyteller, keeps reinventing herself, and supports people in need. She's a true artist and would bring incredible energy to the table.

If you weren't doing what you do now, what would you be doing?

If I had the means, I'd collect modern and contemporary art, just for the joy of it. I'd probably be a painter—an abstract or surrealist one. I love surrealism in all forms: visual art, books, storytelling. I paint for fun, but if I weren't in hospitality, I'd definitely be doing something creative.

If you could go back and talk to your 15-year-old self, would she be surprised by how your life has turned out? What would you say?

I wouldn't be surprised by how things turned out—this is exactly the life and career I dreamed of: being a global hospitality leader. I'd tell her: keep going! You're on the right path!

How would you like to be remembered?

As an altruistic, fun, inclusive, value-driven, and genuinely good person. Professionally, when people think of me, I hope they that also remember that great results can be achieved through a humble and authentic approach, which are a sign of strength and not weakness. I also hope that my genuine passion for coaching and mentoring future leaders and my determination to take them not just where they would like to be, but where they should be, based on their potential, will shape a legacy that lasts.