

## BUSINESS

## THE VALUE OF PEOPLE



Jay Caiafa

Chief Operating Officer, Americas at InterContinental Hotels Group

**Interviewed By: Douglas Lindsay**

**Lindsay:** Could you share a little bit about your leadership journey and how you got to where you are today?

**Caiafa:** I grew up in a very small town in Connecticut. My parents were born in the United States, but my grandparents came from Italy. We grew up with a passion for this country. With a passion for our heritage. But, most of all with an understanding of the importance of family. I think that is something that has always stuck with me because when I think about leadership, teams, and the way that I manage my organization, we are actually more of a family first. The importance of that bond, trust, and teamwork has always been important and clear to me my entire life. I think that came to me from that immigrant heritage. The pride in getting over to the United States, serving the United States, and then building a family and a legacy in that way.

As a kid going to public school in this tiny town in Connecticut, I actually had the opportunity to do a number of different things. I look at kids today and so many of them are forced to specialize, whether it is sports or arts or whatever, so early on in their life. I was able to be kind of a jack of all trades. Starting when I was a little kid, I always played multiple sports like baseball, golf, basketball, and I ran cross country. The one thing I couldn't do is play football because my high school was so small. At the time, it was the smallest public high school in Connecticut - we had 52 kids in my graduating class so we did not have a football team. I think through high school, both academically and athletically, I often found myself in a position to lead. That started off by being the Captain of all three sports that I played at a varsity level. But also, even in academic environments, I often kind of led the charge in my classroom activities. Bringing that back to leadership and character, I don't know if I was ready for that. At the time, you don't really think about being a leader or the responsibility that goes along with wearing the title of team captain. It just seemed like something cool to do and I was able to rally around my friends. I don't think it was until later in life when I realized how formative some of that actually was.

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When you are now expected to be the one motivating the team, and you are supposed to embody the integrity of it. Like golf for example. You have to call penalties on yourself. It is a sport that is rooted in integrity. It is not a sport that is based on enforcement of someone else seeing you. So, I always kind of found myself thinking about building that type of culture, that type of integrity often in a team sport environment.

I actually decided that I wanted to go to the Air Force Academy when I was in high school after I saw *Top Gun*. I realize that was a Navy movie, but it planted a seed. I knew that was what I wanted to do with my life. I wanted to serve. I had the opportunity to attend the Academy and I graduated in 1999 and became a pilot. My generation of fliers, we were really odd because we went through casual status, went to pilot training, and then there was just a brief period of time where we were serving on active duty before September 11 happened. We graduated in early 2001 from flight school. You saw the world in a different way and it was fun. We were doing air shows and poking holes in the sky. It was a great job.

Then, September 11th happened and I think that was the first time in my life that I realized how quickly our lives could change. How fragile normalcy really is and how quickly you have to adapt to change. That morning, we were mission planning for an air show in the far east. We were sitting in the planning office and somebody came running in and said, "Fellas, you are not going to believe this. A plane just hit the World Trade Center." So, we jumped up and went into the scheduling office where the TVs were. At the time, I wasn't thinking much of it. I was the flight safety officer in the squadron and there are a lot of mishaps, especially with small planes. But, then you saw the initial wreckage. I was actually on top of the World Trade Center two weeks earlier with my family. Living in Connecticut, and working in New Jersey, I was driving back and forth through New York every couple of weeks. Now, you see the skyline smoldering. I remember, there was

a Master Sergeant standing next to me, and he said, "Can you imagine if somebody did this on purpose?" We were thinking, "Why would anyone do this on purpose?" Then, the next thing you know, we saw the second explosion, and before you know it, we were flying combat air patrols over mid-town Manhattan. You are watching this skyline fall apart and reflecting on your life, what it means, what it means to serve, and knowing that everything is going to be different now.

One of the most amazing memories is from the next morning on September 12th, when I was in the air watching the sunrise over New York and that iconic skyline was gone. The Trade Centers were gone. I remember having such a deep-rooted belief that we

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would get through this. I wasn't sure what it was going to be or what the next day was going to be like, but it was a deep-rooted belief that we were going to get through that. I think that is because you are surrounded by a group of people that all share that sense of team, purpose, and belief.

Post September 11th, I spent a lot of time in the Middle East. We were in that generation that kind of straddled those two different eras. A lot of what I learned in the Middle East helped to shape the way that I lead today. One of my favorite sayings, and everyone shudders when I say it, is I don't believe there is more than 100%. It is one of my biggest pet peeves when someone says that they will give 110%. From my perspective, if you can give 110%, then that is actually your 100%. We can't give more than that. The reason I believe that so strongly is because when we went through that the experience post-September 11th, if you suddenly believe that you have more in your tank beyond what 100% is, then that allows you to believe that you can deplete other areas of your tank and make up for it somewhere else. I just



don't think that is true. As a leader, we started learning that for our aircrews, our job was to be a stress absorber for the crew. When something goes wrong, if the pilot is freaking out, or if one of the crew members is freaking out, we can't be at 100%. We can't be at our best. So, if 20% is stress, then 80% is our best. People will say, if I can just give 120%, then I can make up for that stress. You actually can't. As a leader, you have to find a way to minimize or eliminate that stress so that your people can be at or near 100%.

I flew with some incredible folks and met some incredible leaders while I was there. Those three years kind of formed my resilience, grit, and determination. But, most of all, it shaped my understanding that a leader cannot succeed without putting their team in a position to be at their best and to build them up. Our job is to get our team to a place where they can be outstanding. Where they can achieve and we can get out of the way. It is about empowering the team.

My career kind of took a big left turn in early 2004. I had started to develop acid reflux. They call it GERD (gastroesophageal reflux disease). At the time, the only medicine that worked for me was Nexium and the Air Force had not approved it for pilots yet. So, I was given a choice. I can either be the ground person and fly a desk for two years and see what Nexium does to pilots. Or, I could have an honorable discharge and go do something else with my life. At the time, I went with choice number two. Suddenly, I found myself in 2004, a bit earlier than my commitment, having no idea what I wanted to be when I grew up. The plan was always to keep flying and maybe go over to the airlines when I retired. At the time, that was a terrible move because the airlines were decimated. We had so many pilots that were furloughed from their airline jobs that were coming back to the Guard.

So, I did what many people do when they don't know what they want to do when they grow up – I went to law school. I went to Duke and fell in love with the

campus and the team centered spirit among students, faculty, and alumni. Duke is known for its team first mentality. I spent my first year of law school at Duke and really enjoyed it. I spent my first summer working with a huge litigation firm and I realized that summer that being a lawyer might not be what I wanted to do for the rest of my life. So, when I came back to school that fall, I took the GMAT, applied to, and got accepted into Duke's School of Business at Fuqua and enrolled in a joint degree JD/MBA. I got out of school and started practicing law here in Atlanta for an international firm called Paul Hastings, focusing primarily on commercial real estate. I really enjoyed the development side of real estate when I was in law school. I thought that was a good way to stair step into the business side of development. Terrible timing again in that I started in 2008 about a week before real estate finance basically collapsed. So, I went very quickly from doing development work to doing things like restructuring and kind of seeing the world fall apart. My firm in particular at that time, laid off about 2/3rds of the team. I was fortunate enough to keep a job. But another life lesson was to watch how leaders handle adversity. Whether they take care of their team or they take care of themselves. Whether they can be transparent and of high integrity. Unfortunately, in my experience it was much more of a black box. We would come in to work and you would see someone coming out holding their box of desk stuff and crying. That went on for months not knowing whether it was your day or not. I was lucky. I kept my job, but I wasn't fulfilled.

I started to moonlight in startups. I was introduced to a biotechnology startup out of Connecticut focusing on stem cells. Not embryonic stem cells, but adult. They asked me to step in and help them out as an advisor and then within about a month or two they asked me to be their CEO. I did that at the same time I was practicing law during the day. That particular opportunity didn't ultimately pan out, but at that point, I had the business bug. I was ready to get out of law, it was 2011/2012 and things were getting a bit better. I got a call from a



headhunter about an opportunity at Bain & Company, which was a consulting firm. I went through the interview process, met a lot of great people and I was energized. I took the job. It was one of the most educational times of my life. At Bain, everything was fast paced, high impact work. You are trying to make a difference in an industry you have never worked in, very quickly. I loved the work that I did there in private equity in particular. Those are short term projects of two to four weeks. You wake up and find out you are working on a case with a new team in an industry you have never worked in. For example, you are going to work on a potential credit bureau sale, so you need to learn everything that you can about credit bureaus because in two days you are going to brief the CEO of this private equity company on whether or not they should buy the credit bureau. Or, it could be a project on plastic fruit cases. You know nothing about it but as a team, you are working until two in the morning, but you are having such a great time trying to figure out these problems. I was at Bain for about three years doing that as a case team leader. I loved the team atmosphere and the highly effective teams solving those problems. I just wanted to learn. Eventually, however, that is what made me leave Bain. That high speed and high pace was a lot of fun, but the challenge was that the moment you got to the point where you had the solution or the strategy and you were about to implement it, the client would look at you and say “Thank you very much. We appreciate it, we loved working with you, but you are just too expensive. We can take it from here.” You realize that while the strategy part was fun, it was the impact part that was actually motivating and inspiring. That was the part that mattered.

I wanted to find a company where I thought I could have an impact and I could be part of their long-term solution. I didn't want to keep forming these relationships only to move on. I wanted a place to call home. One of the people who worked with me on a case team suggested I look into IHG. They had an opening in their strategy group. So, I started looking into it. At the time, I was industry agnostic but I had three qualifications that

I was looking for. I was looking for a company with a culture that put people first. A company that was about making sure the team was more important than individual accolades. One that was highly externally competitive but internally collaborative. That was the number one thing I was looking for.

Number two, I wanted a company that touched people's lives where the end product wasn't just a thing - it was something that made a difference in the fabric of people's lives. Number three, I wanted a company that was in the position to be disruptive. At the time IHG was the third largest hotel company in the world. Third is a really good place to be if you are wanting to be disruptive. Number one has no reason to change. Number seven has no impact on the industry. Number three is in the perfect position. I thought as long as we have leadership that was willing to take the above approach, this could be a good place to be. I found all of those things with IHG.

I joined IHG in 2013 and while I have been there, I had the opportunity to get a lot of at bats. I started in the strategy organization. We wound up growing that team and expanding based on the fact that everything we did had impact. All of our projects had some form of top line impact to the company. After about a year and a half in that role, I was asked to step up from Director to Vice President to take over the Americas strategy team, which was a great opportunity. It was something I really enjoyed being able to work with and grow a team. I led that for about a year and a half at which point we decided that we were going to undergo a pretty massive transformation. The business wasn't fit for purpose for what we wanted to do. So, we reorganized to unlock funds to drive growth including for the Americas region where I was most familiar, and I helped lead that transformation.

Coming out of that I was asked to build a new organization called Hotel Lifecycle and Growth, that was designed to drive growth in our business by creating



a centralized organization specifically dedicated to helping our owners actually build and open their hotels. That was my first opportunity to build a large team by bringing together hundreds of people throughout the organization and getting them aligned on a new vision, a new purpose, a new meaning. Then, I was incredibly fortunate after doing that for two years, we had an opportunity where our COO left the company and I was asked to step in as the COO for the Americas region and take over the largest operations for our company. Our region for the Americas is about 2/3 of the profit revenue for our company as a whole. So, I was honored and fortunate to take that role. I think one of the reasons I was able to take that role was because I had an incredible team built behind me in the Hotel Lifecycle and Growth section that was able to take over my role. As leaders, our job is to make ourselves replaceable, not to make ourselves necessary. In that opportunity, I was fortunate to be able to have someone who could take over the reins. Actually, I was prouder of his promotion that I was of mine. That was really fulfilling. And with my incredible luck, I took the reins of this job a week before COVID. So, here we are.

**Lindsay:** Thank you for walking through that. I think it is especially important to examine those pivot points or those points where we make a change. Some of those occur to us and some of them we control. They cause us to think about what is really important. You mentioned COVID, and in an industry like hospitality and the restrictions that have been imposed, that is a huge challenge. Can you talk a little bit about what it is like to lead though that and maintain a people first culture that you mentioned?

**Caiafa:** I've talked to a lot of people about this because it went very quickly from hotel operations to crisis management. We were really fortunate in that several weeks before COVID really hit home for us here in this country, we had a region in Greater China that had already been going through it for some time. As a result, we were installing a new crisis or risk management

framework within our organization. In fact, our executive leadership team had our two-day team meeting in January where we sat down and decided to model out what our risk management approach would be if COVID made it to the U.S. At the time, it was still coronavirus. We didn't even have the COVID name yet. We went through this two-day type of war game of how exactly we would stand up the taskforce and what we would have to do. Coincidentally, a couple of weeks later, I had my entire team together in Chicago and I got a call from one of my general managers who said one of their employees tested positive for coronavirus. So, we had the steps ready when we needed it. It was so important to be prepared and think about it in advance. For our industry, we went from a record high occupancy to having 8 out of 10 hotel rooms empty overnight. It was decimating. Most of our hotels are owned by franchisees. They are small business owners whose entire livelihood is in that hotel. The reason I bring that up is because those two things taken together are our true north as we navigate the crisis. Number one, our primary goal was always, and still remains, to keep our hotel guests and our colleagues safe. We do that through our safety protocols and our cleaning protocols. Number two is getting our owners to the other side of this. Trying to build a bridge both in terms of cost generated from the business and our lobbying efforts with the government knowing that the number one thing to those owners was going to be liquidity. It isn't tax breaks. It is liquidity. They need to be able to pay their debt service and they need to be able to pay their employees in order to survive. Those two pillars formed our guiding principles: How do we keep people safe and how do we get our owners to the other side?

One of the things I remember from going through pilot training was when you have an emergency in the cockpit, you have three priorities and they are in this order: Aviate, Navigate, and Communicate. That has always stuck with me. In this situation, that is what we did. The first thing that we need to do is make sure this thing does not hit ground. How do we make sure people



are safe and how do they stay alive? Number two then, is how do we start planning for recovery? What are the things that we think are going to drive business back into hotels? What do guests need to feel to start traveling again? How do we handle first responders because we obviously have a commitment to first responders who are trying to get there and make a difference? They need a place to stay where they feel safe and hotels were that

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shelter for them in many cases. Then, the communicate part for us was more about how do we tell our story? How do we bring back travel? How do we ensure our guests and owners trust IHG and want to be a part of that? So, everything kind of went through that lens.

A lot of it goes back to those pillars we talked about with 9/11. A lot of what you try to do to get your team through a moment like this, is first, you have to have to maintain a sense of calm. When people are panicked, you just can't be productive. That goes back to the idea of everyone has a lot of things going through their head and how can I, as the leader, absorb that stress for them instead of amplifying it. A leader can be a stress absorber or a stress amplifier. How do I take that stress away from people so that they can be at their best?

Second, you have to anchor on a sense of purpose. Remember why you do what you do. I am very fortunate that in the industry that I am in, people are hospitality professionals to their core. They are in this business because they love to take care of people and make them smile. It is very similar to the military where people have clear purpose. When you have a purpose and you have bad days, you still know where you are going. You know why you are doing this and why you show up. The third thing is getting people to understand that no one gets through this without a team. No individual conquers crisis. So, how do we make sure we are working together with our owners, partners, and everyone to

ensure that the team and family are strong and able to hold us up? We are all going to have bad days and need to be picked up. How do you really get that environment set?

The final thing is building belief. Like I said, when I saw that sunrise on September 12th, I just knew that we would get through this. It is the same thing with COVID. As a leader, I keep going back to those principles and asking how do I make the organization feel these things? The way that I have been able to do that is by empowering my leaders, people that I trust to continue to build up their people. It hasn't been easy, to be honest. We have gone through some very difficult times, but we have stayed true to the things that matter.

We've made very hard decisions to put off things like furloughs, which we eventually had to do, but not at a rate that many of our competitors had to. We managed to welcome back several weeks ago almost all the people that we had to put on furlough. There was a very small layoff number compared to the rest of the industry. On one side, that gives me pride that we did the best that we could for so many people and we did our best to take care of the people that we couldn't hold on to. We hope someday they will come back. It also gives you discomfort because every person that was impacted, they were impacted at 100%. It is important to recognize that and have that transparency, sympathy, and compassion. It hurts. It is never an easy thing.

**Lindsay:** Certainly, people have been differentially impacted by what is going on. When you go back to that idea of people first and trying to take care of as many people as you can, that goes a long way in helping your hotel owners and employees know that the organization is trying to look out for them. That they aren't in this alone.

**Caiafa:** Actually, that's an important point when we consider current events around social unrest and racial



injustice in our country right now. When I look back at 9/11, the one thing that helped us get through that was that as a country, we were so incredibly united against a common enemy as we tried to build back up. Even in the financial crisis in 2008, everyone was mad at banks. We weren't fighting each other and people were helping one another get through it. This crisis is a bit different in the sense that we are in a point of time, regardless of what your politics are or your beliefs are, we are not united. Our country is actually highly divided. We are in a position where it is no longer good enough to not be something. We need to proactively do good. It's not just talking about it. For us, one of the things we always talk about at IHG is how important it is to bring your whole self at work. I'm a strong believer that you should not be a different person at home than you are at work. I don't think we have the bandwidth to do that. We will be unsuccessful at both. Every day I go to work, I bring my family with me. They are part of my life, on my sleeve, and in my heart. I am a father at work, just like I am a father at home. It's impossible to separate those. You can't manage the business side of this without looking at the human side.

We need to think about the importance of diversity, inclusion, and belonging in an organization, and how powerful that is in helping your team be successful. You can't do this without realizing that you just don't know what people are carrying at home. There are countless people that I met that I didn't know were caring for their ill parents at home. They have that burden and maybe now they are being furloughed or not making any money in their hotel. You just don't know what they are carrying. I think one of the biggest challenges we found in leading virtually is that it is actually very easy to manage the business this way. But, as a leader, you can't tell what impact that you are not having. You can't see what your people are carrying in their face or in their eyes. It is hard on Zoom to understand their mental health. How are they doing emotionally? I wear informal clothes to work now, but my schedule is very formal. Everything is scheduled and calendared. So, I

can't walk down the hall and see someone who is having a hard day and say, let's grab a cup of coffee and talk. So, to me, the biggest challenge I have found is how do you ensure that your people are doing okay through this?

**Lindsay:** Have you found anything that works with that?

**Caiafa:** Obviously we have a lot of things like town halls and WebEx calls. What I have asked my team to do in particular, is to find one person a day or every two, who you don't normally talk to and reach out to them. Just check in and see how they are doing. Unfortunately, I lost a friend of mine this past year who went to the Academy with me to suicide. He was a beacon of light and just an incredible person. We were so shocked when we heard that he had taken his life. That just goes to the fact that we don't know what people are going through, but maybe that phone call buys somebody a day. And that day maybe turns into a good day which turns into a week. And so forth and maybe we get them through whatever dark period they are in.

Something that has been really important is being transparent and honest. One of the things that people don't always realize is that in being a leader, while your core values shouldn't shift, the way you deliver against them and the way that you engage with people should. When people are in a time of normalcy and calm, they want their leaders to be analytical and unemotional, inspiring, but business oriented. When someone is under stress, they are actually looking for something quite different. They are looking for someone who leads with empathy, transparency, and with recognition of what people are going through. You can have the same leader who is successful in one way, trying to take that behavior into this environment and are completely unsuccessful because that is not what people need to hear and feel. We have tried really hard to have honest conversations. When we have our town halls, we are recognizing what is happening. We are realizing that they also need to hear from those around them, their

colleagues. I can relate to it from my perspective and my lens, but having other voices in the conversation is important so that we have different perspectives. We have had a lot of those hard conversations. Sometimes it is in groups and sometimes it is one on one. They are tearful and, in some cases, awkward and hard. But, they are incredibly important in keeping the conversation going. I've talked to people about the struggles I have in my life. To not talk about that can cause people to sometimes think that they are alone in their fight. Now, we are starting to put into place on my team reverse mentoring to try to help our leadership team to understand where their unconscious biases are. We are trying to do things that are not just what people have defined business as historically, but what it means to be a successful business and a people culture organization in this environment.

**Lindsay:** That transparency is critical and helps to foster the alignment between what we believe, say, and do. I agree that the current environment has caused some leaders to get out of their "normal" way of doing things and consider how they connect with and value the people on their team and in their organization. The idea of normal has changed.

**Caiafa:** That is something that people are going to have to get comfortable with. I know some people say they don't like change, but I don't know how you can be successful as a human being if you don't embrace change. Every day is a new assumption. Regardless of what you think about his company or him, Jeff Bezos always names the building in which he works as Day one. Because day one is always a fresh day. You have to go in and attack it with a clean set of eyes and the belief that maybe my assumptions don't matter anymore. Because, if you ever get to day two where you feel comfortable, you are pretty much done at that point. That is true with my career. There is no way I could have planned out my career where it is now. I've held jobs that didn't exist when I started with the company. I never thought I would be in hospitality when I was stepping into Jack's

Valley at the Air Force Academy. You never imagine all of this. You just have to maintain your values and ideals and be willing to learn and evolve.

I think one of the best pieces of advice I've ever gotten was right before I graduated from the Academy. I was talking with a Chief Master Sergeant. I asked him "What would you give me as a piece of advice as someone who is about to graduate? What should I remember and take away from this?" The advice he gave me was to keep a leadership journal. He said, "What I want to you do is write down those things that leaders have done that motivate and demotivate you in each of your jobs. Then, every time you get a new job and get a new promotion, I want you to go back and read your journal and remember

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what it was like to be in those positions." That was something that I have done through my entire career, because we often need reminding of what it was like when we were there. We are managing people like us, but we don't always remember us then, we remember us now. That is something that I think is really important. Also, to remember that everyone has something to learn and everyone has something to teach. As we think about what is going to stick from this COVID world to what is going to happen tomorrow, I think the important thing to remember is that you and I are not going to figure this out by ourselves. We are going to need our teams and different perspectives through all levels of the organization. That is where that transparency and trust really matter. I don't want the only people taking to be my Vice Presidents. I want it to be everyone in the organization. That is why we set up the reverse mentoring. I want people to be able to feel comfortable. That trust is so important in leadership because without trust, you won't get honesty, accountability, or a working model of what a highly effective team looks like. I think







that starts with honesty up front. If they don't know who you are and what you stand for, what does it matter what your plans for the year are?

**Lindsay:** That trust is critical and ties back to what you were talking about with respect to change. I think many people have trouble with change because they have been on the wrong side of change in the past. There isn't trust developed with the organization, so they can't trust their leadership or those around them. That creates uncertainty and they don't know what's really going to happen. So, it can be perceived as a threat. However, if I have trust developed, then I may not know what it looks like on the other side of the change, but I do know that I am not alone.

**Caiafa:** As leaders, it is not only important to set that foundation, but also to recognize what people are going through whenever there is change. It's relatively scientific. To be overly simplistic, there is positively perceived change and there is negatively perceived change. In both situations, people go through a pretty predictable journey. In negatively perceived change, people go through the grief curve. They will try to bargain their way through it and as a leader, you need to help them through their journey. The same thing happens in positively perceived change, it's just a different curve. We used to joke that it's a lot like the marriage curve. It starts with uninformed optimism. When you first get married, you think we get to live together, we love each other...it is going to be awesome. Then, you go quickly from uninformed optimism to informed pessimism. What do you mean I can't watch what I want to or I have to pick up after myself? But, you eventually get to informed optimism and you get through the curve. To your point, when you start getting into those places where you are trying to tell people what you think they want to hear or you are trying to play a different part of your leadership card with them, it is very dangerous to do that. They have to see you as the same person. Whether they like what you have to say or not, they have to trust you, that you are being honest, that you have their best intentions in mind, and that you will control what you

can control to try to help them get to the other side. That is where I see leaders get into trouble. They will bargain with people, tell them not to worry, or that it isn't too bad. Maybe overall it isn't that bad, but to that person it was and now you have destroyed your trust. Once you destroy that trust, it is incredibly difficult to ever earn back.

**Lindsay:** That trust is along many avenues, like your employees, competitors, and other stakeholders. With an organization as large as yours, a violation of trust, has many second and third order effects beyond the individual. The bottom line is that even though there may be uncertainty all around me, if I have trust in the team and in my leader that gives me a path on how to get through that change. It gives a sense of unity. Otherwise we have divisiveness. When we talk about organizational culture, that unity is important. When we don't have that and we see people working at cross purposes, then it is predictable that negative things happen.

**Caiafa:** That is important to have trust in the organization as well. What is a brand, but trust in a promise? Every time you buy a product, you trust it to do what you think it is going to do. When you stay at one of our hotels, each of those brands is a promise. If we don't have trust, we are done. To your point about divisiveness, regardless of what side of the line you are with current events, it is clear that as people, many have lost the ability to even be kind to each other. For example, who would have thought there would be a way to be divisive over a pandemic? I think it goes back to integrity. The moment you start to lose integrity or trust, you slip into an area of moral relativism. Once you get into that world, the next thing to slip is accountability. If we have different moral compasses, then who holds us accountable? That not only applies to the world of business, but also with respect to humanity. It is important to remember that we are in a situation where people are impacted from an economic standpoint, they are impacted from a health standpoint, and they are impacted from a morality standpoint in many cases

all underpinned by the greatest public health crisis we have seen in a century. This is challenging and you never know what lever is flashing red for your people that day.

**Lindsay:** If your people know what to expect from you, then you may not pull every correct lever in the correct sequence, but at least they know you are coming from a place where you are trying to support them and the organization. We don't expect people to be perfect, but we do expect them to care.

**Caiafa:** This is also where you go back to the leader's responsibility to lifting others. A leader's job is to create a team where everyone has value and everyone matters. If you think about a car, you can put the best engine in the world in that car. However, if the car doesn't have wheels, it is going anywhere. You can't simply replace the wheels with more engines. It doesn't work that way. People need to understand what their purpose is in the organization, understand that they are valued, and they don't have to pretend that they are someone else. So, if that day they are stressed because their mother is sick or they are stressed because they are worried about making their bills, we don't expect them to be perfect either. We expect that we have a team that will lift each other up when we are down and they know that they belong. They know that they are important and that they matter. I think that is something that we are seeing more broadly in society. People are just having trouble telling each other that they matter. That it is okay for them to be who they are. It is about building that environment where people not only trust you as a leader, but you trust the intention of the team so that they can be themselves and offer ideas and offer their view of the world in order for the team to be better. I think if you draw that back to the military and our time in the Air Force, the thing that comes to mind is the debrief. In the flying squadron, you debrief after every mission. That happens and works through trust and it makes the team better. We are now seeing that in business and trying to bring that mentality into a business environment. But, you can't do that without trust.

**Lindsay:** Based on your vast experience, what advice would you have for young leaders?

**Caiafa:** First and foremost, being a leader is not an opportunity to be important, it is an opportunity to serve. I think it is really important to understand that perspective. That was an important moment for me when that flipped for me from the perspective of being a leader as an award to one of responsibility. Second, it goes back to the idea of the Golden Rule.

The notion that rank is a symbol of importance, is a mistake. It is important because you need to have a decision-making structure and hierarchy, but it doesn't mean that a General can't learn from an Airman. I think being open about your leadership journey and understanding that you can learn just as much from someone who is following you as you can from someone who is leading you.

The last piece is ensuring you understand what your values are and not compromise on them. I remember going through the Academy and having Contrails out memorizing so many things like the Core Values. I realized later in life how those Core Values have actually defined every team that I have been a part of. Integrity First, Service Before Self, and Excellence In All We Do.

I thought that was something that was just part of a moment of my journey but you realize that some things in life you just can't trade away. Integrity...you just can't get that back easily. Putting others ahead of you will never get you into trouble. Trying your best is important. If people see that in you, you are going to be successful.

