

DH - Compilation 2026

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What I do is inconsequential. Why I do what I do is I get to shorten people's journeys every day. What I love about our hospitality industry is that it's our mission to make people feel cared for while on their journeys. Together, we'll explore what hospitality means in the built environment, in business, and in our daily lives.

I'm Dan Ryan, and this is Defining Hospitality

This podcast is sponsored by BermanFall Hospitality Group, a design-driven furniture manufacturer who specializes in custom case goods and seating for hotel guest rooms

Ian: So I'm gonna define hospitality as turning strangers. Into friends. Now, the reason that, the reason that's my definition is I've gone etymological, right? Because we know that the word hospitality, You know, has got Latin roots and all of the words like. Host and hospital, all of those words, like guests all come from a very similar route.

, I've written a [00:01:00] whole bunch of, , alternative, history novels. But one of the, You know, one of the things that you do as you research that social fabric, that, that the stuff that glued societies together in ancient times is because hospitality was this sacred duty and it was all about welcoming guests from other lands, from far away places.

And you had, you were honor bound to do right by them and to give them food and to send them on their way. Into, You know, safety with a, a full b

Chelsea Hershelman: there's something to be said for when we're designing these spaces and then, filling them with the amazing operations team that brings them to life.

We're

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Thinking about what is the guest journey? How are they arriving?

Who are they? How can we help them? How can we make them feel welcome and safe and, make the most of their business trip or their, or their vacation? We really think about that and we really lean and wanna know our guests. and then I also think about as [00:02:00] we're designing buildings, what is it like for our team members to, to, to come into the building? Do they feel welcome? Do they have a great space to, You know, put on their uniform and start to personify their role within the hotel?

John O'Sullivan: I think hospitality is the almost sacred act

Hmm.

Seeing another human being and saying without words that you authentically belong here. I think it's a, a soul practice, and I think it's a heart practice, and I think it's something that in a lot of cases comes very naturally to the warriors that live the journey each and every day

steve_1_08-13-2025_091847: Very simply, I define hospitality as making people feel valued.

bruno-viterbo_1_07-18-2025_112744: the sense of conviction that I mentioned earlier. That is such a powerful force. You know, it's like a person with conviction in a room. It's like gravity. It just pulls everything there and it stabilizes. And it doesn't mean that that can [00:03:00] change and evolve, it just creates this powerful force of, keeping people also focused on what they should be doing. It removes the uncertainties. It just makes people feel better about what they're doing and, and then they move forward.

John O'Sullivan: opening our first Four Seasons in the Middle East and not necessarily having the infrastructure there and the culture in Egypt before that was that staff were subservient.

Managers ate in their own restaurants. Staff did what managers said, and there was no level of camaraderie. And I remember interviewing for the first time people and saying, "You know, here's what we're gonna do. We're Four Seasons. This is how we operate." And people just laughing in my face.

And I remember being in that ballroom, and I get emotional just talking about it.

I remember being in that ballroom And just seeing people who totally believed and n-- and actually knew that, that there was a n- there was a new dawn for their possibilities. And I fast-forward, one of my best friends was the [00:04:00]

general manager of the Four Seasons in Dublin. Wonderful man, John Brennan. And he was really short of staff, and we sent 15, , Egyptians to, to Dublin.

We knew that they were never coming back because it was a great opportunity for them. Um, and I remember going... Whenever I would go to Dublin to go to one of my favorite pubs with John, I would always go to the hotel. And two years later, all the Egyptians had Dublin accents, and they'd be going, "Oh, yeah, we start at 11.

Great seeing you." And I'm going, "Dude, you got the wrong script. You're, you're from Zamalek in Cairo. What's going on?" And then coming back, they would all take me to a Middle Eastern restaurant, and we would smoke shisha, uh, it's all legal, and sort of eat a beautiful food. There-- That's the story. The story of hope and the story of giving people the possibilities to liberate themselves from the tyranny of [00:05:00] history, which at times just sort of oppresses them.

eileen_4_08-01-2025_102703: Every guest room we do a white box to make sure that, it's a white box model, full scaled model to make sure scale and proportion is understood. So at that human scale we're, we're, uh, really monitoring scale and proportion and then do these lifesize models

dan-ryan_10_08-01-2025_132703: just so I'm clear, the white box is not necessarily a model room. You're just, you're building out the form so you can walk in there and feel how, how it is. I, I wish people would do that more, but it seems to just make a, a, a tight schedule even tighter when you start doing that. Yeah.

eileen_4_08-01-2025_102703: We found it to be the answer of rolling out a thousand rooms

because, you know, you, you could be in, you know, overwhelming to do 2000 rooms, but we do that white box and get the scale and the proportions of whatever it is, viewpoints, archways, whatever we are, we're working on. And then we roll into a model room [00:06:00] and between the model room and the white box, we don't look back.

bruno-viterbo_1_07-18-2025_112744: it started with the way he looked at. design that was presented to him, which was we could have this rendering a, of a, of a five story atrium, with a big fountain in the center and, you know, and all these paths leading to different places. And Wayne would start talking about the scale of the people that were on the rendering before he would actually start

talking about the building itself. And, and if for some reason the people that were representing on, on, on the rendering were not the right type of people that would be in that space, he would be really disturbed by it. Like, you know, these are a, a guy in a suit with a briefcase, you know, in a, in a, in a little atrium before you enter the gaming lounge. That's not the kind of person you see there.

dan-ryan--he-him-_6_07-18-2025_142744: Oh, that's super interesting. So basically the design could be good, could be bad, it could be the best design ever in the world. Let's just assume it's the best design ever. He's [00:07:00] focusing on the actual renderings of the people and what they look like, and is that a real representation of the type of person that's gonna be walking through this space?

Holy cow.

bruno-viterbo_1_07-18-2025_112744: where he started. I mean, from what, from what my experience was, and maybe other people have different experiences, my experience was that he started with what are people seeing? How are they experiencing this space?

Hmm.

and, and where are they going and what does this mean? It wasn't about, Hey, we have these great finishes on the walls and there's all this detailing and the lighting and the chandeliers.

It, it was about what does it feel like to be in that place? And I remember, you know, in one meeting that was a lesson for me, we were reviewing the work of the interior designers, and I think at one point I made a comment about something. I said, oh, I, I like that. And he looked at me and he said, well, this is not about whether you like it or not. is about, is it right or is it, is it wrong?

Hey everybody. We've been doing this podcast for over three years now, and one of the themes that [00:08:00] consistently comes up is sustainability. And I'm just really proud to announce that our sponsor, BermanFalk Hospitality Group, is the first within our hospitality industry to switch to sustainable and recyclable packaging, eliminating the use of styrofoam.

Please check out their impact page in the show notes for more info.

John O'Sullivan: and the joy I have, the biggest joy I have, one of the biggest joys, is meeting someone on arrival who has sent me an email saying, "You

know, I wanna put my program together. I'm from New York, uh, and I wanna do... I'm, I'm here for five days and I want..." Yeah. Like, they're, they're here to four of them.

Uh, "And I wanna, you know, do this, this, this." I go, "I hear you. It's not the busiest time of the year, you don't need to do that. When you arrive, let's talk about it." And seeing that person, and then seeing them four or five days later suffering from a beautiful condition called jellyfishitis, which is what I call it.

And where they can hardly get up and going, "Yeah, you were so right, man. I, I've just been by the beach. I've just discovered mango margaritas," which you should [00:09:00] have discovered earlier in life, "and volumes of them. And I just love, I love the way I feel."

Chelsea Hershelman: I've been a leap of faith person most of my life. I think it probably helped growing up, we moved around Alon, so I think I was. I I went to like eight different schools

K

through

12. So

Dan Ryan: Oh wow.

Chelsea Hershelman: Yeah. you

you learn to be like, I learned to belong to myself and the Brene Brown nomenclature.

Um, and that I can. do, I could do hard things. I could go into spaces where I wasn't that comfortable, especially as a pretty hardcore introvert. Um, You know, I could learn to adapt to new spaces and new challenges. And then that when I was 18, um, I was able to do an exchange year to France, sort of a fifth year of high school.

And so talk about ultimately the faith going to a new country where, okay, I learned and Suburban, You know. Public school, but it was very different going to France and [00:10:00] people talking to you like you're a baby and that type of thing.

But um, so I was determined to get conversational as quickly as possible and I did that. And um, You know, there was no, I mean there was a safety net and that I was with the Rotary Club, but um, I really just had to do it. there was no one but me to figure this out. I didn't have anybody else with me.

So I think that was the beginning of, of the fact that I just, I've always had restless feet and that I wanna go explore, and I just, I do have this innate curiosity And so I just was like, I've got nothing to lose in everything to gain if I try this. And, and that's what I did. And, um, uh, You know, I went to France and then, Every time I've changed my career, um, it's been these leaps of faith. And I have a little meme that says Sometimes your only available transportation is a leap of faith. And I sort of love that because sometimes you just do have to step out and not in a way that. It's disrespectful to where I've been, [00:11:00] but in a way that's like, guys, I've gotten so much out of my time with you.

Thank you so much. I, I just need to try something new

Margot Stern: two of my dear, dear friends. Stefan and Davis founded Co Epoxy, which is this brand where they were like, well we're, you know, we're gonna do gear, like outdoor gear, but we're gonna have this sort of like, you know, socially good component of it. So we want it to be social impact and yeah, it's fine.

Like, we're gonna do this. And you, you look at that and you're like, but there's already Patagonia and eight bajillion other competitors. How are you gonna enter that marketplace? And you watch your friends go out and do it and kick butt and you know, now they're in every single REI, even internationally.

So I think when you have friends who are doing stuff like that, it totally distorts your view and understanding of what's possible and screw you guys because you got me into this mess. 'cause then I sort of was like, oh, I can also go out and, I will just develop this 27 bedroom boutique hotel and spa and restaurant and I'll take it through a [00:12:00] complete D one zoning variance, which I'd absolutely never done before.

Chelsea Hershelman: I would say don't disqualify yourself. You know, I think that's the, most limiting thing you can do is like, oh, I'm not meant for this or whatever, because, You know, I mean, I have a master's degree in art history. It It's not an obvious career path at all to go from graduating from that to, procurement, um, in, in the hospitality industry. Um, to me there's a through line in that I got to be part of bringing design to life. And I had studied Alon of the so-called decorative arts in my degree. So there is a through line, it's just maybe

not an obvious one. Um, but I think that if you can set your pride aside and your. Type A, if you have a type A tendency that you want to always look like You know what you're doing and that you have this, You know, anyone with a perfectionist streak, recovering perfectionist for sure. To just kinda set that aside and say, what do You know, what do I wanna do with this one wild [00:13:00] and beautiful life that I have? You have nothing to lose by putting yourself out there, because the feedback you'll get is like, actually, You know, love your attitude, love your, um, enthusiasm. We need someone who has a, You know, who's a licensed architect.

Like, cool, not me. But then, You know, you get some further feedback of, but we could see you in a role like this or that or the other. And we don't have that right now, but maybe that's something you should pursue. Or they say yes, or they say yes, however, we think that actually this role would fit you better. So I think that there's never any harm in just having the conversations and feeling things out and, being really upfront about, You know, I haven't done this before. However, I have skill sets. That I think can get me there. And, You

know, I,

I

could be an asset to your company.

Margot Stern: Go to the town, I say, you know, this is what I'm thinking. If you don't want this in your township, please tell me now. I do not wanna come in here and try to bowl people over. I have a vision. If you don't like it, I'll take it elsewhere.

[00:14:00] And they said, no, we love this. This is aligned with our master plan. This is aligned with our priorities right now. We really appreciate that conservation is, you know, part of your, um, proposal, which it was and still is. And so I, the one thing that was important is sort of getting the alignment from the town from the very beginning.

That is not to say that I had alignment from all of these citizens of the town because what ended up happening is there was a rival real estate developer who I, unbeknownst to me, had wanted to acquire the property, had sort of low-balled, the owner thought he was gonna get a deal, thought he was gonna turn it into some kind of rehab facility and set about absolutely trying to destroy the reputation of this project.

So I mean like yard signs going on Facebook,

you know, Facebook chats and next door and telling people that I was a big city developer from Philadelphia and I was gonna destroy the natural wilderness and I was gonna sort of ruin life as they know it. And that community, and it worked. People showed up at the zoning meetings and [00:15:00] were going on and on about how I was gonna like kill all of the bears and uh, the turtles

steve_1_08-13-2025_091847: We served a lot of well-known high profile individuals. Being a high cuisine caterer in la I think probably the two events that would stand out the, the first would be the first time we served an American president. And it was just regardless of what, politics were at the time. This was early on in our business.

We had a tiny kitchen. Our kitchen at the time, Dan was 10 feet by 10 feet. We had one oven, one double door reach in. And we got the call that we were catering for President Clinton and 80 of his friends at Bob Hope's house in Palm Springs.

John Duffield: The concept of living intelligence is the data the guest brings in. So this is where you said it gets a little bit creepy. So

imagine if you [00:16:00] Mm-hmm. or whoop device or the aura ring say

it's tracking your biometrics, right? You know, it's tracking your heart rate, body temperature,

number of steps, recovery, circadian rhythms, like as a traveler when I'm traveling. Half the time I show up to a place exhausted, You know, dehydrated, say, and I'm, I'm ready to relax, or I'm starving, I'm ready for food. Imagine if I opted in to share some biometrics from my health wearable and, there's the right privacy, the right security practices in place, and the right value exchange, right?

'cause we're not gonna give this up for no reason. Then all of a sudden the property starts to around my unique needs. It knows when I show up, if I am [00:17:00] excited, exhausted, or ready to rock, it can adjust lighting, Uh, the bar can be triggered to prepare hydration for John Duffield coming in. Um, it knows how to set the temperature of the room. It knows if I'm running hot or not. It knows if the next morning after waking up. How my sleep was. It automatically pushes back the wellness bookings that I have set for that next day. 'cause it knows I need some more recovery.

But if I was in front of Apple, it would be that, You know, they're living on a mountain of, of user data. They create the, the, the, the Sleekest most widely adopted products on the face of this earth. Um, and and what's something that,

that people are gonna never stop doing that is, that is traveling.

So an intersection point there where there, where we could totally reimagine what that kind of looks like. Uh, do you want to, something like that. Do you want to come in [00:18:00] and, and change And and, and play a role in the future of travel?

eileen_4_08-01-2025_102703: Get ready because it's gonna be an amazing experience. And little do you know where you're going to be and who you're going to meet and in yourself. Um. You know, trust your gut like you do. Don't ever not, trust your

gut. Um.

Um.

and, um, enjoy the ride. It is an incredible experience and, Take time to be just grateful, because it is the industry and the people are incredible and I would've never have recognized that being that young is that. You know, everyone in our industry really wants to support each other, and I think that's a commonality through your, your podcast here. And I welcome anyone from a mentorship if you I really encourage my team to get mentors to, to really get that outside perspective and really embrace what's happening.

steve_1_08-13-2025_091847: the first principle [00:19:00] speak the good practice. Speak the good in yourself. Speak good about the client, the customer, and the company. Practice. Number two is honor the other.

Number three, you earn the respect of the other. And I think in a lot of our encounters, we expect respect. respect should be given, but it also has to be earned.

rinse and repeat. And the way that you rinse and repeat is you celebrate and improve.

So that's

sort

I love it.

you manifest this virtuous cycle mindset. And it's, it's how you can start beginning to think like a host.

John O'Sullivan: Forgive everyone. Don't allow... I-- If I had to die tomorrow and you said to me, "So you're gonna die tomorrow.

Who do you want to forgive?" I have forgiven everyone because they're not worthy of being on my hard drive of going, "Oh my God, you've done me wrong," whatever. Great. I have forgiven everyone. I have asked for forgiveness from everyone. [00:20:00] Uh, and if you do that, then I think, you know, and I go back to your canvas.

Your canvas is waiting to be re-primed rather than sort of, you know, taking a square inch and working on it. And I think, you know, and don't take ourselves too seriously. We're not, we're not doing brain surgery. We're doing a lot of heart surgery, though.