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Jamal Samad, a loss prevention supervisor at the InterContinental Miami hotel, welcomes a guest.

INTERCONTINENTAL MIAMI

Museum-size grandeur and family-scale service define hotel

By **RON HURTBISE** | South Florida Sun Sentinel

One of Miami's foremost luxury hotels, the InterContinental Miami, provides one of the grandest settings imaginable for its nearly 500 employees. Just outside of the four-star hotel is the towering downtown skyline and the allure of adjacent Biscayne Bay and Bayfront Park. Guests entering the wide, polished lobby are greeted by a 18-foot-high, 70-ton sculpture, Henry Moore's *The Spindle*, that would look at home in any world-class city's museum. Patrons of the lobby bar and Toro Toro restaurant enjoy enthusiastic cocktail service as servers deliver works of culinary art.

The InterContinental Miami has been named the large winner of the Sun Sentinel's 2019 Top Workplaces survey. It's the third win in five years for the hotel.

Just about every event that comes to Miami extends a tentacle or eight into the hotel. And many events, like next year's Super Bowl, establish headquarters here. This is where the National Football League brass and untold members of their entourage will hold business meetings, conduct media interviews, mull potential

rule changes, and celebrate the pending completion of another record-setting season. Offering a bloc of 500 of the hotel's 641 rooms helped the city land America's largest sporting event for 2020, General Manager Robert Hill says.

It didn't hurt that the popular Super Bowl Village will be located next door at 32-acre Bayfront Park.

Inside, one senses that the hotel's employees are carefully screened to ensure they possess,

not just patience and eagerness to please the guests, but an instinct to help and protect each other. Encountering each other through the staff-only corridors, managers and prep cooks greet each other by their first names.

"There truly is a family feeling here at the InterContinental Miami," says Hill, the hotel's general manager for more than nine years. "And it starts with fair and consistent treatment of all colleagues,

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whether it's the attendant that's cleaning the room, the steward washing the dishes, the server serving the guests or the cook that's in the kitchen cooking."

Carla Seymour's radar is always on as she serves breakfast, lunch and dinner in the hotel's employee cafeteria, called the Chill Grill. The eatery provides a strong argument for employee happiness: Staff can eat for just \$2 a meal.

"As they come in from their busy days, I just love to try to get them to express and have a smile on their faces," Seymour says. "Sometimes I can look on the face of people and see they are, not overwhelmed, but going through something. I love to say something to them and make them forget about what they are going through at that moment, to really enjoy their lunchtime."

Jamal Samad, a loss prevention supervisor, has worked at the hotel for three years, retrieving lost possessions and keeping guests and employees safe.

"For me, it's all about the culture," he says. "Just coming into work everyday ... working with



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the amazing staff here. My leaders, they really believe in me, they trust me, and I feel like I have a voice."

David Suarez has been working at the hotel for four years after breaking into the trade in his native Cuba at age 15. He mostly loves

the interactions with guests from all over the world. "You can meet people from China, Russia, the Caribbean," he says.

But he also appreciates the wide variety of backgrounds among his co-workers.

"We have a lot of customer serv-

ice people, and you learn from them all daily," he says. "There's a lot of diversity [among the] people working in this hotel, and that's what makes it fun."

Clellon Joy III, a banquet cook who has worked in food service at the hotel since 1989, describes his

tenure as "a joyful ride."

"I enjoy what I do," he says. "I like the camaraderie, the leadership, and the stability of the hotel." Mostly, he says, he likes living and working downtown, where his daily commute is simple.

Ensuring that employees feel respected, rewarded and engaged are the keys to having a great hotel, Hill says. Numerous recognition programs, with names like "It Pays to Wow," encourage the hotel's meeting planners and guests to identify employees whose efforts exceed expectations. Employees identified most frequently throughout the year earn gift cards.

Seymour says the work environment at the InterContinental differs sharply from that of a previous job "where they didn't care."

"I worked at a warehouse and all they wanted was for that work to get out. But here, we are a family," she says.

Hill says that employees who treat each other like family also treat the hotel's guests like family. Those guests, he says, "recommend our hotel to other guests so they can come and have the same experience."