

# It's time to rethink how we do business says new principal of The Private Hotel School

By [Janine Greenleaf Walker](#)

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Martin Koch, the new principal of the Stellenbosch campus of the renowned Private Hotel School (PHS), has vast experience in the education and hospitality sectors - having been involved in the opening of the Sol Kerzner School of Tourism and Hospitality at the University of Johannesburg - and says that Covid-19 is forcing the hospitality industry to rethink how it does business.



Martin Koch

Koch tells us more...

## ***Tell us a bit about yourself***

I studied sports management and started my career working in the gym industry – installing and managing corporate health facilities. My appointment at the University of Johannesburg as academic head for sport and tourism management studies was my first introduction to hospitality training.

During this time, I was fortunate to be part of the university's building committee and one of our major projects was the construction of the Sol Kerzner School of Tourism and Hospitality. I then moved to various private colleges and have spent the last 18 years managing campuses and brands around the country.

*“ Your corporate culture will be tested during this time. Learn from the equity in which you invested, and ensure that you build a brand that will sustain the next calamity. ”*

I started working for the AdvTech group at Vega and then moved to Educor where I managed both face-to-face and distance educational brands. Managing the distance brands – Itec and Damelin Correspondence – helped me to develop a holistic view of the higher education and training sector of South Africa. I spent the last three years consulting to hospitality and commercial property and service delivery companies – including four- and five-star hotels.

***Why do you think so many PHS alumni have been successful?***

The training and education the students receive to ensure that they are employable. They develop skills that they can start using from day one when they enter the industry.

The staff at PHS is dedicated to their craft and this passion is transferred into a student-teacher eco-system where students are allowed to discover their own selves. PHS helps students to become confident individuals who have a core set of values with a positive attitude to serve people.

***What advice do you have for anyone wanting to make a career in the hospitality industry?***

Choose a career that links with your passion and you will not work a day in your life. Hospitality is a lifestyle and helps you to be employment ready. You will be skilled in doing certain tasks before you complete your studies and you will receive sufficient knowledge to develop your skills further.

***How do you rate the South African hospitality industry?***

We are generous – generous properties with generous people. We are a friendly bunch of people and the tourists love us for that.

***What advice do you have for the hospitality industry during this coronavirus pandemic which has hit the sector hard?***

Your corporate culture will be tested during this time. Learn from the equity in which you invested, and ensure that you build a brand that will sustain the next calamity.

***And for students who are studying or want to study hospitality?***

Hospitality providers are very resilient and we will bounce back very quickly. When day one arrives – properties will require skilled staff. Our clients are also demanding more of us and a qualification in hospitality will help meet these demands.

Don't think just hotels – being able to anticipate other people's needs and then deliver what they want is not exclusive to the hotel industry. Many other industries require these skills to connect with the client-facing business end – and there is nobody better equipped than hospitality staff.

***Who was your biggest hospitality/food influence growing up?***

Sol Kerzner – who said: "I want hotels like they have in Hollywood". Very average idea but he worked very hard to be the best at it.

***What are you most proud of?***

The work that I have done with my first students. I met one of my old students and he introduced me on a chat group called the Martin Koch Terminator Group. I was apparently a tough taskmaster at university – but what a privilege and honour to work with people who have developed into brilliant world citizens. It is a very humbling experience.

***Was there anything that you thought you wanted to do before you started working in the hospitality industry?***

I studied sports management, so I wanted to be like Jerry Maguire.

***What makes for good service in your opinion?***

Caring enough to exceed the customer's expectations.

***What countries have you visited who you believe are the best when it comes to hospitality and providing customer satisfaction, and why?***

Barcelona – it was very professional yet relaxed. Cape Town is up there with the best of them.

***What kinds of foods do you think are underrated?***

Sunday roast – it's time to sit together with the family and lots of laughter.

***Do you do the cooking at home and what is on the menu?***

Yes – it's cold today so it will be a stew.

***What is your favourite dessert?***

Ice-cream

***Your favourite kitchen tool?***

Braai tongs

***Is there anything food you don't eat?***

Brussel sprouts and *atchar*.

***Who is your foodie icon?***

My wife – if she doesn't cook, I have to!

***What food programme do you watch on television and why?***

Pioneer Woman – my wife likes her.

***Your favourite three ingredients***

Meat, meat and meat

***Your favourite food and wine pairing?***

I lost the pre-nuptial! Any wine my wife drinks with her food normally works for me.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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