

A Great Cause

By: Jeff Higley
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Steve Belmonte

I haven't always seen eye to eye with Steve Belmonte. The sometime-boisterous president of the Lexington Collection and I have one thing in common that at times creates interesting conversations: We have opinions about everything.

Steve was in the hotel industry long before I knew what a duvet was. He started as a teenager and hasn't looked back—spending 40-plus years in the business. We've disagreed, argued, disagreed some more and mended fences. Once I even apologized because gulp, I was wrong about something.

But one thing I have never forgotten about Steve is that he and I share a love of kids. Yeah, kids get on all of our nerves at one time or another (or another or another...), but at the end of the day I don't know many people who don't have a soft spot for children—especially if the kids need help.

Belmonte is continuing a legacy he started while leading the Ramada brand by partnering with Plan USA, formerly called Child Reach, in an effort to get help for some of the neediest kids in the world.

Plan USA will use Belmonte as a spokesman on infomercials and public-service announcements. The television schedule has the potential to reach 100 million consumers nationwide, and it would cost Lexington \$2 million or more to buy airtime.

The Lexington—Plan USA partnership also will be incorporated at the property level with hotels actively engaging in the Lexington Dollar A Day program. In turn, 100 percent of that donation will be given to Plan USA to help build schools and hospitals in some of the poorest countries in the world.

Yes, there are advantages for Lexington to have Belmonte involved.

“It shows our company to the public in a very warm and caring manner,” Belmonte said. “Without charities like this, these kids will die. There is no government safety net for them in these third-world countries.”

One of the best things about the lodging industry is that it is filled with caring people. Steve Belmonte is one of them.