

A conversation with Scott Roebuck from Marriott International: How Helping People and Doing Excellent Work Guided His Career

Scott Roebuck, Senior Manager, US and Canada, Managed Select Brand Finance with Marriott International, sat down with us to discuss his life story and how it intertwined with his career. Read on for a glimpse of his journey and lessons learned along the way.

Who is Marriott International?

Marriott International is the leading global travel hospitality company with a rich history. Initially involved in various ventures, including theme parks and restaurants, Marriott has focused on growing its core lodging business and relevant adjacencies that serve every type of traveler for every trip purpose.

Marriott's mission is to unite people through travel, facilitating connections at their extensive network of over 8,500 properties worldwide. These properties are either franchised or managed, and Scott's role involves supporting the managed hotel sector. As Marriott approaches its 97th anniversary, there is a sense of anticipation and excitement about the future.

Growing up Marriott

Scott's Marriott story begins in the early eighties before he was born. His parents met working at the Marriott headquarters and got married in 1984. Scott was born the next year and has ever since been a "Marriott baby." In fact, he attended the first-ever "take your child to work" day at the headquarters when he was seven. He has remained at Marriott ever since. Although it was a central part of his life, Scott didn't always know he wanted to work at the company.

"You can change your mind."

Scott's college years and early career taught him a valuable lesson: "Just because you didn't say you were going to be a finance person at the age of seven, it's okay. You can change your mind and go a different direction anytime you want to," Scott says. That's what he did.

With the goal to help people and make a difference, Scott started as a political science major at Salisbury University. However, political science soon lost its appeal. He pivoted to combine business and political science into a single major, taking several valuable business courses along the way. Knowing he didn't want to pursue the political side of his degree, it only made sense to job hunt for business positions after graduating in December of 2007.

Making his way back to Marriott

The Architecture and Construction team at Marriott was hiring project accounting staff, reported Scott's brother. Scott applied, but not because his parents worked there or because he wanted the hotel discounts, or because it was his only option. He applied because he knew it was an excellent work environment. So, there he was, no longer a guest or a "bring your kid" kid, but a staff accountant at Marriott.

Do good work and treat people right

The keys to growth in a company are no secret, Scott reminds us. He learned early on in his career that he enjoyed helping people do their jobs better. "I've always tried to do good work, and I've always tried to treat people right. I've tried to be fair. I focus on maintaining my cool," he recalls. Scott attributes this work ethic to his career success.

Offer help, change lives

When a full-time position in corporate facilities accounting opened, he needed help with his resume to secure the role. His current boss helped him overhaul it, and he recounts, "If my boss did not review my resume with me, I wouldn't be here today. I don't know where I would be, but I wouldn't have gotten that job."

If you're an executive or a manager in a company, always offer help to those under you. Scott points out, "Just because someone has graduated college, we shouldn't assume they are good to go, and they can handle everything thrown at them." There's so much value in mentoring those with less experience. It can change lives as it did for Scott.

Speaking two languages

With about three years at the company under his belt, the Financial Information Management team at Marriott asked if Scott would be interested in applying for a new position with them. This would begin his shift from accounting to finance, bridging the two with systems finance.

Scott likens communication between the finance team and the accounting team to translating different languages. Accountants are "in the weeds," as Scott puts it. They're closing out each month, setting the balance, and ensuring the numbers are put in correctly. Finance, as he sees it, is more customer-facing. The finance person takes the numbers accountants put in and interprets them. They "tell the story behind the numbers," Scott says.

With his background in accounting, he was able to bridge this communication gap. Sometimes that meant walking into someone's office, making a connection, and clarifying what they meant in their email. Pretty soon, he was fluent.

Finance is customer service

Still working at Marriott in finance today with different finance jobs supporting different teams under his belt over the years, he views his job as helping "people that are not finance people take care of the finance part of their job so they can go back to doing what they do best." He deals with the numbers, tells a story behind the numbers, and then facilitates the discussion of "where do we go from here if we're not going to meet budget?" Finance professionals are essential in assisting in these budget conversations at opportune times - "have them in June as opposed to December."

Advice for recent college grads: You don't start at the top

Are you a recent college graduate, or do you know one? Here are some of Scott's dos and don'ts for recent grads:

Do...

- Focus on finding a place to get your foot in the door and getting in at the ground level.
- Make sure you like the place and want to work for the company.
- Take your time. Learn how the culture works and how the systems work.
- Ask to learn more and be assertive.
- Your day-to-day job at a high level.
- Over-communicate, especially with your boss.
- Own up to your mistakes and offer solutions.

Don't...

- Worry about knowing specific systems or certain things that a company does.
- Work somewhere without vetting the company and doing your research.
- Expect to make senior manager in three years.
- Struggle silently. Your boss wants you to do well; communicating with them will help you succeed.

Scott's most important leadership lesson

Healthy communication and genuine connections are Scott's primary tools in leadership. Learning how to handle emotions and keep calm will lead to better outcomes. "Losing your temper has never added any value in any work situation," Scott asserts. Disagreements are normal. Scott has learned that finding common ground, compromising, and moving forward is the best thing you can do as a leader.

Ups and downs

Scott has faced many challenges and triumphs in his career. One ongoing challenge he's currently facing in his organization is recovering and adjusting after the pandemic – a struggle

familiar to many finance executives. It boils down to "trying to find a balance between getting the owners what they need while still filling the hotels at a reasonable cost."

On the other hand, Scott's most rewarding accomplishment thus far was combining two tools – separate budget and forecasting tools – into one streamlined tool. After working with both tools and having countless conversations about them with general managers for five or six years, he knew them well and knew he could do it better. Currently, he's working on his next accomplishment, moving his tool to the cloud.

Scott Roebuck's three favorite books

1. *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action* by Simon Sinek
2. *Calvin and Hobbes* by Bill Watterson
3. *The Dark Knight Returns* by Frank Miller

The three most influential people in Scott Roebuck's life

1. **His mom:** Scott's mom worked her way up to be a Senior Director at Marriott headquarters with a pure work ethic. More importantly, she has taught Scott the importance and the impact of being calm even in tense situations.
2. **His wife:** Scott's first and most influential person in his life was an easy choice, his wife, Sarah. "I married very far up," he says. The reason she's been so influential for him is because "she is extremely hardcore" in her professional career and in her personal life. Scott's wife inspires him to be hard-working and disciplined.
3. **Robin Williams:** As president of the Marriott Toastmasters Club, Scott pulls inspiration from Robin Williams in his public speaking. Scott often works Robin Williams-like quick humor and levity into his speeches. In addition to Robin's lifelong influence on how Scott communicates, Scott admired his mindset of lightheartedness and connecting with people.

Words to his younger self

Scott would remind his younger self not to worry. Looking back, he realizes you don't need to know what the company does right off the bat. He says, "If someone wants you to work for them and they like who you are, and they feel that you'll add value, they'll teach you everything you need to know." If you can link your past experiences to a company's current needs, you'll be in a good position, and they'll teach you the rest.

What keeps you motivated to show up?

"I would say it's the knowledge that I am supporting people that have to get up really early and have to go manage our hotels," Scott responds. In other words, he likes to show up for his people. He's grateful to work from home and be with his family and doesn't take it for granted.

What motivates him is seeing how hard the people in the hotels are working, inspiring him to "mirror their commitment."