

EDAMAME AND SELF-ACTUALIZATION

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Joel K. Schettler

— Joel Schettler, editor

In a world of lima beans I choose edamame, as would most people these days. David Brooks, columnist for the *New York Times*, recently observed that the computer age has brought about a phenomenon he calls “the edamame economy.” In a time when Travelocity or Hotels.com can turn rooms into a commodity, a new kind of motel has hit the market: the mass boutique.

While the comfort of familiarity may be efficient, recognizable and easy, it is also, well, bland. It's the lima bean. You may know what to expect, but therein lies what's missing. As Brooks says in his column, you could stay “for days and barely notice anything about the place.” That's not only true for hotels. Today, it's a rule for most everything we buy.

In his column, Brooks quotes Chip Conley, founder of Joie de Vivre Hospitality at only age 26. Conley organizes his hotels around Maslow's law of needs. A bed and a room may fulfill the needs at the bottom of the pyramid, but at the top lies something completely different. Today's consumer is proud of her cultural discernment, and she looks for products to speak to those values, writes Brooks. He quotes Conley from his book *Peak*: “If we get it right at our boutique hotels, we don't just satisfy our guests' physiological, safety, social and esteem needs: We bring them an awareness of self-actualization.” Hospitality may be back to its all-time highs of 2007, but all is not as it once was. If you want to stand out in today's marketplace, you have to speak to those sensibilities.

This issue of *RSVP* includes an excerpt from my discussion with industry leaders at the recent Explore Minnesota Tourism Conference held in Duluth this past February (page 36). As you will learn from our insightful panel, the travel and tourism market has nearly fully recovered from the effects of the devastating recession of 2008 and 2009. Nevertheless, much has changed, including how marketers, hotels and other brand ambassadors must engage customers. The brand promises have changed. Fail to deliver and you may hear about it in more ways than one. I encourage you to read our discussion or listen to the entire podcast about social media and other topics.

Designers offer their own efforts to turn tabletop displays into three emotional experiences in our cover story (page 41): a wedding, a gala, and a corporate function. See how three local event designers responded to our challenge to create trendy tabletops. Draw upon their inspiration for your next event.

Finally, I would like to end this column by congratulating this year's annual Diamond Service Award winners. For 18 years, the Bloomington Convention and Visitors Bureau has been honoring the true stars of our industry: the greeters, waiters, hosts, drivers and other front-line workers who work so hard to bring meaning to the word “hospitality.” It's not hyperbole to say that your interaction every day with those discerning guests from around the world is what makes our community such a wonderful place to visit. Thank you for all that you do.