



How One General Manager is Transforming Resorts into Thriving Communities in Canada

At Hozpitality, our Trendsetter series shines a spotlight on leaders redefining hospitality with vision, innovation, and heart. These are the individuals who are setting benchmarks, inspiring their teams, and creating meaningful connections with guests and communities alike.

This week, we feature Donald Buckle, Executive Vice President of Resort Operations & General Manager at Living Water Resort & Spa and Living Stone Golf Resort. With a career built on mentorship, resilience, and servant leadership, Donald's story is one of balancing operational excellence with genuine care.

A Career Built on Mentorship

Donald's hospitality journey began with a simple philosophy: say yes. Early on, he took every opportunity others avoided, covering doubles, stepping into empty roles, or arriving early when asked. "I never asked about extra pay or recognition," he recalls. "I looked at it as free education."

His openness earned him valuable mentorship, culminating in his work with Larry Law, whose influence reshaped Donald's view of leadership. "Larry showed me that leadership isn't only about running operations or driving results; it's about leading with compassion, creating community, and making sure people feel cared for."

Managing Two Resorts as One Community

Overseeing Living Water Resort & Spa and Living Stone Golf Resort requires agility and teamwork. Staff are cross-trained, enabling them to shift between properties during peak times. "It keeps us nimble and ensures service never slips," Donald explains.

From a revenue standpoint, the model is smart; guests are sometimes upgraded from the mid-level property to the higher-end resort, creating delight while boosting occupancy.

But more than efficiency, Donald emphasizes culture. Whether guests choose Living Water for wellness or Living Stone for golf and family fun, they experience the same warmth and care. Shared amenities, from the spa, marina, dining, to the golf course, create the sense of one resort family.



Donald Buckle

Executive Vice President of Resort Operations & General Manager Living Water Resort & Spa | Living Stone Golf Resort

Staying Ahead of Industry Trends

Donald sees hospitality evolving in four major ways: personalization, year-round experiences, technology, and sustainability.

Guests now expect more than a room; they want the comforts of home with resort benefits. Living Water's condos offer full kitchens, living areas, and waterfront views, a perfect fit for families and long-stay visitors. Seasonality is embraced, with summer golf and marina activities, winter skiing and spa retreats, and conferences and wellness programs in the fall and spring.

Technology plays a growing role with online check-in, AI tools for guest insights, and seamless booking systems. Meanwhile, sustainability remains central: solar panels, EV charging, eco-certification, and even vegetables grown on-site in the resort's greenhouse.

"Today's guests want comfort, connection, and responsibility," Donald says. "Our job is to deliver all three."

People First:

Guest satisfaction at Living Water Resorts is rooted in personal connection. Remembering names, celebrating milestones with handwritten cards, and recognizing loyal families are everyday practices. “Guests may forget what their room looked like, but they never forget how we made them feel,” Donald says.

That same philosophy extends to his team. During the pandemic shutdown, salaries were topped up to 90% before relief programs began, and a Caring Fund supported employees in need. Staff lunches, BBQs, and access to chaplain and counselling services reinforce a culture where people come first.

“When staff feel valued and part of a community, they naturally deliver better service,” Donald explains. Quoting Larry Law, he adds: “You can be profitable and kind.”

Living Water Retirement Residence

Donald’s vision goes beyond vacations. With the upcoming Living Water Retirement Residence, he hopes to create a community where seniors can live alongside families who already gather at the resort.

“This isn’t just about creating a place to live, it’s about building a lifestyle rooted in wellness, family, and belonging,” Donald explains. Residents will enjoy resort amenities, spiritual support, and intergenerational programs connecting them with the wider community.

It’s a bold step toward redefining hospitality as not just short-term stays, but lifelong community building.



Advice to Future Leaders

Donald’s advice to aspiring leaders is straightforward: stay open to mentorship, lead with heart, and never lose sight of people.

“Too many leaders chase numbers and forget that hospitality is about people,” he says. “If you put staff, guests, and community first, the numbers will follow.”

For the next generation, adaptability and emotional intelligence are the critical skills. “Our industry changes constantly. If you can embrace new tools while leading with empathy, you’ll be the kind of leader hospitality truly needs.”

From mentorship to innovation, and from guest care to team culture, Donald Buckle embodies a style of leadership that proves hospitality is about more than rooms and revenue; it’s about belonging. At Living Water Resorts, he continues to shape spaces where families grow together, teams thrive, and communities feel connected.

