

## Day Three of the Summit: JFKIAT retains skill & knowledge



Roel Huinink, President & CEO, John F. Kennedy International Airport (JFKIAT), Terminal 4, discusses the terminal's hybrid working model

On the third day of Summit of the Americas' View from the Top series, Dermot Davitt at The Moodie Davitt Report welcomed Roel Huinink, President & CEO, John F. Kennedy International Airport (JFKIAT), Terminal 4, to discuss his leadership role and its ongoing recovery.

Describing JFKIAT's experience of the pandemic, he says the airport was hit hard and fast in 2021. At this time, with Delta Air Lines predominantly leading its domestic business, JFKIAT is

welcoming back 50 - 55% of domestic travel and 30 - 35% of international travel - the majority of which is traveling to the Caribbean, South America and Europe.

### **On the frontline**

As part of its comprehensive response plan, the team at JFKIAT established several key pillars to develop targeted solutions - hygiene and sanitization, health and wellbeing, social distancing and queuing, transactions and communications. Huinink points out that one of its greatest shifts has been the development of a hybrid working model. Regardless of level or position, each member of the team including Huinink, is expected to serve as a frontline worker on a regular basis. Reiterating a main theme of the series, he says this model allows the team to retain the same level of skill and knowledge, which is necessary to re-open and re-build. Leading by example, he adds "the first step to restore consumer confidence is to restore employee confidence" and promotes an all-hands-on deck <sup>1</sup>

mentality.

## **A fine line**

Since JFKIAT is home to the largest concession partners in the travel business, there has been constant dialogue and heated discussions about finding a balance when it comes to offering a sustainable work environment and positive customer experience. Although the airport allowed concessionaires to close during the pandemic, there is a fine line between closing due to low traffic and financial loss and providing the best customer journey available. With no easy solution, aligning interests and looking at the big picture has been a collaborative effort.

Unlike most airports in the USA, each terminal at JFKIAT is operated by a different entity. In partnership with The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, the airport has worked to re-frame existing agreements with its concession business partners and re-position its commercial plan. Although MAG relief has been issued and extended, Huinink says he doesn't believe in this fee; however, he supports the need for a retailer incentive to boost performance. Whether it's based on an expectation or a metric, the platform will require the partnering of the airport and its retailers to drive traffic and perform sales, respectively. The ultimate shared goal: to invest in data-driven concepts, connect with the traveler pre-airport and improve the customer journey.

"[The excitement of traveling and meeting new people is still there. People want to have a good experience at the airport. The future is bright. It's been an extremely hard year for all of us, but I know the consumer and the industry is ready to return,]" he concludes.