

AS SEEN IN

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# HB

**HOTEL BUSINESS**

## MAN ON A MISSION

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HB EXCLUSIVE

# Latest deal puts Equinox Hospitality on next path

By Gregg Wallis  
Senior Editor

San Francisco-based hotel investment, management, acquisition and development company Equinox Hospitality recently acquired four properties in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex from Sonesta International Hotels Corporation.

While the deal may seem like the kind of transaction that happens every day, for Adam Suleman, principal/EVP, Equinox Hospitality, it represents much more on many different levels. “For a long time when we started the company in the ‘90s, we did institutional deals,” he said. “That went away as Lehman [Brothers, an early partner] disappeared and we started doing our own [deals], which we had success with, but there were a lot of one-off smaller deals. This repositions us in a place to say, ‘Now we can compete on a next level because of the resources we have and the equity and debt context we’re working with.’ It really—hopefully—is the start of a new chapter in which we’re doing bigger and larger deals.”

Although the financial terms of the deal—which totals 463 keys and includes the Sonesta ES Suites Dallas Richardson, Sonesta Select Dallas Richardson, Sonesta Simply Suites Dallas Richardson and Sonesta Simply Suites Fort Worth Fossil Creek—were not disclosed, Suleman said that the value of this transaction is in the sphere of where larger institutional investors become involved.

But, he said, his company is different than traditional institutional investors because it can be a lot more competitive and flexible in the deals it pursues. “Institutional money tends to be very focused—there tends to be a little bit of tunnel vision,” he said. “They want X return, and they want X deal and X brand and X location. We can be a lot more flexible. We can look

at that hotel just outside of the prime location or an emerging brand like Sonesta.”

He said the company is more entrepreneurial. “We tend to look at deals that have a little bit more of a storyline, not just a stabilized asset in a great location...,” said Suleman. “We are looking at it through that creative lens,” he said. “It is a multilayered story in a sense.”

While the deal provides the next steps for the company’s acquisition strategy, for Suleman it also represents a sort-of passing of the torch from his father, Abdul M. Suleman, who founded the company in the early ‘90s and is the president/CEO, to Adam and his brother Sam Suleman, who is a principal/EVP.

For Adam Suleman, it is important that the company continue the legacy that his father established when the company was launched.

The elder Suleman first started in hospitality after emigrating to the U.S. from India and graduating with a degree in chemical engineering from Brigham Young University in Provo, UT. Unable to immediately find a job in that field, he took a “temporary” job at a hotel in San Francisco. After rising through the ranks with Hyatt, in 1994 he purchased a hotel in Kauai, HI, in partnership with Lehman Bros., and Equinox was born. The company has owned and operated hotels across the U.S. and the Middle East.

“I am delighted, honored and mighty proud that my sons Adam and Sam both joined me in our family business,” said Abdul Suleman. “There is nothing more exciting for me than to have them working side by side with me. It is my pleasure, pride and joy to be working with them. My legacy is my children.”

The company was established with a set of operational philosophies that it follows to this day (see sidebar)—and that all of its leadership is proud of.

“We’re a family business and we even beyond making money,” said Adam Suleman. “What’s important to us is my dad’s legacy and our values. During COVID, because we tried to do like a lot more conservative, low-leverage deals, we never fired anybody. We never cut people. We fought tooth and nail—we didn’t make any money—to keep everyone on board. We still paid bonuses. We really care about people, and I think that’s just true hospitality nature. We’re not finance, institutional investors in that sense. We also have a human side which is the hospitality, and it’s really reflective in our business.”

## The company’s operating philosophies

- Our people are No. 1—their development, loyalty, interest, team spirit and attitude. We develop managers in every area, and this is our prime responsibility. We believe “our product is our people.”
- See the good in people and try to develop those qualities. A positive and productive mindset results in positive and productive performance.
- We believe in two-way communication and an open-door policy. We like our associates to tell us what they have to say rather than what we want to hear. Open and honest.
- We have two rules in our hotels. Rule No. 1: The customer is always right. Rule No. 2: If you ever have any doubts in your mind, always go back to Rule No. 1.
- Get involved in the community and be part of the community. The community’s success is our success.
- It is better to have one person working with you than three working for you.
- We make business decisions based on logic not emotion.
- We are not afraid to take calculated risks, but are decisive, direct and honorable in our dealings with people. No ego and greed but stay humble and show humility.
- We stay focused, committed and follow through with action.

—Gregg Wallis



LEFT TO RIGHT: Sam, Abdul and Adam Suleman of Equinox Hospitality