

# James Hogan: the global innovator



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James Hogan held C-suite positions in major hotel, car rental and airline businesses before taking over as President and CEO of Etihad Airways in 2006. Over the next 11 years, he took the business from a \$300 million regional airline to a \$26 billion global aviation group, taking on flag-carriers and the mega-connectors in markets across the world. His initiatives included chefs in first class, The Residence and wide-ranging career programmes in aviation for Emiratis. Today, he advises corporations across the world through his consulting business, Knighthood Global.

## What first drew you to aviation?

I started in 1975 with ANSETT, an Australian airline, working in Melbourne Airport.

That early experience in airports sparked a lifelong journey through service industries - airlines, car rental, hospitality - each reinforcing my belief that success lies in understanding people and delivering exceptional service.

## What's been the common thread in your career?

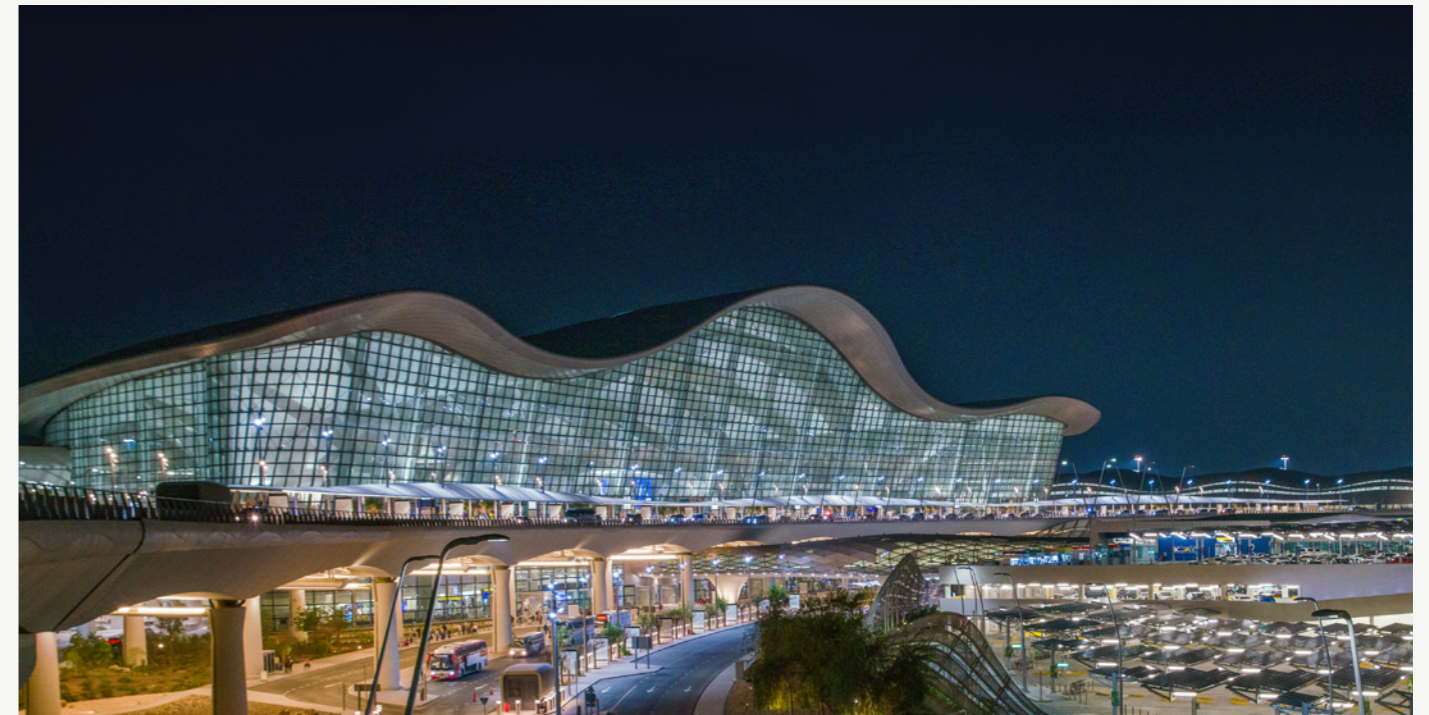
Whether at Hertz, Forte Hotels or Etihad, I've always focused on building global businesses that respect cultural diversity. I've worked across Australia, Asia, Europe and the Middle East, and I've learned that motivating a workforce and serving a segmented customer base - business, leisure, religious or worker traffic - requires empathy and precision.

## What does making a difference mean to you?

It's about innovation that delivers real value. At Etihad, we introduced concepts such as The Residence, complete with a butler trained by the Savoy, and onboard chefs and nannies. These weren't gimmicks. They reduced waste, improved service and created memorable experiences. Making a difference means combining vision with operational detail, and ensuring every initiative enhances both customer satisfaction and business performance.

## What's the one value that underpins your leadership?

There are actually two key values for me: respect and loyalty. I saw these principles embodied in the UAE's leadership, and they've been fundamental throughout my career. Respect for employees and customers is essential in capital-intensive industries like aviation and hospitality. They form the foundation for building trust, reciprocal loyalty and sustainable growth.



## What's the biggest challenge you've faced?

Aviation is a long game and you need a long-term roadmap. Along the way, you face countless external factors well beyond your control - wars, pandemics, oil shocks among them. Internally, the bigger challenge is staying the course in the face of doubters and naysayers. Panic leads to retreat; vision and success demands resilience and focus.

## Who do you admire as a difference maker?

In aviation, Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al Maktoum and Maurice Flanagan built Emirates into a global powerhouse.



Paul Griffiths at Dubai Airports deserves more credit for his leadership. Outside aviation, Pierfrancesco Vago at MSC and Manfredi Lefebvre d'Ovidio at Abercrombie & Kent have shown how customer focus and innovation can transform industries.

## What's one thing anyone can do to make a difference?

Never surrender. If you believe in your path, keep going: through barriers, setbacks and doubt. Combine vision with detail. Know where you're heading, and make sure everyone in your organisation does too. That's how you turn ambition into achievement.