

Chapter 8

Exceeding Guest Expectations: An Overview of the Best Practices in the Hospitality Industry

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the researcher presents a series of scenarios of how guest expectations can be exceeded. The world of hospitality revolves around satisfying guest needs and providing quality service. As chain hotels around the world strive to offer the best service and to create brand loyalty, one wonders who is really providing quality service. It is no secret that international hotel brands try to engage their guests by anticipating their needs and providing a personalized service. By pointing out different practices used by worldwide hotel chains to ensure they exceed their guests' expectations, hospitality students can gain an understanding of what it means to create a customer for life. These examples will give them the knowledge to understand how to act in order to engage with guests. In addition, students could realize how to use empowerment efficiently for the benefit of their guests and their organization.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter is meant to point out some of the methods used by hospitality organizations to engage with guests and create customers for life, by presenting different scenarios from five international hotel brands. These points may be useful as educational tools, offering examples to hospitality students of some best practices from the industry. At the same time this chapter will help hospitality students to develop their creative thinking and develop a fresh perspective for when they join the industry as interns or full-time employees in different departments of the hotel.

Engaging guests and providing a unique experience can difficult to achieve (Tobin, 2013, p. 11), so it is crucial that hospitality students are trained to step outside their comfort zone in order to create what Gallo (2008) calls “customers for life”.

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Exceeding Guest Expectations

Tobin suggests five guidelines to be followed in order to cultivate excellence and service leadership. Implemented by companies like Marriott and Ritz Carlton in their daily operations, these guidelines offer great insight when it comes to educating future hospitality professionals and preparing them to provide excellent service.

1. Guest Expectations in the Service Environment

Tobin thinks that leading companies in the hospitality industry should encourage their employees to constantly engage with guests and seek feedback. Each interaction between hotel employees and guests represents a critical moment. Angelo and Vladimir (2011, p. 25) believe that leading companies in the hospitality industry must treat these interactions as vital elements of guest engagement. They adopt Jan Carlzon's concept of "*moments of truth*", which has been a common hospitality practice since the early 1980s and is still valid today.

The moments of truth represent any type of interaction between a hospitality employee and a guest. They can be as short and simple as greeting a guest who walks into the lobby of a hotel, or more complex hospitality operations, like checking-in or checking-out a guest. The moments of truth ultimately define how committed is a company to fulfilling the guest's needs. Since the hospitality industry operates with intangible products, like services, the moments of truth must be handled correctly by all employees. These interactions offer opportunities to employees to create positive impressions on guests, correct potential mistakes and create customers for life.

2. Clearly Differentiate Between Task and Purpose

Taking care of the guests is a process which starts even before the guest has stepped in the hotel lobby. Making reservations, giving them information when they arrive, serving them once they are in the restaurant, or cleaning the room after the guest has departed, are all parts of this guest cycle (Baker, Huyton & Bradley, 2006, p. 47). Hospitality employees are responsible for the well-being of their guests throughout the entire cycle, unlike employees working in the manufacturing industry. On the production line of a manufacturing industry the employee is only in charge to perform a limited number of tasks, like placing a part or a component. In this way it underlined the difference between performing a task, and having a purpose and performing a task. According to Tobin (2013), Marriott promotes this by having their employees understand their higher purpose like, "*I take care of people*". This practice is the opposite of a more task oriented attitude, like "*I check in guests*" or even "*I clean rooms*." These principles lead the hospitality employee towards the third guideline promoted by Tobin.

3. Give Authority and Autonomy

Leaders in hospitality should create the framework to successfully achieve a task; however, they should allow their employees to make decisions by themselves. By empowering employees to act within guidelines in order to satisfy their guests, hospitality employees take ownership of their actions, are proud of their role within the organization and the tasks are fulfilled in a timely manner. Angelo and Vladimir (2011, p. 19) support Tobin's authority principle, by presenting the approach promoted by Hilton Hotels.

At Hilton every employee is encouraged to act as a manager. The idea is underlined by the fact that front-line employees are the ones who have the most contact with guests, as they deal with the guests

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