

# The Guest

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## R E P O R T

## Service excellence

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### Don't toss guests a bouncing ball

Road warriors. Those dedicated business travelers who journey all day or all night by train, plane and automobile to serve the needs of their companies and organizations.

They have the power to choose where to stay, who to take them there and what services they will need while they travel. They have corporate dollars in their pockets and expense accounts to support their choices, if made wisely.

They appreciate and demand attention to detail and must combine the unpredictable pressures of travel with the duties they must perform. They earn each travel stripe they get and relish the time when they can actually reap the rewards of the business traveler's badge.

I am one of those warriors. I have earned my badges and recently, I was ready for my rewards.

Knowing I had given a tremendous amount of business to various airlines and hotels, I was proud to cash in some miles, enough for a first-class airline ticket and some points for a choice hotel stay.

I know the hospitality industry, and most industries for that matter, value loyal customers, especially those who have accumulated lots of points and miles – proof of my business choices and revenue contributions.

When I called the reservation desks of various national chain hotels, at which I had accumulated vast point amounts, I expected they would recognize my patronage, appreciate my business and jump through hoops to please me.

I was wrong.

I was given the runaround, greeted with impatience, presented with all the restrictions and “why nots,” and left hanging without the arrangements I desired. To get where I wanted to go, I would have to work hard, talk to several people, ask lots of questions and basically convince these reservation agents to pay attention to me.

I was given other phone numbers to call and bounced back and forth until someone finally got it right. After all the direct mail that told me how important I was as a loyal and frequent customer and after all my road warrior bumps and bruises, this was the end result?

I had become even less than a commoner. I was seen as someone wanting a freebie as opposed to someone who had been such a frequent customer that I had earned a first-class, free stay as a thank you for my business. I had lost my identity as a card-carrying member of the world of frequent traveler VIPs.

My patronage had been pooh-poohed.

The good news is that in each situation, there eventually was one individual who stopped the ball from bouncing, pulling me in from oblivion and going out of their way to make up for all the initial duress.

The bouncing ball of service actually landed on their shoulders, by their choice, as all other points of contact had passed the buck.

These individuals calmed me down, gave me reassurance, took care of my needs, provided me with personal contact information to avoid the voice mail

runaround and reinvigorated my loyalty connection.

I regained my identity and was welcomed back into the membership elite. However, I did have to work for it. Is that the way it is supposed to be?

When hospitality managers and their employees have the opportunity to come face-to-face with customers and guests who have been loyal, regular, revenue-generating sources, instant recognition and attention should take place.

Employees should be trained with some method of “noticing” and appreciating the frequent guest when they call or when they stop by.

If the call comes into a central reservations call center, all reservation agents should be able to respond to a frequent traveler's identity, whether the information is accessible from a database or simply conveyed during the call.

If the call needs to be handled separately, the traveler should not be bounced around but provided with specific steps and numbers to accomplish what they need, during that very first call.

A simple “thank you for choosing us” before concluding the call is a point-scoring finish to recognize a guest's patronage and continued ability to choose. Customers and guests should not have to work so hard, especially when they want to give a business more business.

Loyal customers give more wallet share, are less price sensitive, are not as easily lured away (unless they are bounced) and love to refer business to a source they value.

If a customer has been bounced, train employees to recognize “the bounce” and address it immediately.

No matter where the request, call or visit is made, an employee should be able to recognize a frustrated guest, reduce their anxiety through confident reassurance and take proactive steps to answer the request, even if it means calling the guest back with the right answer.

Recognize guests do have choices and by calling, they want to build a stronger relationship. Seize that opportunity and warmly welcome each inquiry and effort to make contact. Don't send them elsewhere, even if it is another department within the same organization. Arrange for that department to call them back and strive for the seamless delivery of service.

Bouncing guests around may result in bouncing dollars elsewhere. Take the proactive steps to ensure each touch point scores the loyal relationships that pay.



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