

# The Guest

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## R E P O R T

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## Service excellence

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### Customer service should be offered with grace

Grace. Some people have it, some people say it, some people show up with it.

To be gracious is to be marked by kindness and courtesy, to be characterized by charm, good taste and delicacy, and to be compassionate, markedly pleasant and agreeable to be around. Some of the great hoteliers of the world were known for their gracious hospitality and their ability to make any guest feel like royalty, no matter how brief the contact.

In today's world of service excellence, while some may have it, grace and graciousness are rarely promoted as desirable or acknowledged qualities in the big picture of service delivery. Yet when they are, the impact reaches into the very soul of any customer or guest. Graciousness makes every situation better. To receive gracious service is to receive the crowning glow of exceptional service.

To understand how to instill and nurture graciousness in employees is to really get what it takes to make the profitable and memorable difference.

When this intangible essence of grace is fully integrated at all levels of service, the difficult moments in any customer or guest situation are more easily overcome. Being gracious does not mean relinquishing control or giving in to guest demands. It does mean generating goodwill and sincere courtesy in handling each point of contact.

Many service and training philosophies encourage employees to go the extra mile in delivering service. The extra mile (extra effort, extra dollars, etc.) may not be necessary when courtesy, and in turn, gracious service are recognized as the shortest distance between two people.

Consider something as simple as a greeting, no matter where or when it takes place. All managers and employees have opportunities to "greet" or welcome guests, whether attending a reception desk, passing in the hallway, sharing an elevator, or walking through the parking lot. These brief touchpoints represent wonderful opportunities for a warm connection, a chance to welcome another human being on a real and sincere level.

The fact that one human is an employee in uniform and one is a guest only enhances the impressions of that encounter. To actually reach out, make eye contact and simply say "hello" is to put this element of gracious hospitality in motion. This small yet proactive gesture reflects subtle appreciation for that guest and enhances the pride and spirit of service. It may seem obvious in public places and when a guest or customer arrives. When it's not so obvious is when it really counts. Hallways, garages and other "in-between," on-premises encounters are some of the not-so-obvious opportunities.

Employees arriving to or departing from work may have already mentally checked out when these encounter opportunities take place.

Gracious touchpoint moments can happen in any customer contact situation and at any time. The goal is to anticipate ways to enhance a guest experience through genuine and attentive efforts and then, graciously, get out of the way.

Whereas the role of gracious service delivery may have been the domain of owners, proprietors and general managers, those very same leaders who encourage gracious service delivery at every employee level, whether on the front line or backstage, will be delighted with the results. By leading, following and encouraging these six simple steps with all employees on a consistent basis, guests and customers will begin to sense this agreeable difference.

Engage a guest or customer with some aspect of their visit: Is the food to your liking? How is your room? Are you enjoying your stay? Are you finding what you need or are looking for? How do you like the area? Be prepared for the answers, both positive and negative.

Acknowledge the presence of a customer or guest, even if it is not your job to do so. Acknowledgement only need last a few seconds, the cumulative impact lasts a lifetime.

Welcome guests with your eyes. They may be strangers but they become citizens of your environment when they are with you and will stay longer or come back when the welcome connects with their insides.

Be attentive. Seek out those who need extra assistance and respect those who don't. Do not exclude or intrude. Balance the line.

Reflect the spirit of service in your organization. Instill it if this spirit is weak or does not exist. Talk to managers and peers about the little "extras" and "gestures" that may be able to add the gracious difference.

Appreciate the guest or customer's choice to be in your environment. Recognize they do have other choices and reinforce how nice it is to have them with you. Tell them so and thank them.

These simple standards are not in lieu of training yet their daily integration will help overcome service challenges and set the stage for gracious service excellence and delivery. When you are graced with your guests' presence, present them with grace. They will be counting their blessings, as you count the extra gracious impact to your bottom line.

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