

The Guest

R E P O R T

My companion and I had just dashed out of the Crowne Plaza Hotel near Miami International Airport in a hurry, late for our next appointment. We started to open the car door only to realize we misplaced the keys. We retraced our steps, frantically searching the parking lot and purse and briefcase compartments.

Jonathan Pear, the hotel's area sales director, noticed our distress and immediately commanded the front desk agents, bellmen, housekeepers, the bus driver, the security guard and various administrators lingering outside to help in the search. Much to our amazement, the whole team enthusiastically jumped in and dedicated their efforts to locating the keys.

With no luck and recognizing our dilemma to get to our next meeting, this white knight offered to drive us. When he dropped us off, he offered to pick us up again and drive us back to our office where we could arrange for a spare key.

That was exceptional service. Through leadership and a commitment to service excellence, Mr. Pear surpassed all expectations, motivated his staff to do the same and turned a potentially negative experience into a memorable and positive one.

When ordinary individuals do extraordinary things to actually serve a customer or guest, that's exceptional service. In a world where good service seems to be the exception rather than the rule, why are excellent examples so rare? Why are front-line personnel so seemingly ill equipped to provide the kind of service that makes a difference? Is service, especially exceptional service, a lost art?

This question of service, even at satisfactory levels, is not new and has actually been building to a crescendo. According to the 1998 industry results of the American Customer Satisfaction Index, the only cross-industry measure of consumer perceptions of goods and services in the United States, the lodging industry finds itself at a five-year low for customer satisfaction.

While building new hotels, cruise lines, restaurants and attractions continues at a frenzied pace, guests are demanding more than new lobbies and exquisite cuisine. Travelers search for ways to make their lives easier and their moments more memorable. Guests want their needs anticipated and their expectations surpassed.

The competition for experiences that count is higher than ever. In South Florida, where tourism ranks as one of the area's leading industries, there are constant mixed reports on the quality of service. And while examples of good service like Mr. Pear's exist, the challenge of consistently finding, delivering and experiencing exceptional service seems greater than ever.

The intriguing opportunity is that exceptional service leads to dollars. But these dollars are being lost through lack of

Service excellence

Employees touch, tarnish memories

guest experience management. There is no question - service sells. Repeat business, referrals and extended stays depend on guests having a comprehensively positive experience. And while technology has created more avenues to reach customers and guests, it can turn guests off and cause unanticipated disappointments without a live body to respond to their needs. Guests are craving the personal touch more than ever - and they will pay for it.



The magic to it is the exceptional service formula and is directly traced to guest experience management. The prepackaged moment is not enough. From the moment a guest steps off the plane or drives up in a car, the experience "clock" is ticking. Guest experience management takes charge of this process.

This proactive strategy distinguishes "experiences" from "services" and promotes them as a new economic offering. For example, services are delivered; experiences are staged. Services are intangible; experiences are memorable. Services are customized; experiences are personal. Services are delivered on demand; experiences are revealed over a period of time.

Services address benefits; experiences address sensations.

Whether the experience begins by phone, at the airport, the car rental counter, the taxi to the hotel or the entrance of the hotel, the restaurant, the cruise or the attraction, an impression and memory are in process. Each of these impression touch points build on each other and are huge opportunities to provide exceptional service - and greater profits.

If the doorman, the bellman, the front desk clerk, the pool attendant, the room service representative, the housekeeper, the concierge and the general manager proactively participate in creating engaging and exceptional encounters, guests will sign up for more and will tell others about their wonderful experience and the excellent service.

This was certainly the case with the entire staff at the Crowne Plaza. After all, I have just told all of you. □

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