

The Guest

R E P O R T

By Roberta Nedry

"The deepest principle in human nature is the craving to be appreciated."

This simple thought from William James captures a fundamental element of service success for guests and employees alike. With Thanksgiving around the corner and the pending holiday season, taking time to appreciate the power of "thank you" and employing it frequently can make such a difference in the "employee experience," which flows through to the guest experience.

As the year 2000 approaches, delivering quality service is one of the major challenges facing hospitality leaders, especially as the labor shortage continues to be an issue. Management that shows appreciation to employees who affect service delivery, especially exceptional service, understands that "human capital" must be considered less as a cost and more as an asset. As guests demand more and want more personalized guest experiences, each employee point of contact, each touch point, can impact and shape perceptions of that experience. When an employee feels appreciated, he or she is more motivated to appreciate the guest and the dollars that guest represents. And, guests do like to feel as if their business is appreciated.

Harry Nobles, former head of the American Automobile Association's lodging and dining rating system, states, "Although service should never be seen as a substitute for physical requirements, guests are more influenced by the way they are treated by you and your staff, than by the opulence of your property."

When managers thank and recognize their own people, their front-line staff feels more compelled to thank their guests. In fact, bad service may be passed on to guests and customers as a reflection of how employees are treated by their bosses. On the other hand, when employees receive positive feedback, they look for ways to repeat the behavior. Once again the guest benefits and so does the bottom line.

It is actually amazing how very little effort can go such a long way. Studies show that informal recognition often may be a stronger motivator than formal rewards. Some organizations actually go out of their way to catch people doing something right and then make a big deal about it. Simple praise and recognition feel good whether directed by manager to an employee, employee to employee or employee to a guest. Thank you's transcend all languages and understanding. Thank you's communicate respect for actions taken, no matter how small or how big. Gratitude for attitude is a nice payoff in the design of the guest experience.

Taking time to appreciate employee and guest efforts does not

Service excellence

Giving thanks: time to appreciate service

take a lot of time, doesn't cost much, if anything at all, and yields big dividends in the big service picture. With employee retention challenges, escalating turnover percentages and increased competition, it is worth it to pay attention.

Some basic elements in delivering thanks and/or praise are eye contact, sincerity, and timing. Making positive eye contact and actually looking at employees means you are halfway there. There is honesty in a direct glance and when that connection is made, the words mean more. Conveying genuine enthusiasm is also important. The emotion and sincerity of your voice reveal how you really feel.

Both employees and guests can tell when the smile, the words and the acknowledgment are real. Deliver comments promptly or in sync with the praiseworthy efforts. Words of thanks should not be rushed, and should be communicated with focused attention. These same elements apply to appreciating and thanking guests for their business.

As this millennium comes to a close, take time to recognize and appreciate the employees who have been service role models.

If they are members of your staff, send them an e-mail or even better, give them a handwritten note of thanks. Ask a senior executive to personally thank an individual and/or send them a note. Salute department personnel in company newsletters, on break room bulletin boards and in team meetings.

Be specific in recognizing the behavior which is special and desirable, after all you want it repeated.

Participate in employee recognition opportunities such as the 1999 Courtesy Awards on Dec. 15, the Greater Fort Lauderdale Convention and Visitors Bureau's program to honor Broward's best hospitality employees (call 954-765-4466, by Nov. 30, for applications)

And most of all, talk to them! Look them in the eye and say "Thank You!" You'll be amazed by the reaction and rewarded by the results.



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