

# The Guest REPORT

## Service excellence

### Those who are last can be first

Imagine being in last place – 14th out of 14 for quality, service and cleanliness. Imagine your property secured this unwanted ranking even after a \$7 million dollar renovation and a location in one of tourism's hotbeds.

Consider this scenario in light of South Florida's exploding industry growth and increased competition combined with today's labor shortage. With nowhere to go but up, the team at the Holiday Inn South Beach Resort concluded that these results were unacceptable and needed immediate attention and improvements.

Five months later, after a determined agenda and eight well-defined initiatives, this Bass Hotel and Resort moved from 14th to 1st place for Miami-Dade and the Keys in overall service, cleanliness and quality – an unprecedented turnaround according to the brand's overall vice president of quality.

When the resort began its quest, GM Orlando Velazquez Jr. and his team knew they weren't perfect – in fact far from it. Yet they made a commitment to try and had the right attitude from the top. Orlando's group understood that a focus on operations and dollars dedicated to the physical property is not enough, especially in today's service-savvy world. By focusing on the basics and really paying attention to core values, the Holiday Inn South Beach Resort's management team came close to perfection.

#### Get employees right equipment

Training employees to understand and deliver the types of guest experiences that really matter are essential in ensuring near perfect service delivery. One noted training company from Dallas observes "that the only thing more expensive than training an employee and having them quit, is not training them and having them stay." Even when things are not perfect, equipping employees with the right attitude and mindset about how to deliver service, even when the service is not there, can have a powerful impact on guest impressions.

Recently, we stayed in a new boutique hotel in Montreal. Only three weeks old, this charming downtown property still was rough around the edges and working out the bugs. One of those bugs was at the bar, or actually absent from the bar.

With no formal bartender or training for the bellman who was filling in, we went through several drink options before we found one he could do. Even so, we still had to coach him on how to mix the drinks, all the way down to the ice cubes.

While this might normally have been a frustrating experience, this bellman-turned-barman turned out to be so delightful in his attitude that we really didn't mind the inconvenience. He was honest about the hotel's state of affairs, he apologized for the unfinished state of the bar, he listened to our needs and he

went above and beyond to find a solution that would still be nice. He then let us know that our business was appreciated.

This far-from-perfect situation turned out to be as nice as it could because he had the right attitude and understood the frontline's impact on any guest experience. A negative situation became positive because of this individual's efforts to find perfection in an imperfect moment.



#### Role model for us all

Each of these examples show how both an individual and an entire management team can assess any difficult situation and dramatically improve the outcome. The eight initiatives that the Holiday Inn South Beach Resort introduced to get them from No. 14 to No. 1 can actually serve as excellent role model steps for other hospitality leaders and businesses:

- Create a mission statement. Define what you want your service philosophy to be.
- Create a team motto. The whole team needs to be motivated and mobilized to go for it.
- Retrain all managers and supervisors. Leaders must walk the talk before they can expect others to do so.
- Re-orient all associates. Clean the slate and introduce a refreshed service platform.
- Set team performance goals. Define benchmarks on the quest for perfection.
- Hold frequent team meetings. Include associates and management and all frontline positions to review current standings and team goals. People do what is expected when it is inspected.
- Aggressively focus results on human resources and performance. Accountability must follow any substantive effort.
- Train and terminate associates as needed. Training must be continuous and standards need to be reinforced.

In real life, perfection may be unrealistic yet moments of imperfection present huge opportunities for service excellence. Nobody may be perfect, but somebody always cares if the effort and attitude are there.

As Robert Browning once said, "Imperfection is really perfection hid." Getting perfection out of hiding and striving to create perfect memories for guests can mean the dollar differential for the repeat and referral business that will impact the bottom line.

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**In five months, the Holiday Inn South Beach Resort moved from last place in quality to first in Miami and the Keys – thanks to GM Orlando Velazquez Jr.'s commitment to change attitudes from the top down.**