

# The Guest

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## R E P O R T

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## Service excellence

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### Mirror mirror on the wall, who's the fairest customer of all?

**R**emember when the wicked queen stared at herself in the mirror and found that the mirror reflected back someone entirely different? The mirror saw Snow White who embodied more preferable qualities than the queen, which led to that whole poisoned apple scene.

How often do our customers and guests mirror our perceptions of them and vice versa? How closely and how often are we looking at them to see if they or we have changed? When we encounter a customer who does see things differently, we may end up giving them the poison apples of service instead of taking a closer look in the mirror.

Taking time to really find out what customers and guests think, after they have used services, chosen a venue, or selected a product, can really lead to enhanced service delivery, greater customer loyalty and increased profitability.

Impressions at the beginning can evolve up or down in the service ratings system. Continuously checking those impressions after the initial hook can yield a wealth of data. Usually there is a brief honeymoon after any new business commitment. Customers and guests get to know their service provider and settle into a routine of expectations.

Eventually, customers develop opinions on what they like and what they do not like about our services, our facilities, our operations and even our personnel. Sometimes they tell us and sometimes they don't. Sometimes we ask and sometimes we don't. Sometimes they don't tell us, we don't ask and they leave. Sometimes we ask, they are thrilled to tell us and we get more business, a happier customer, and new ideas on what to leverage to other customers and more aligned business strategies. The mirror really works.

Each day that a customer or guest does business with us, valuable service data develops. When a concierge logs each request, compliment or complaint that comes in, they are tracking the business trends and preferences of their guests.

When a truck driver delivers goods to customers on a weekly basis, that driver will see the changes, challenges and successes of that customer's business as they take place.

When a waitress takes orders and finds certain selections are requested over and over again, she is privy to trends that could make a difference in pricing, menu and product positioning.

When the accounting department receives a higher percentage of questions on credit policies or billing procedures than normal, they may be getting more insight on how to get bills paid more quickly or to encourage larger business volume.

When a reservations or call center or even the operator get a lot of frustrated inquiries on directions, time saving solutions or more clear explanations may be needed to reduce anxiety and increase efficiency. These are just reactive opportunities to evaluate service from existing internal roles if captured or documented.

On a proactive level, businesses who seek out opinions on all touch points involved in service delivery will discover appreciative and informative customers. Hospitality leaders who take the time to document each point of contact in the flow of service delivery and who then ask their guests to evaluate the good, bad and the ugly of each

of those points will discover issues and opportunities to enhance service.

They will also get insightful data on what is working well and what to do more of and maybe even substantive new marketing strategies. They may discover what to leverage more and what to promote less. They may learn that the invoices are confusing and that calls are not returned promptly. They may learn that what customers need or want varies according to the season and the economy.

Ten tips to consider when looking in the mirror:

1. Document each point of contact in any service provided or product delivered. Develop a method to evaluate each of those points.
2. Determine what data currently exists (the concierge log book for example) and analyze it on a regular basis.
3. Visit customers, talk to them by phone or use mail at least two times a year, especially repeat and loyal customers.
4. Ask them what they like – and don't like – about everything. Be specific (invoices, delivery times, check out times, personnel changes, call access, etc.) and get examples which illustrate the points.
5. Touch base with customers when key personnel are on vacation or when new people come on board. Insure that service is consistent and not broken during any of these changes.
6. Find out what more you could do to get more of their business.
7. Define service phases for customers and get a report card after each phase (first visit, first year as a customer, first renewal, etc.)
8. Include a brief customer service survey in each bill that goes out. It may not get filled out and returned regularly but the few times that it does will be valuable.
9. Let customers know you want their input and give them specific steps on how to provide it (a customer service phone line, a designated ombudsman, a monthly questionnaire.)
10. Fax or mail a brief questionnaire to others who may not be the primary service contact but who impact impressions (family members, the bookkeeper, the personal assistant, a co-worker, etc.)

Hospitality leaders and managers who are concerned about higher levels of service excellence may discover the fairest customer of all is the one they look at and talk to regularly.

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