



Guest Services

by Ashok Sharma, FHCIMA

Four methods to enable the continual delivery of service excellence

*Another great article from The Rooms Chronicle, the #1 journal for hotel rooms management! ***Important notice: This article may not be reproduced without permission of the publisher or the author.*** College of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Niagara University, P.O. Box 2036, Niagara University, NY 14109-2036. Phone: 866-Read TRC. E-mail: editor@roomschronicle.com*

Notice: The ideas, opinions, recommendations, and interpretations presented herein are those of the author(s). The College of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Niagara University/The Rooms Chronicle assume no responsibility for the validity of claims in items reported.

Guests' expectations are directly related to the dollars they pay for a memorable stay experience. It is always a question of "good value for the money?"

Today's guest is more discerning than he was a few years ago. Hoteliers are somewhat responsible for their guests having become more discriminating by spoiling them with products and services by which hotels of today excel and compete. This article shares four methods that will enable management and staff to review their performance and continue to deliver high levels of service excellence.

The 15-10-5 rule

Simple norms of a guest's recognition start when one is addressed by his name by various staff members of the hotel. Half the battle is won when a guest is called within the first 15 minutes of entering his hotel room by a member of the guest services staff to inquire if he is comfortable and to ensure that the room and hotel meets his expectations. Similarly, all staff should be trained to make certain that when they look into a guest's eyes from a distance of up to 10 feet, there comes an automatic smile of recognition, and at a distance of 5 feet the staff member steps forward and offers to make polite conversation with the guest. These three steps are known as the "15-10-5 rule" and will ultimately determine how a guest perceives the staff's attitude and service excellence standards of the hotel.

Technology aids recognition

With 'smart rooms' on their way globally, guest history software is becoming more detailed. This enables a hotel to document guest choices such as their likes and dislikes, and dos and don'ts into memory chips into the network of a hotel's internal communication system. Upon checking in, the guest history system recognizes the traveler as a repeat visitor; this important information is acknowledged in the entire management system and displayed at various POS terminals. Indeed, technology is destined to be a significant factor in making a guest's stay memorable and in raising the bar in guest satisfaction scores.

Hotels are living bodies where service flows continuously through the smiles and attitudes of the staff. This flow must not be hindered or stopped. Guest satisfaction levels are directly related to this flow, making it much more relevant than innovative technology for improving products.

Guest satisfaction questionnaires

Guest satisfaction questionnaires are a valuable tool for cultivating critical information from guests. Yet, they are not without certain flaws. For example, they do not indicate if:

- i. The guest was automatically served with sparkling or still water of his choice?
- ii. The guest was provided with the same 'wine' in his room as selected by the system, from the guests' choice of wines from the fine dining restaurant?
- iii. Did the staff in the breakfast lounge offer the guest eggs cooked to order, as indicated in guest history records?
- iv. Were orange lilies and the guest's choice of fruits automatically placed in his room before check-in or within 15 minutes of his checking-in?

These critical service standards contribute to satisfaction levels as well as repeat visits, and they must be provided by the management as proof of guest recognition. This practice also gets translated into eventual profits and keeping the brand promise.

It has been determined that guests generally do not complain and choose to ignore complacencies and oversights by employees. If an individual guest is either very happy or very unhappy with the service, only then does he opt to write his views on a comment card or make mention upon checkout. Eliciting responses from guests thus becomes a personal challenge for each employee on duty, whether it be attending to a checkout or settling a guest check at a restaurant table or the bar, to ensure that a guest is encouraged to fill in the comment card or guest survey. As a matter of practice, some top brand hotels strive to achieve hit ratio for guest comments of 90% on checkouts.

NEW! E.I. Video Teaches Employees to Put Their 'Best Face Forward'

It only takes seven seconds for guests to form an impression of your employees - and your property. An employee's poor personal hygiene, wild hair, or loud makeup may cause guests to wonder what other unpleasant surprises await them during their stay.

"Best Face Forward," a new video from the Educational Institute of the American Hotel & Lodging Association, presents personal appearance tips for line-level employees in a fun, fast-paced format based on today's popular TV makeover shows. The 12-minute program follows Matt, an unkempt maintenance employee, and Lauren, a front desk associate with multiple piercings and an unprofessional hairstyle, as their general manager sends them for professional appearance makeovers.

The video and accompanying print materials focus on basic grooming issues, including:

- Bathing and oral hygiene
- Cleanliness of hair and nails
- Uniform care
- Appropriate hair styles
- Makeup tips
- Acceptable jewelry and footwear

Includes video companion.
Available in VHS or DVD format.
Length: 12 minutes

Product # 05600DVD02ENGE
AH&LA Member Price \$99.95
Non-Member \$124.95

To Order Call: 1-800-752-4567 or
1-517-372-8800 or visit Educational
Institute's web site at:
<http://www.ei-ahla.org/>



Operations audits

It has become essential that the service excellence standards of all hotels are periodically evaluated or assessed by performance of operations audits. The hotel operations audit is a process resulting in an honest assessment and evaluation of services and quality excellence. The operations audit is conducted incognito from a paying guest's perspective.

The unbiased observations reflect strengths and complacency in the service process and the quality of the product, which is benchmarked against the best among international hospitality standards. Guest experiences are converted into a detailed matrix, which carries a score and a summary guidance. The matrix calculates a score percentage which must be at least 92% or above, if the hotel has a great brand image and a brand presence. Every discipline of a hotel's operations is covered.

Many hotels have this exercise repeated on weekly basis in their restaurants and monthly or quarterly in the lodging segment. The service excellence audits are encouraged by senior management in order to fine tune and refine the services to optimum levels. In fact, under the performance management system, the key result areas of most general managers are directly reflected based on the minimum expected scores of the periodic operations audits. Such a regular exercise contributes to enhancement of processes and procedures, training initiatives and continued concept advancements.

In group hotels where such exercises are done on a regular basis, a monthly conference call takes place with general managers and the quality assurance teams to ensure that the group standards are adhered to across the chain. Presentations of operations audit scores of each hotel are accessed by QA team and analyzed for the senior management. On critical issues, assistance is sought from the 'Audit Guest' under an 'alias' name when they brief and discuss the gaps in service and state of the product.

Digital images of 'as is' situations and sound files with the consent of the management are also provided, if requested by the hotels. In this competitive world, the need to strive for the most accurate guest feedback in any form is an encouraging and a welcome initiative.

After all, *Exceeding Guest Satisfaction* by providing *Enhanced Guest Services* results in *Increased Guest Satisfaction*. A Win-Win situation for all! ✧

(Ashok Sharma, FHCIMA, is senior executive vice president for Renard Global Management, a Toronto-based organization that assists global hoteliers to raise their quotient of excellence. The company is involved in operation audits of hotels, resorts, clubs, spas, airlines, cruise liners, professionally operated malls, banks and privately owned international nursing homes/hospitals. E-mail: ashok@renardglobalmanagement.com.)