

Guest Services

by William D. Frye, Ph.D., CHE

Service recovery in action

It's funny how things work out sometimes. It was just last issue that TRC published an article titled "Empowering Employees to Please Guests." And then opportunity knocked, portraying itself as ever-present as one could imagine in an act of fate.

During last month's restaurant show, a TRC staffer arrived at the Ritz-Carlton hotel in downtown Chicago to attend a 5:30pm reception hosted by a hospitality college in one of the hotel's functions rooms. The staffer, who was over an hour early, had planned to sit in the lobby lounge and attend to various paperwork while watching the Ritz-Carlton personnel work their magic as they do on a daily basis. A stop in the men's restroom was in order prior to entering the lounge.

Unfortunately, a renegade hand soap dispenser errantly splattered its contents not in the staffer's palm, as would be expected, but rather on the front of his suit coat jacket. No warning was given, nor was this trajectory of the cleanser expected.

After a valiant attempt to blot the excessive soap that was dripping from the jacket, it was clear to the staffer that any further efforts to remove the residue by an untrained professional would only result in irreparable damage to the suit coat. More immediately, it seemed apparent that the staffer would have to forgo the much anticipated cocktail reception since he would be unsuitably attired. The hotel he was residing at was located on the other side of the city and there would not be sufficient time during rush hour traffic to go back, change clothes, and return to the Ritz-Carlton before the reception concluded.

Then visions of employee empowerment in action flashed through the staffer's mind. He recalled that many world-class hotels offered on-premise dry cleaning services. Immediately, he visited with the hotel's concierge to inquire if the hotel could work any miracles for him before the reception started in one hour.

Without hesitation the assistant hotel manager on duty offered his apologies for the incident and assured the TRC staffer that the suit coat would be restored and ready for wear within the hour. During this time the staffer embarked on his original plan to visit the lobby lounge and watch miracles in action. Little did he know that today he would be a first-hand witness and recipient of such!

The Ritz-Carlton's manager made good on his promise and delivered the crisp looking and newly dry cleaned suit coat in time for the reception. Refusing to accept payment for the dry cleaning service, the manager did much more than work a minor miracle. He fulfilled what many speak of as service recovery. But by the actions and attitudes demonstrated by him and the others at the Ritz Carlton that afternoon it really was not a miracle. It was just business...plain and simple everyday business. Ladies and gentlemen serving ladies and gentlemen--where higher expectations are met and service is not something to be thought about in terms of cost to the hotel or inconvenience to its staff.

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