



Guest Services

by Steven M. Russell, CHSP

The “Cheers” Factor in guest service drives satisfaction, retention, and loyalty

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For 11 years of Thursday nights, Norm Peterson made his way down the stairs, to the Cheers Pub in Boston. When he walked through the door and said “Afternoon Everybody!” the reaction was always a warm resounding “*NORM!!!*” (in unison by the staff and regulars at the bar).

At *that* moment in Norm’s day, anything that may have caused him irritation, stress, uncertainty, etc. was simply forgotten...for awhile. When he was there, he was always surrounded by a friend or two, a staff tentative to the “little things” he likes, like a favorite corner barstool set aside, a cold brew waiting before he even sat down, and a friendly word and a welcome. He felt appreciated and “at home” or even a little “more at home than at home”. That’s why he kept coming back again and again.

You see, those of us planted in front of our TV’s “looking in” on those Thursday nights with Norm and the gang got to experience a phenomenon that I like to simply call the “**Cheers**” **Factor** – Taking the understanding of our customers to a higher level, to make each interaction a sincere and memorable experience. To create that customer loyalty – just because they know *you care*.



Think of this from our customers’ viewpoint. Of course, you want my business; but I also know you know that I not only put emphasis and a value on the product, but the *experience during the transaction and relationship of business* as well. It starts from the moment I arrive. How can you provide me the “**Cheers**” **Factor** at your hotel?

As a guest, all my perceptions from here on out will be influenced by my first 15 seconds with you and your staff. Can I expect a warm welcome, (as I don’t expect the staff to cheer my name or even know it yet) or just a lukewarm, “Checking in?” or “Table for 3?”

A former colleague of mine used to coin a phrase that summed up the importance of our guest’s initial impression and how it can bias future decisions about doing business with you: *The greet from the host determines the taste of the roast*.

Let’s face it; we as operators face guest driven challenges day in and day out. Some of these challenges we anticipate, some we can’t. However, the true leaders in any industry are those who actually view the challenges as the opportunity to go above and beyond to solidify customer loyalty...thus reaping the benefits of being known in their town, city, state, industry or even country, as the best (insert your choice here) there is – period!

Occasionally, you may hear or even have said to yourself at one time or another, “But their (property/restaurant/etc.) is much more appealing” or “newer” or “much more up to date; I can’t compete with that, even *if* my customers are happy here.”

I disagree. Of course, in some cases that could be true if the disparity between products is quite deep or wide. However, in most cases, don’t we find, especially when we are the customer, that if the person-to-person experience is sincere and the service is *on the mark*, we tend to truly value those dynamics more and base our intent to return or even (gasp!) refer that same establishment, store, service provider etc. with confidence? Think about it.

Remember this...for 270 episodes between 1982 and 1993 the staff at Cheers kept us and their customers coming back by being so much more than an average place to be. In 2008, even more than ever, to truly stand out and be better than average at providing exemplary customer service successful managers will have to focus on providing their guests service with a high “**Cheers**” **Factor**.

Afternoon Everybody! ✧

(Steven M. Russell, CHSP is a hospitality management trainer in the Education and Training Department at Best Western International, Inc., The World’s Largest Hotel Chain®, and is based in Phoenix, AZ. E-mail: steve.russell@bestwestern.com.)