



# Guest Services

by Sue Garwood

## Common sense for customer service means using your senses

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“Common sense ain’t common,” said actor, performer Will Rogers. And many a general manager would attest to that! Sometimes we believe that common sense, or “CS”, sometimes seems to be almost non-existent when it comes to our team members. “How could they?” “Why did they?” is the cry from many a hotel manager.

But what is common sense? Some may describe it as the ability to think or reason soundly or perhaps the ability to judge and distinguish various conditions. There are many definitions, but one rather different interpretation hotel managers might want to consider is that common sense is the ability of the nerves and brain to receive and react to stimuli. In other words, receiving impressions and reacting through one’s senses!

Could it be? Our senses? But how does “CS” relate to the other “CS” (customer service) we hear so much about in our industry today? Let’s take a closer look at the most common concepts of customer service using our “senses.”

### Sight

Did you read the story in the *Wall Street Journal* of the man, dressed in dirty, old coveralls that went into his bank and asked the teller to validate his parking ticket? The teller asked if he had conducted business in the bank that day and when he told her no, that he had to pick up a prescription for his sick wife and had forgotten his wallet, she informed him she couldn’t help him. He said fine and then asked to close his account. The man proceeded down the street to another bank and opened a new account - with his \$1,260,000!

One shouldn’t judge a book by its cover! No matter how an individual is dressed, one doesn’t deserve attitude because of pre-judgment. That pre-judgment could be and probably is very wrong. Could your staff be doing this?

As an added note to this story, how could anyone not be touched by a man who had to pick up a prescription for his sick wife and had the misfortune to leave home without his wallet? Hasn’t something like this happened to each and every one of us? But let’s talk further about this “touch.”

### Touch

The sense of touch is two-fold in the CS business; emotionally and physically. Now I know what you’re thinking - but let’s think again!

There was once an elderly woman, checking into a hotel, absolutely in tears because her flight had been delayed, her luggage lost with her new dress she was to wear to her favorite great niece’s wedding.

Miss Linda was working at the hotel’s front desk. She came around the counter and led the distraught woman to the sofa and helped her find her telephone book in her purse. Miss Linda called the woman’s niece and explained the situation because the guest was so upset she couldn’t talk. It was decided a family member would be sent to pick up the upset guest and take her shopping to quickly find a dress and get her to the church. Miss Linda saw her off and five hours later, when the luggage arrived, had it put in the guest’s room.



The next day, Miss Linda was called to the woman's room. She was shown all of the digital pictures from the wedding and met some of the family members. The guest showed the dress she had worn and, pointing to the dress she had planned on wearing but couldn't, told Miss Linda that she would be saving that one for Miss Linda's wedding because she had never met anyone so very kind and she wouldn't miss her wedding for the world!

But what exactly did Miss Linda do? She put her arm around the woman and led her to a sofa. She patted her hand as she talked on the telephone to her niece. Miss Linda was touched by a woman's story she "heard" and responded appropriately.

## Hearing

Now we have all heard of the difference between hearing and listening. Here's a series of questions to ask as you observe the interaction of your staff members with your guests:

- Does your staff really want to listen?
- Are they getting rid of or putting all distractions aside to ready themselves to listen?
- Can they act like good listeners?
- Are they listening to understand? Is there a problem or is it that the guest just needs to talk?
- Are they listening all the way through or are they jumping to conclusions and speaking too quickly?
- Are questions being asked for clarification if needed?
- Is the eye contact steady, concentrating on what the guest is saying?
- Are there smiles and nods of acknowledgment?
- Does the guest walk away feeling that here is someone who really cares? After all, isn't that what you would want in that same situation?



## Smell

Who was it in the movies that said, "I smell a rat"? Smell, are we talking unpleasant odors (and it could very well be) or is it possibly a detection of something awry? All situations just might not be what they seem.

There was a very unhappy couple who checked into one of our hotels. They had been traveling all day and arguing all the way! Their destination was further than they thought and realized they would have to stop for the night. They hadn't planned on it. It was going to cost. They drove for almost an hour trying to find a hotel but all were full. They finally found ours, with only one room available. They were not happy with the rate.

After going to the room, they came back to the desk and said it was unacceptable. There was only one bed and they needed two! The guest service agent explained that was the only room available and would they like a roll-away? Well, they couldn't sleep on that!

There was no one to carry in their overnight bag, they couldn't park close to their room, the ice machine was at the other end of the building, the bedside bulb blew when they turned on the light, the shower was too small, their favorite television program could not be found, and on and on and on. Get the picture?

At check-out, Miss Dee heard it all and then some from the irate guests. She was told of the rudeness of the night agent and the outrageous rate they were charged. They were seniors and deserved a discounted rate! Miss Dee explained they had received an AARP discount. They didn't think that was enough.

The guests complained about their room, the one bed, the small shower, the burnt out bulb. Miss Dee explained it had been the only room available and asked if they called to request a new bulb. No, they didn't.

They complained they never saw the breakfast hostess, that they didn't like the danish, and that there were brown spots on the bananas. Miss Dee calmly explained that the hotel did not have a breakfast hostess. Was there something missing? She was sorry they didn't like the danish but did they try the blueberry muffins?

Just at that moment, the produce vendor walked in with a case of bananas on his shoulder. Stopping him, Miss Dee removed a small bunch of bright yellow bananas and gave them to the guests. "Why honey, you've given us enough for breakfast, lunch and snack. Thank you so very much!" stated the wife. And on their way they went.

Miss Dee knew there was more to it than what was shared and she addressed most of their complaints, but it was the bananas that did it! There's a banana in most situations. We just have to find it!

## **Taste**

Now is it taste - as in palatable, or taste - as in preference? As hoteliers, what is our preference? That's easy; for most of us it's that bottom line. But, plain and simple, that bottom line is our people; the employees that create memorable customer service experiences, one experience at a time. We need to establish the philosophy of taking care of our people, for they, in turn, will take care of our guests!

Now that's CS for CS! More on this later! ✧

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