



People Skills

by T. Scott Gross

Managing motivation: When employees don't want to play

*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*

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Monday doesn't look to be a good day. Our client called. We were all set to work with his team on the concept of Positively Outrageous Service. It was to be a big deal; the kind of razzle-dazzle introduction that would have the whole place buzzing with ideas for delivering Positively Outrageous Service and dreaming great dreams about innovative marketing events.

I made the big mistake of suggesting that before I arrive, our client's employees should be surveyed to see if they already had a few good ideas for making customers say, "Wow!" At least, it seemed like a good idea at the time.

The problem is that when my client asked the employees for ideas for wowing the customer, the response was quite a bit less than overwhelming. It turned out that the employees felt that such simple, expected actions as smiling and offering the customer a friendly greeting should be enough to pass as Positively Outrageous Service.

Sorry folks, but our surveys show that consistently good service is no longer enough to earn a place in the hearts of your customers. Today, consistently good service doesn't win any prizes. In fact, consistently good service is the minimum ticket to get into the game.

When we surveyed 600 Americans at random and asked how the service at full-service retailers compared with that of the big box discounters, we were in for a shock. It turned out that 62% of our survey group said that full-service retailers provide service that is either very good or excellent. Not bad unless you look at the score for the big box discounters. They managed to con 64% of consumers into rating their service as either very good or excellent.

What does that mean? It means that the horror stories you have heard about service at the big box discount stores are only part of the picture. Your friends have been telling you the bad things just to make you feel better. Well, those same friends told us an entirely different story.

What you want to know is what to do about it.

First, employees are not psychic. What seems elementary, obvious or just plain common sense when it comes to serving hotel guests...is not. At least not to them. This means that if you really expect good service, even Positively Outrageous Service, you have got to tell your employees what it is.

Second, and get this because it's important... you can't decree great service. You have to demonstrate it and reward it. Demonstrating great service is really nothing more than simple leadership.

Take everything you have heard about learning theory and forget only this: people learn by doing. The things that people are likely to do are things that they see in their environment and can imitate. That makes you, the boss, their leader, and the only true training program. What you do, the team will imitate.

If you run to your office when the front desk gets busy, why should you be surprised when employees retreat to the back office rather than deal with a bunch of messy customers? On the other hand, if you make it a habit to seek out guests and go the extra mile to serve them well, guess what will happen darned near automatically?

A friend of mine is a bank president. He decided to move his desk into the open area immediately inside the front door so that if you are in the bank, you are in his office. Got any ideas how the employees in this bank treat customers? What do you think about moving your office into the hotel lobby? Would you do it? Go ahead. I dare you!

Beyond being a great example, there must be real training. The kind of how-to training that gives employees concrete suggestions for dealing with guests and specific techniques for selling and providing service. If your employees could figure this out for themselves, you would be working for them!

Pictured below: T.Scott Gross



Finally, there needs to be a reward system designed to reinforce great guest service. For many employees, just the fact that they are able to help someone solve a problem is sufficient reward. Too bad that in the real world, this won't be true for every employee. Most humans can't avoid evaluating their efforts in terms of what's in it for them.

In the old days, if you did a good job...you got to keep it. Sorry. These aren't the 'good old days.' Today, suggesting that good work earns one the right to stay just doesn't cut it. This is especially true for the better employees who can get both self-satisfaction and the monetary compensation to go along with it someplace else.

It's too easy to say, "You can't get good help any more." Besides, you can get good help. You can find honest, dependable, motivated employees. What you can't find are folks who are able to divine how to serve and sell. Once you find the raw talent, it is up to you as their manager to turn them into superstars with *example, training* and *reward*.

Simple? Yes.

Easy? No.

But then, if it were easy, everybody would be in the lodging business! ✧

(T. Scott Gross is the author of MicroBranding! His best known microbrand (and book of the same name) is Positively Outrageous Service. Scott will be a keynote speaker at the AmericInn Annual Convention, April 23-25, 2006 in Duluth, Minnesota. He would be happy to hear from you at: www.tscottgross.com)