

Mentoring To The Max - By Doug Kennedy

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It is definitely arguable that the role of supervisor or assistant manager in a hotel environment is perhaps one of the most stressful positions on the organizational chart.

While everyone has superiors and subordinates, frontline supervisors and assistant managers are often caught in the middle of competing needs of stakeholders ranging from executive-level managers through frontline employees, not to mention being called upon to handle the most difficult guests.

That being said, frontline supervisors and managers simultaneously have the best opportunity to close the gap between hotel standards and procedures that exist in memos and training manuals versus what transpires daily on the frontlines. Even more importantly, they have the chance to mentor new associates and inspire the next level of hospitality recruits onward and upward.

I remember well the faces of people like Ralph, my bell captain when I was a budding young bellman at the Lexington Marriott Griffin Gate Resort. Ralph not only taught me the paperwork and processes, but also encouraged me to tell the g.m. I thought I was ready for the next open front-desk management training position. This, despite the fact that several other employees were more qualified on paper. Fortunately for me, that g.m. believed me!

Unfortunately, most first-level supervisors are automatically promoted to their position without proper training or indoctrination, usually for the sole reason that they were an excellent producer in their frontline position.

By focusing training and career development on essential, but often overlooked, role-players, you can ensure your supervisors and assistant managers reinforce the principles of hospitality on a daily basis. Here are some training tips for your next supervisory-level meeting or workshop:

Demonstrate by example. Your every action is being scrutinized daily by the frontline team; your performance sets the real standards much more so than those in any manual or handbook.

Requisition the resources your team needs. When you need additional systems, equipment, or even staff, document your need in advance before requesting it. Show upper management how these resources can improve service or enhance profits.

Avoid 'reading the headlines' and knee-jerk reactions to atypical incidents. Look at each associate's overall performance long-term. Research even seemingly obvious situations before jumping to a conclusion about who dropped the ball or why.

Be consistent in applying standards. Avoid 'superstar slippage' that can occur when top performers are allowed to routinely cut corners based on their legendary service of the past.

Pitch-in as needed during peak demand periods. Stay tuned into the daily cycle of service and anticipate the potential bottlenecks and gridlocks in advance. By pitching-in momentarily during these situations you can not only improve guest service efficiency but also demonstrate moral support for your troops.

Complete performance reviews on time and with proper consideration. Remember what an impact the review has on each associate's individual career and be diligent in completing them. Log notes about staff performance in a book or file over the course of the year versus trying to remember it all come review time.

Manage upward effectively to secure long-term change. Frontline supervisors are the connection between the ivory towers of management and daily life in the trenches. Make sure that upper management is kept aware of not only the daily successes but also the daily challenges occurring for the staff, versus telling them only what they want to hear, only when they are asking to hear it.

Try not to get called on your day off. One might think that the supervisor who receives calls day and night at home to help out his staff gives the most to his hotel. But a truly successful supervisor is the one whose team is so effective at getting by on their own that they don't need to call for help.

Most importantly, **leave your own personal brand service mark.** Wherever you are working at this moment, do everything you can to assist your hotel on its journey to excellence, right here, right now. Whether expecting to be there six years or six months, contribute every shift, every week, every month in every way you can to making your property better upon your departure than it was on your first day.

Maximize every chance to mentor those who report to you, and know that the rewards can be great when you one day look back at the number of successful hospitality careers that have been launched under your watch.

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Doug Kennedy, President of the Kennedy Training Network, has been a fixture on the hospitality and tourism industry conference circuit since 1989, having presented over 1,000 conference keynote sessions, educational seminars, and on-premise training workshops for diverse audiences representing every segment of the lodging industry.

His articles have also appeared worldwide in more than 17 prominent international publications including the HSMIAI Marketing Review, eHotelier, 4hoteliers, Hotel News Resource, Hotel Online, Human Assets - Dubai and Hong Kong, Hsyndicate worldwide, BAHA Times - U.K., Hospitality - Maldives, and the Hotel Expert Magazine Hong Kong.

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