

Hotel Sales Training - Nobody Does What Nobody Checks!- By Carol Verret

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When Marriott lowers its expectations for REVPAR growth for the balance of 2007 we should all pay attention. (USA Today, July 13) Marriott lowered its expectations based upon softening demand and the pressure that will exert on rate growth. While REVPAR is still forecasted to grow by up to 6% this year, this represents a softening from the almost double digit growth of the last few years.

These developments normally lead to a renewed interest in sales training. Prior to selecting content and a good training program, it is imperative that companies set metrics for the objectives of the training as well as how the effectiveness and subsequent ROI is to be measured.

Content should be geared to the experience levels of the staff and finalized upon following an assessment of the skill sets that need to be supported or trained. Other areas to be examined include processes currently employed and their relevance to the market and to recent innovations in hotel sales.

The processes of the sales department need to be aligned with the content or the staff will not find it relevant to their reality. For example, if the sales staff is evaluated on the basis of making cold prospecting phone calls (please tell me you don't do that!) it is of no benefit to introduce them to the skill sets required for making effective email approaches. If the 'shop' call program focuses only on telephone calls, then email fulfillment and communication skills become irrelevant to the participants.

Regardless of the quality of the content and the hands on exercises to ensure that the participants 'get it', it will not provide much of an ROI unless management is implementing processes to insure that the participants are actually using the tools embedded in the content to enhance their productivity.

Prior to embarking on a sales training initiative, management should consider the following:

œ **What are the perceived issues in the department?** What has triggered management to provide training? Is production down; is the staff new to hospitality sales? The 'triggers' will determine the metrics for an ROI on the training.

œ **What are the performance metrics currently in place?** How are the goals for department framed? Are their goals stated in terms of activity levels and what kind of activity is measured? Is the effectiveness of their activity measured in terms of revenue goals or are the goals based upon room nights?

œ **What reports do they provide on a regular basis and who checks them?** If activity reports include checking the source of business and the documents, including emails, are attached, it is then easier to check on the implementation of the content of the training. If the participants know it is going to be evaluated in that way, they are more likely to implement. What would be the motivation for changing the way they sell?

œ **Decide in advance how training is to be measured!** Test for the training! If the company uses a shop call service, incorporate elements of the training in the evaluation. If they have been exposed to new ways of communication through effective email communication, locate a shopping company that does that.

œ **The ultimate ROI - room productivity.** Set realistic goals for what percentage in productivity would be ideal - don't expect a 10% increase in the first month!

The best reinforcement for sales training comes from the people that sign their paycheck - if management hasn't bought into it, there will be no ROI! Many sales people indicate that they go back to their properties with new ideas only to be stymied by a GM or DOS that doesn't want them to implement.

If you think this article is self-serving coming from a hotel sales trainer, you are right. It is in my and every other sales trainer's interest to ensure that client's measure the ROI on the training. The most frustrating thing in the world is when management doesn't follow up!

Remember - Nobody does what nobody checks!

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