

It's all about the people - By Doug Kennedy

2007-09-17

It was 40 years ago during the Summer of Love that philosopher Timothy Leary was encouraging baby boomers to tune in, turn on and drop out. Now after four decades of so-called advancements in telecommunications technology it seems appropriate to say to hoteliers: Turn off and tune in. Turn off your BlackBerry and tune in to relationships, that is!

If my observations as a hospitality industry conference speaker and trainer are any indication, this seems like an especially appropriate directive these days as more general managers and other hospitality executives I witness in action are increasingly becoming enslaved to their Bluetooths, BlackBerries, Treos and other PDA devices, and, as a byproduct, are increasingly detached from what is happening around them at any given moment.

Not that these devices or this medium of communication are the culprits, but rather that the instant accessibility they have enabled have caused too many hoteliers to spend more time responding immediately to e-mails and phone calls from the corporate office and/or ownership than they do responding to the needs of their guests, meeting with vendor-partners, and staying in touch with internal customers and frontline associates.

These phenomena became glaringly obvious last month when I was speaking at a major technology conference and it was time for the first break. On the agenda it read 'networking break,' which, to me, represented a 30-minute opportunity for participants from this niche of our industry to meet and greet and to exchange ideas and resources at this once-a-year meeting of some of the brightest minds in the business.

But standing in the outside corridor, I noticed that the vast majority of participants were standing alone, either typing feverishly with their thumbs on tiny keypads or talking animatedly into thin air, with only a prominent metallic earpiece to indicate that they hadn't lost their sanity and started talking to themselves. Standing there looking out at such a prestigious crowd, I couldn't help but to ask myself what could possibly be more important at this very moment in time than networking with the top minds in your profession at an event you paid a registration fee and travel expenses to attend?

Granted, as a veteran of hotel operations, I'm certain some of them truly had a crisis to handle, which is when such devices can make things better for everyone, including guests. But looking at the percentage of the audience that was standing outside alone versus networking with their peers, I just couldn't believe that many hotels had had bad enough luck to require their immediate attention at the very same moment.

But our industry's growing obsession with connectivity via cell phone and e-mail is not just evident when hoteliers are on the road at conferences and events. Too many general managers traverse their lobbies with a Bluetooth in one ear and a PDA in their suit coat pocket, ready to respond immediately to an e-mail from 'corporate' when it beeps or buzzes. The worst part is that it's most often not by choice nor preference that hoteliers are chained to their devices, but out of necessity.

Now this is not to say that the medium of e-mail is the enemy, nor that PDAs and other devices are themselves the distractions. But rather it is how we as an industry have adapted to using this enabling technology. For a very few, this technology has helped them better tune in to the needs of guests, and to improve communication and especially service efficiency. Yet for the vast majority, most are spending way too much time obsessing on keeping their in-box clean versus keeping their guests happy. While our industry has traditionally encouraged MBWA-Managing By Walking Around, a new and better acronym might be MBEE-M-Managing By Endless E-Mailing.'

What's ironic in all this is that I would argue today's hoteliers are actually less organized with their filing and trace systems due to these e-mail devices. I cannot tell you how many times my most techno-savvy and early-adapting hotelier friends are calling me for copies of an e-mail or attachment that they cannot find due to their e-mail filing systems (or lack thereof) because they read e-mails on various devices.

So, if you are ready to turn off (periodically of course) the beeping, blinking or vibrating PDA you are carrying around right now, and instead ready to tune more into the needs guests and associates, here are some suggestions:

Schedule a set time and place to read and respond to your e-mail versus responding to every 'ping' from your Outlook e-mail server or buzz from your PDA and allowing the incoming message to re-order your day's priorities.

Set up separate e-mail inboxes, one for 'external' customers, which, of course, truly require and justify a quick response, and the other for 'internal' e-mails from colleagues, associates and vendors that are not as time sensitive.

Use e-mail to inform, notify, update and to survey. But when it comes time to negotiate, brainstorm or to work through complex problems, pick up the phone, or even better, visit in person when possible.

Avoid e-mailing every thought or idea that comes into your head at any given moment. Instead, add them to running task lists or brainstorming journals that you can bring up in person at an appropriate time when they can be given due consideration.

If you find yourself e-mailing the same person more than two or three times per day, don't! Instead, make a running list of issues/topics to discuss with them. Then at a regular time of the day hold one direct conversation (preferably in person or at least over the phone) and knock out all of the issues of concern at once.

If you work for a corporate office or ownership group, make sure your on-site executives know that their first job is to take care of the guests and associates, and that your e-mails and phone calls can (and should) be responded to later when time allows. Be aware of how both planned and unplanned activities in the hotel and local area can impact the hotel and its management team's priorities.

If you are a g.m., v.p. or other top-tier, on-property executive, make sure you have a bias toward talking in person or at least on the phone versus e-mail. Not only will this reduce the time your executive level managers spend e-mailing you back but you will set the tone for your hotel's 'e-mail culture' and along the way foster teamwork by reducing, if not eliminating, the frequent miscommunications that occur within companies that obsess on e-mailing.

By choosing how we utilize these enabling technologies, we can ensure that they are best utilized to help us improve communication-not to over-communicate.

By Doug Kennedy

Copyright 2007 - Kennedy Training Network

Doug Kennedy

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.

Visit www.kennedytrainingnetwork.com for details or e-mail him at: doug@kennedytrainingnetwork.com.

This article comes from Hotel News Resource

<http://www.hotelnewsresource.com>

The URL for this story is:

<http://www.hotelnewsresource.com/article29253.html>

© 1998 - 2007 Nevistas and the author.

Brought to you by Hotel News Resource

Distribute your news on our Network

See what all the buzz is about at:

http://www.hotelnewsresource.com/Info-news_account_info.html