

## Why Even The Best General Managers Experience Disappointing Guest Satisfaction Ratings - By Naomi Stark 2007-10-29

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A perfect 10 begins upon arrival. Yet many end up rating their experience in the 7's or 8's not a 10. Why does this happen? How does that beautiful perfect 10 become so elusive, dwindling down to a score of 7 or 8?

Typically, it is based on the quantity of small 'glitches' they experience. Rarely is it due to the occurrences of major issues as these are not the typical guest experience. One-glitch travelers typically understand and will typically tolerate, leaving you most likely in the 9 - 10 range. Two glitches and your ratings have been chipped-away into the 8 - 9 range. Any more and the Chip-away Effect becomes corrosive quickly. The guest rating experience is now in the 7 range or worse. We all know what glitches are as we've all experienced them. Your room wasn't ready when you arrived, your In-Room-Dining breakfast order of eggs and potatoes were missing the salt & pepper. By the time it's delivered, your eggs are cold. What is worse than cold eggs??

We've all experienced glitches. When you are personally responsible for guest satisfaction scores, the occurrence of these glitches chipping away at your 10 rating magnifies your frustration. For the General Manager, who is faced with scores that do not reflect the vision, expertise or the commitment to their property, guest and team, the pain can be worse than that which is experienced by the guest. In my career, I've had the privilege of working with some of the industry's elite General Managers. However, on more than one occasion, these very accomplished General Managers experienced disappointing guest satisfaction scores. These intelligent, competent and accomplished GM's faced the common scenario that so many do: the negative results of the Chip-Away Effect.

The Chip-Away Effect is stronger than the most experienced and well-intentioned General Manager. The occurrence of multiple glitches is the result of an all-embracing operation such as a hotel. Many businesses enjoy shutting down for the night. Not a hotel. This 24X7 machine, comprised of numerous departments, filled with a variety of individuals, all have an impact on your customer's satisfaction and loyalty. What should be simple, being hospitable to guests, becomes a complex challenge: Unifying hundreds of team members with a wide variety of backgrounds and skill levels to all provide each individual guest with a consistent, accurate, efficient and professional hospitality experience.

The essential personality trait that is often present in General Managers who have led their teams to the 90 percentile and #1 in their brand and market segment is appreciation for the value of outside assistance. The demands on a General Manager do not allow them the luxury of 100% concentration on guest satisfaction. Ironically, it's this love of hospitality and for taking care of the guest that motivated these General Manager's to get into hospitality in the first place. It certainly wasn't, "gee someday I'd like to spend all day in a budget review meeting." No, the industry's best GM's have a deep love for hospitality. They genuinely enjoy the people that work for them and the guests that stay with them. However, the reality of today's business demands requires their attention to be in many other directions. Therefore, many General Managers successfully enlist outside assistance to do what they wish they had more time to accomplish.

The benefits of outside assistance are substantial. Hiring an outside entity whose only focus is maximizing your guest satisfaction and loyalty is a powerful advantage. This focused concentration, free of day-to-day operations and distractions, exist for the sole purpose of facilitating the GM's and the team's success. Those of us who provide this outside assistance have the unique perspective of the most critical guest while sharing the GM's vision and his best interest at heart. We recognize that our success is determined by that of the GM and their team. It's having this extra force in your corner that successful GM's appreciate when they enlist outside assistance in developing their guest satisfaction and loyalty ratings.

How else can outside assistance facilitate supreme success of a hotel? In the case of Stark Service Solutions, we specialize in providing management team's tools that give the upper hand in proactively managing guest experiences. Take for example the corrosive damage caused by the Chip-Away Effect. The occurrence of each 'minor' glitch erodes not only satisfaction ratings but also the guest's loyalty to the hotel. This becomes excessively costly especially when it involves group business. What is needed and necessary to stop the Chip-Away Effect is a centralized communication hub that insures everyone hotel wide knows what the guest in front of them has experienced, especially those on the front line including: Front Desk Agents, In Room Dining Order Takers and Servers, Room Attendants, Banquet House Attendants, just to name a few. Imagine the left hand knowing what the right hand is doing! Our unique programs offer this invaluable advantage in the battle for guest satisfaction and loyalty ratings.

The capacity to stop, yes stop, guests from experiencing multiple glitches during their stay is vital. Take for example this not so uncommon guest experience:

Ms. Karen Stevens arrives to check in at 4:30 pm. She has already endured a very long day of travel. Ms. Stevens has waited in lines to check in at the airport, at security, again at the gate, followed by lines to get off the plane, retrieve her baggage and then for a taxi cab. Finally arriving at your hotel, she waits yet again for one front desk agent that is working only to be told that her room isn't "quite ready."

Though Karen's frustration has little to do with the 25 minutes wait for a room, her frustration is expressed toward the hotel, as it's the final straw of another aggravating day of travel. It all began 10 hours earlier when her adventure to get to your hotel began. Your Front Desk Agent quickly follows empowerment guidelines offering to compensate Karen for the inconvenience with complementary breakfast the next morning (since free eggs are the end-all cure-all in hotels).

Here's where the scores start to chip away. The next morning, Ms. Stevens gets up bright and early ready to face her day of very important business in your city. She has slept well on the very plush and expensive mattress and bedding that the hotel has invested in. She thoroughly enjoyed the massaging showerhead and the fancy toiletry amenities provided. Now she is going to top it all off with a delightful and complementary breakfast. The frustrations of yesterday are fading away and things are looking up. Karen steps onto the elevator after only a minor wait. She encounters a Public Area Attendant who immediately looks down insuring no eye contact or greeting. Approaching the hostess stand of the beautifully designed restaurant the hostess looks up and greets Ms. Stevens with, "One for breakfast?" After being seated, Ms. Stevens waits. 1 minute, 2 minutes, 3 minutes, finally a server abruptly informs her, "I'll be with you in a minute." 3 more minutes. 5 minutes later coffee finally arrives and the server 'warmly' welcomes Ms. Stevens with, "What can I get you?"

Karen places her order, moments later breakfast arrives. Hot and delicious! The culinary team gets it perfect! Moments later Ms. Stevens has finished her breakfast and is ready to go. 3 minutes pass. 4, 5, 7 more minutes pass. Where is the server with the check? Finally, Ms. Stevens goes to the hostess desk to give her complementary coupon and get change from her \$20 dollar bill to leave a gratuity. Now the prior day's frustration and stress comes racing back and the complementary breakfast for the initial wait at arrival backfires. Instead of creating a new and positive experience, the compensation has just reinforced what went wrong in the first place.

What if the hostess, server and chef all knew about Karen's personal experience and the glitch that occurred at check in? What if they were all prepared for Ms. Steven's arrival for a complementary breakfast? How different Ms. Steven's experience could have been! A loyal customer and a perfect 10-satisfaction rating would have been had! Each team member could have insured her dining experience was perfect. They would have treated her like gold, because after all those who works in hospitality poses the desire to please their guests (especially tip based employees). It's the rattrap of day in and day out demands and the lack of communication tools that compound the corrosive impact of the Chip-Away Effect.

The bottom line today is that the tools and technology exist to insure that the General Manager's vision for their team and guests is a consistent reality. At Stark Service Solutions, we are proud to do our part in bringing hospitality alive again in the industry. We enjoy contributing to today's brilliant General Manager's by providing them with the tools that turn their visions and aspirations into daily realities. We also take great pride in seeing hotel teams thrive with Superior Guest Satisfaction, Loyalty and Market Share. Making hospitality alive again in today's technological society where too many feel that they need to go far outside the borders of the United States to experience genuine hospitality is a terrific success.

If you would like more information on our proactive guest satisfaction and loyalty management tools that stop the Chip-Away Effect and facilitate the procurement of a superior loyal customer base that drives market share, please contact us toll free at: 1.866.281.5062 or by email: [info@starkservicesolutions.com](mailto:info@starkservicesolutions.com).

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