

Five Tips to Improve Hotel Customer Service with User Generated Reviews - By Carol Verret

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Providing a consistent level of quality customer service is always a work in process for hotel managers. Couple that with the fact that the labor pool in many markets is relatively shallow and that turnover remains high as compensation remains low, and it is easy to see why some managers are reverting to the 'fog the mirror' method of hiring!

Understanding the sensibilities of a generation of potential employees raised on teams and that heavily participates in community sites like MySpace and FaceBook makes it easier to hire and motivate a customer service team.

First of all we need to reflect the mirror back on hotels' traditional methods of training for customer service. In many hotels, training is focused on process issues, how to check in and check out a guest, how the reservation system works, how the equipment works and as an afterthought, oh yes, be nice to the guest. We fail to incorporate customer service training into the skill sets upon which the employee will be evaluated.

We neglect to build in evaluations based upon measurable behaviors that impact the quality of the customer's experience. We assume that they understand that they need to smile and make eye contact as well as say 'how can I assist you' - don't bet on it! Many of the individuals that we hire don't check into hotels and have little experience with being a hotel guest except when they were on vacation with their parents. They lack empathy for what it feels like to be a hotel guest.

Here's how user generated review sites can help you improve customer service:

Comments in User Generated Reviews create empathy for the guest. This assumes that the manager exhibits respect for the user generated comments. Our employees totally get community sites - it is part of their DNA. When they see the impact that guest service has on the experience of a guest, the guest becomes a person not just a check on a comment card. It helps them understand how important their role is.

Ask the Team how they would respond to a negative comment. The guest service team in the comment should be asked to participate in the formulation of a balanced conciliatory response. Our employees want to feel that their input is valuable - that their opinions are considered. This is a perfect way to get them involved and the more we involve them the more committed they become.

Use the guest comments to reinforce positive training behaviors. Congratulate them when a comment includes remarks on the friendliness of the staff or how a staff member went out of their way for a guest. Let them read for themselves how a poor guest experience impacts a real human, the guest, in their own words.

Empower them with responsibility for monitoring guest reviews online. Make the guest service team part of the process - assign responsibility to the team for monitoring and printing out reviews from review sites. Copy and distribute them for the next meeting so that team members can make comments and suggest solutions.

Design a card to be given at checkout to every guest with the URL of a review site. This is a brilliant idea that one hotel thought up and implemented. Every time a guest responds positively to the question 'How was your stay?' hand them a card with the URL of Trip Advisor or another review site and ask them to write a review of their experience.

Every manager and supervisor can create a collaborative community based culture of customer service in their areas. Managers and supervisors that express disdain for the reviews on the user generated sites transmit to their employees that they don't care about the 'community of guests' and if the manager and/ or supervisor doesn't care then why should the guest service associates!

Carol Verret Consulting & Training also offers Creating a Culture of Customer Service training for managers and associates.

Carol Verret And Associates Consulting and Training offers training services and consulting in the areas of sales, revenue management and customer service primarily but not exclusively to the hospitality industry. To find out more about the company click on www.carolverret.com. To contact Carol send her an email at carol@carolverret.com or she can be reached by cell phone (303) 618-4065. View the Hotel Sales Blog at www.hotelsalesblog.com

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