

## What Was The Year That Is? - By J. Ragsdale Hendrie

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Year end summaries are marvelous, allowing pundits to espouse their expertise and awe within their industry nooks and crannies. They analyze tirelessly, they assess vigorously. They note laboriously the trends, the winners and the losers. But, the big Hospitality secret is nothing really changed and has not changed dramatically since HO JO's and Holiday Inn represented the Hospitality landscape.

Everything is still homogenized, service is still faulty and uneven, the product undergoes mutations and even 'wars', but still is mediocre. And, sadly, the poor Consumer sucks it up, pleased to have a bed, a tepid meal and perhaps a blink from the Front Desk. Who is kidding whom. We have made very little progress, and market events are further constricting our opportunity to excel as an Industry, something we are loathe to undertake.

This is not a total denunciation of the industry, for many companies have made great strides in their march to Remarkable Hospitality. However, the majority have perpetuated the status quo, neither embracing the realities nor the actions to advantage change. We use our publicists and trade organizations to herald our advancements, but they pale in comparison to what needs to be 'right-sized'.

Other industries, such as automotive and technology, have undergone huge transitions to make themselves more innovative, competitive and Consumer aware. We accept 100% turnover, close our eyes to Immigration matters, ever dependent upon a disenfranchised service pool, which will invite unionization. The biggest challenge for Hospitality will not be the search for talent, it will be the search for able bodied employees from that shrinking availability pool. Are we talking about that issue? Are we addressing that future? Shot ourselves in the foot, again!

We had a rush to develop in the last few years, particularly the condo/fractional market, where now in some cities we have far fewer Hotel rooms for rent and condo sales are now begging - 'I'll throw in country club memberships, dog walking, and weekly massages, if you just sign here'. Large corporations are readjusting their property portfolios and creating new sub-Brands. This becomes such a crowded landscape, that Brand identity is negligible and any differentiation within these Brands becomes neutralized. Most of these 'collection' properties are focused upon the upper end Consumer. That demographic is growing (Baby Boomers), but they are also very, very savvy, and will not be swayed by smoke and mirrors and stretched marketing. 'You can fool me once, ...'

Our product survived the Amenity and bedding wars, and, perhaps we have improved mattresses, body lotion and hook-ups for our various gadgets. Amen for upgrades. So, if you do not have a coffee maker, an iron, herbal soaps or a plasma TV, you might as well close the doors of the joint. Those costs must be absorbed. We pass some on to the Guest, we cut back on hours and our staff, we further invest in technology, creating less paper and actually less face to face, personal interaction time with our Guest.

You would think that from all we have learned and know about the Experience, that Service would be emphasized rather than diminished. What in the world are we doing? As an Industry we have never fully invested in our Ambassadors - seeking talent, developing our people, compensating them and respecting them. They make the Experience work, they are the difference. There is a mystique about 'Hospitality'. Other Industries seek those ingredients to improve their Customer's Experience. Enhanced care, treated specially, lavish attention, immediate action to resolve any issue, satisfied senses. We do care, we will attend your needs, and thanks. Others looking in that Hospitality window, extract what we know to be our essence.

So, the Year that was. Not really very different that the prior year or for that matter prior decade. Who had a good Year? Our Staff worked hard, but Jeremy's around the corner is offering \$1.00 more per hour. Our Middle Management also worked hard, but Frank's Hotel around the corner is offering me a better title. Our Property Executives want to do more, but are crushed for the numbers, and they hear that Most Valued Exceptional Hotel Corporation is offering a signing bonus. And, Senior Company Management, well, they are doing quite well, thank you. Constricted, constrained, Kaboom! Let us not forget our poor Consumer, our Guest, Visitor and Patron. Maybe next Year.

The author, J. Ragsdale Hendrie, believes that Remarkable Hospitality is the portal to the Guest Experience and offers solutions through [www.hospitalityperformance.com](http://www.hospitalityperformance.com).

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