

Cornell Study Finds Work Climate Contributes to Hotel Service Excellence

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New Hospitality Management Study Emphasizes Importance of Clear Expectations and Rewards within Hotel Human Resources

Conventional wisdom suggests that content employees provide the best service. As a consequence, many managers begin their customer-service strategy by addressing employee satisfaction. However, a new hotel management study by two Cornell University professors suggests a different starting point for service excellence, known as workplace climate.

Noting the prevalence of the belief regarding employee satisfaction, professors Michael Sturman and Sean Way - both of the School of Hotel Administration - tested the effects of this conventional wisdom in a chain of Asian hotels. They found that workplace climate helps drive service excellence, but employee satisfaction does not.

The newly issued hospitality management study, 'Questioning Conventional Wisdom: Is a Happy Employee a Good Employee, or Do Other Attitudes Matter More?,' is available at no charge from the Center for Hospitality Research website at <http://www.hotelschool.cornell.edu/research/chr/pubs/reports/2008.html>.

'Workplace climate expresses the idea of clear expectations and rewards regarding an employee's job,' said Way, an assistant professor of human resource management. 'When employees have a firm understanding of a hotel's policies and procedures, and when they know how their performance will be judged, a hotel has a strong workplace climate. This leads to a solid service performance.'

'On the other hand, looking at the supervisory ratings for the hotel chain that we studied, we could not find any support in our data for the idea that satisfied employees do a better job,' added Sturman, an associate professor of human resource management. 'If anything, we found it works the other way around. A job well done makes employees feel good about themselves.'

Newly Released Hotel Management Study Supports Human-Resource Report Findings in Other Industries

Sturman and Way conducted their hotel human resource study in the food-and-beverage departments of 40 properties operated by an Asian hotel chain. While they do not claim that their findings can be generalized beyond that chain, they also note that researchers in other industries have had similar results. Several other studies have likewise found no support for the popular idea that employee satisfaction leads to customer satisfaction.

'We must add that there are many reasons that a hotel manager would want to ensure their employees' happiness,' cautioned Way. 'Employee satisfaction is a large driver of turnover intentions, for instance. Thus, we believe hotel managers should be concerned about their employees' job satisfaction. What managers should not do is expect that their employees' happiness will necessarily drive the quality of their hotel's customer service.'

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