

## Personalized Hospitality Excellence Still A Deliverable! - By Doug Kennedy

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Despite all the negative publicity we read these days about the erosion of customer service, genuine, authentic hospitality is still being delivered daily by frontline superstars.

As a frequent flyer who is sometimes on the road more than off, all too often I'm made to feel like just another customer in queue, another voice on the phone line, another room number calling in requests. More than once I've found myself standing alone in an empty lobby and being asked: 'May I help the next guest?' or walking up - luggage in hand - and being greeted with 'Checkin' in?'

Yet despite all this talk about service mediocrity these days, I still receive gestures of personalized hospitality excellence, often when I least expect it. Although a lot has been written about creating 'Wow' experiences and 'Legendary' service to help guests overcome extraordinary circumstances, some of the most meaningful gestures of hospitality are the easiest to create and cost virtually nothing to deliver daily.

For example, I'll never forget my room service waiter Brian at the Don Cesar Hotel who not only took time to listen to the drama of my 'how was your trip in?' story, but also before leaving asked 'Can I get you some extra pillows or anything else for your room Mr. Kennedy?' At the Loews Philadelphia hotel I was completely shocked when the gift shop clerk handing my late night purchase asked if I might also want a wake-up call! I'm still grateful to Dey, the restaurant captain at Cambridges Beaches in Bermuda, who having been my waiter for several nights in a row called to remind me the (only) restaurant was closing soon. (I had gotten mixed-up by the time change and otherwise would have missed dinner that night since it was off season and everything was closing.)

Then there's entire bellstaff of the Peabody Orlando who still let my kids ride along on the luggage cart despite that they are now 9 and 10 years old! Yet it's not always just the front of the house staff that excels in hospitality excellence. I've also had some of my most memorable service experiences from the heart of the house staff such as Allie my housekeeper at the Hilton Suites at Lexington Green. During my weeklong stay for a summer family vacation she not only worked around my family's crazy schedule, never complaining about our mountain of towels, but she also made sure my daughter's stuffed animal friends each received a chocolate mint with turn-down service!

So why is it that some frontline associates are able to deliver genuine, authentic hospitality in a pro-active way while others languish in mediocrity? More importantly, what can hotel managers do to foster a corporate culture that creates more of these behaviors and actions? Here are some suggestions for helping your frontline staff create these memorable moments of ordinary excellence daily:

**Recruit and select those who are hospitable by nature.** Start by reading the definition of hospitality which is 'treating others with warmth and generosity' and then find people who are warm and generous. Recruit customer service providers you see in action. In reviewing resumes, look for volunteerism, community participation, and team experiences on resumes.

**Extend authentic and genuine hospitality in your relationships with frontline associates,** understand that hospitality starts in the heart of the house when you greet your first colleague of the day. The higher the level of hospitality excellence guests receive at a hotel, the more vibrant and fun the annual employee holiday party is, guaranteed!

**Re-humanize your guests.** Make sure associates never refer to guests as their room or table number. Help frontline service providers understand that there is a 'story' behind every guest and each is engaged in their own unique travel situation or circumstance.

**Report back to the frontline staff on how their actions and attitudes have a positive impact on guest stays.** This is especially important for the 'heart of the house' staff and also those such as reservations or PBX operators who don't actually meet guests face-to-face.

**Eliminate rigid scripting of guest interactions and overly detailed standards that turn staff into robots.** Instead, encourage your staff to have real conversations with the real people they call guests.

**Celebrate your staff's success.** It doesn't take a cash payout or an engraved plaque to show your appreciation. Sometimes a heartfelt 'thank you' and dare I say it in today's litigious business world - a hug - can be much more meaningful.

By Doug Kennedy

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### **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 HSMAI 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.

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