

Finally, A Destination Development Plan Which Delivers On The Promise - The Oregon 'Q Care Program' - By J. Ragsdale Hendrie  
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Slap some ideas on the wall, vote for those which slide the slowest, invest tightly budgeted dollars for ephemeral marketing, get the slogans and promises out to the public, and await the results. They will come, you assure your Stakeholders. Perhaps they will, loaded with expectations you have created.

Now, comes the dicey part - delivery! Will the infrastructure hold up? Will your Hospitality Partners perform? Will your Visitors and Guests be greeted and treated to the highest level of care and attention? Or, will the reviews of your Destination result in a declining and devalued reputation?

Lest we forget, it is all about the Experience, how those who visit translate the Service received, the authenticity of the moment and the reliability of the delivery. For those of us who have watched Tourism initiatives unfold throughout the world, in countries, states, islands, provinces, regions and cities, we may extol the promotion but are always wary, pending the results. Now, we have an approach which connects all the dots of a worthy Tourism stratagem, the Oregon 'Q Care' Program.

This is an extremely exciting Tourism advance, and fully supports a 'super-trend', identified in a recent Futures Study, hosted by DMAI (Destination Marketing Association International) and conducted by Karl Albrecht International, 'The Future of Destination Marketing - Tradition, Transition and Transformation.' The research team created an advisory definition: Destination marketing is a proactive, visitor-centered approach to the economic and cultural development of a destination, which balances and integrates the interests of visitors, service providers, and the community. They identified a significant Trend in advocating the Total Visitor Experience, called 'Proliferating Preferences', where travel customers increasingly seek and respond to a diversified set of value clusters (i.e., combinations of experiences, products, and prices that suit their individual preferences). The DMO's (Destination Marketing Organization's) key contribution in this dimension is the '... 'visitor focus' - drawing the attention of all stakeholders to the challenge of delivering a high-value visitor experience from end to end, start to finish.' Travel Oregon gets it!

The State of Oregon Tourism Commission has stepped audaciously to the center of the Destination stage, commendably addressing the piece of the Destination Development package that most never connect - understanding that each and every player in their State - in their cities and hamlets, in their hotels, restaurants and attractions, and retail operations - have a role and responsibility in successful Oregon Tourism. Some might call this synergy of the parties, they call it the 'Q Care Program', and it revolves around Service Delivery. [www.oregonqcare.com](http://www.oregonqcare.com)

Oregon is very fortunate. They do not have to burnish a faded reputation, or build something from scratch or reconstruct from memory. They have known treasures - their seacoast, forests, recreation, lively cities, gracious and accommodating residents. They are already a Destination of Choice! But, along with the laurels comes further accountability and responsibility. Standing still spells gradual demise, for the marketplace dynamic drives continual improvement and excellence. Oregon understands this, and the 'Q Care program' delivers on the Visitor Expectation.

Oregon Q Care is a statewide customer service training certification program created to support the development of the Tourism & Hospitality Industry through enhanced guest experiences. It provides statewide standardized customer service training, emphasizes the importance of quality customer service in the Tourism & Hospitality Industry, and equips employees statewide with tools and resources to better serve Oregon's visitors.

We look to our Tourism Leaders for the vision, and the Oregon Tourism Commission has the inspired direction of Todd Davidson, who through the 'Q Care Program' has determined a manner to 'enculturate' all the stakeholders by establishing reasonable standards for all Hospitality sectors, educating the broadest audience through free, Internet connections, and answering the 'Whys', the 'Wherefores' and, most importantly, the 'What's in it for 'me's''. Whether you are a proprietor or pot washer, hostess or hot dog vendor, ticket taker or waitress, front desk agent or fishing guide, you are an integral part of that synergy for a successful Oregon Tourism ethos. And, by the way, the Program engages their seasonal workers, too!

As Travel Oregon CEO Davidson noted, 'Delivery on the promise is the mantra here.' He feels the on-line deployment of Q Care provides the most immediate and accessible 'Best Of' tactics and strategies to those front line service Ambassadors, examining language, the non-verbal, response and presentation in the Guest interaction. Plus, he said, the Web Site linkage provides a source for Tourism information. Ultimately, every single person who 'touches' a Visitor or Guest will influence the Oregon Experience.

Travel Oregon collaborated with Eric Aebi and Peter Starks of Training Technology to create aspirational yet common sense training modules. The behavioral vignettes deal with those everyday 'transactions' which either make or break an otherwise memorable Experience. These are situations we all relate to, and one misstep colors our perceptions and ultimately, our opinions and memories. The Producers adroitly explored the simplicity of asking for directions, the rude Front Office Clerk, the inattentive Food Server, and other encounters, which are familiar to anyone who travels. Their narrator describes the reaction of our Guest and then cogently relates how the situation might have been better handled. This is not simply a tell, show, do, review, for the actors skillfully deliver a nuanced performance we all recognize. The modules bring it right home, demonstrating that service, attitude, attention and sincerity make the difference.

Initially launched during the 2003-05 biennium as classroom based training, approximately 9,000 people have been certified with the Q Care program. The new online Q Care program is designed to reach thousands more across the state by:

Expanding accessibility through Internet delivery (24/7)

Offering valuable customer service training at no charge

Conveying the value of tourism to Oregon residents

Encouraging employment in the tourism industry

Adding standards and training for behavior-based visitor contact skills

Connecting trainees with tourism industry resources

Travel Oregon is leading the way with the Q Care Program. By investing in this initiative, they have elevated the Tourism bar. All the players can participate, skills are enhanced, service distinguished, and memories are made. Well done!

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).

email: [jrhendrie@aol.com](mailto:jrhendrie@aol.com)

phone: 978-346-4387

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