

What have you done for me lately? - By J. Ragsdale Hendrie

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The Oregon Tourism Commission has answered that question for their Stakeholders with the 'Q Care Program'.

Many in the Hospitality Association world twinge when confronted with that simple question, 'What have you done for me lately?' Some can confidently start ticking off the benefits, others ask for more information and some head for the hills. What a loaded question, for it is wrapped around relevance, value and action. These are not easy times.

Hospitality trade organizations, such as Lodging and Restaurant Associations, and other groups, such as Chambers of Commerce, Travel and CVB's, should be very much a partner in that journey to Remarkable Hospitality and the memorable Visitor/Guest Experience, for in most cases they present the very public face of our businesses to the marketplace. They help promote our destination, our industry segment and our business. But, what disconnects we discern. Where is the synergy? Oregon Tourism has an answer.

These aforementioned organizations are publicly funded, quasi, or private. We look to them for leadership, innovation, representation and 'bang for our buck'. We anticipate our needs to be met and our expectations exceeded. What do we find? Many organizations reflect declining memberships, waning influence and products/services of questionable benefit. They are struggling for relevance and solvency, spending more time chasing dues or squabbling internally than serving their constituent needs, bringing business through our Hospitality doors. Oregon Tourism has an answer.

Many of us have served these groups in some capacity. We recognize what they face: competition for the members, sensitive community, regional, and state/national issues, a tight budget and tighter economy, internal and external politics, restrictive policies, unenlightened management and directors, and perhaps the worst enemy - ennui. But, it all comes back to worth and relevance! Oregon Tourism has an answer.

Lest we forget, your Constituents are 'selling' an Experience - how those who visit their business translate the Service received, the authenticity of the moment and the reliability of the delivery. For those of us who have watched Hospitality initiatives unfold throughout the world, in countries, states, islands, provinces, regions, cities and towns, 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 and Hospitality stratagem, the Oregon 'Q Care' Program.

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, attractions, and retail operations, and, yes, their Associations - have a role and responsibility in successful Oregon Tourism and Hospitality. Some might call this synergy of the parties, they call it the 'Q Care Program', and it revolves around Service Delivery. 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, well known for Hospitality! 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 our visitors.

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 Hospitality ethos. And, by the way, the Program engages their seasonal workers, too!

Steve McCoid, President/CEO of the Oregon Restaurant Association, is a firm supporter of the Program. He notes that Q Care'...caters to the very people who demand on-line training and provides a needed course in customer care and service...our employees need to understand the ramifications of poor service and techniques and methods of dealing with customers. ORA thinks that the Q program is well done, visually stimulating for the user, interactive and a well designed, well thought out training tool. It is also offered at no cost to the industry and can now be utilized by any restaurant operator with a computer as part of their training program for entry level employees.'

Travel Oregon collaborated with Eric Aebi and Peter Starks of the Red Global Group, LLC 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.

Gregg Mindt, Executive Director of the Oregon Lodging Association, felt that Q Care was a great base-line Program, believing it will be received extremely well by lodging employees at all levels, encouraging service excellence. He also noted, 'If we are creative, this Program becomes a wonderful template for other industry related groups, such as Taxi Cabs and Limosine Services'.

This is an extremely exciting Hospitality advance for those Associations which embrace value and relevance. In a recent Futures Study, hosted by DMAI (Destination Marketing Association International) and conducted by Karl Albrecht International, called 'The Future of Destination Marketing - Tradition, Transition and Transformation', the research Team noted an over-riding theme for DMO's, which also applies to other Marketing Organizations/Trade Associations - Relevance. The marketplace is noisy, shifting and evolving, and their role is less defined and effective. A secondary theme was the 'The Value Proposition', which determined successful focus - the singular, essential contribution made by the DMO in the perceptions of the many stakeholders with whom they interact. Over the years, many new players in the marketplace for travel, tourism, meetings, and hospitality have been nibbling away at the DMO 'value package' - the configuration of services traditionally offered.

The Research group also identified a 'Super Trend' which all Hospitality related Associations can appreciate: 'Proliferating Preferences' - where Consumers, especially travel related, increasingly seek and respond to a diversified set of value clusters (i.e., combinations of experiences, products, and prices that suit their individual preferences). A Strategic Challenge for DMOs is to design, promote, and coordinate a satisfying Total Visitor Experience that maximizes the economic contribution to the destination, and one that stimulates return intention and referral behavior for their constituents. The above should resonate in any Hospitality Charter. It is about the Experience, and the Oregon Q Care Program delivers.

Successful Associations are not static. They continually assess their resources, realign the process, people, products and services to maximize value. Communication is constant, reliable and germane. They are always connected, imaginative and decisive, recognizing that flexibility and adaptability make for progress. The Oregon Q Care program brings all the parties to the table for a hearty feast, where all can share the bounty, equally!

The author, J. Ragsdale Hendrie, believes that Remarkable Hospitality is the portal to the Guest Experience and offers solutions through www.hospitalityperformance.com.

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