

How The Oregon Q Care Program Answers Hospitality's Service Training Needs - By J. Ragsdale
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We all start to hum and tap our feet to the Beach Boy's paean to teenage angst and dreams. But, we in the industry share the same emotions, whether we are in Lodging, Restaurants, Attractions, Recreation or Retail.

We aim to meet Guest/Visitor expectations, exceed usual Customer Satisfaction indices, frame an overall Experience which is memorable and make some money while we are at it.

Our landscape has changed dramatically. Consumer demands are volatile, our economy shudders daily, the price of food and energy rockets, our labor force is constricted and dwindling, standards run amok - the cost of doing business becomes a very shaky affair. In Oregon, the Tourism Commission tackled many of these issues head-on, they created the Q Care Program.

We run an honest, proud business. Our Brand tells our story. It is an authentic, passionate description of what we are and what we do. We know we operate in the Experience Economy with the Consumer very much in control. The common denominator and differentiator is Service - how we deliver on our promise. We know what we want, but how do you instill and 'enculturate' your staff to make this happen consistently, not only in our own business but also in our community. One poor Service Experience by a Visitor or Guest eradicates our best efforts, for, nowadays, bad news travels quickly. Q Care addresses this need for Hospitality Standards, effectively describing the ramifications of poor service and demonstrating how to rectify and improve that Service Delivery.

How we struggle, particularly the independents, to staff up for our season or year. Many of us focus on the younger generation, or folks from 'away', or people new to the industry. Many of us are thrilled just with warm bodies. This is a different crowd and manpower source from years ago. They have different needs, different means to communicate and variable levels of learning. The Q Care Program is delivered on-line, interactive, easy to follow, directed by prompts, questions, review and acknowledgement of success. The Program is easy to use, generation friendly and will change behaviors and, therefore, actions and responses from a changing Labor Pool.

The last bastion of excuses is typically costs and resources. There is no time for training, we are too busy. I cannot afford workshops and seminars. I do not have the facilities, supplies or personnel to provide the instruction. Well, Q Care is free, and all you need is a computer.

Wow, a State sponsored Tourism and Hospitality Program, supported by State Associations such as Lodging, Restaurants and CVB's, open to all State businesses and their personnel, easily delivered and at no cost. Does it raise the Hospitality Bar? You bet!

The State of Oregon Tourism Commission has stepped audaciously to the center of the Hospitality 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. As CEO Todd Davidson of Travel Oregon notes, 'Delivery on the promise is the mantra here.'

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.

We look to our Tourism and Hospitality Leaders for the vision, and the Oregon Tourism Commission, 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 Hospitality ethos.

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.

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

Mr. Hendrie is a keen observer of trends and results in the realm of Travel and Hospitality. He believes that Remarkable Hospitality is the portal to the Memorable Experience. Seek solutions at: www.hospitalityperformance.com.

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