

Managing Hospitality

OPENING DILEMMA

Upon check-in, a guest indicates that the national reservation agent misquoted his room rate at \$95 when it should have been \$85 per night. The front desk clerk responds, “Sir, you will have to discuss that with the cashier when you check out in three days. I can only register you with the rate that was entered into the computer. What’s \$30 to a businessperson on a budget?”

The concept of **hospitality**, the generous and cordial provision of services to a guest, is at the heart of our industry. These services, in the hotel industry, can include room accommodations, food and beverages, meeting facilities, reservations, information on hotel services, information on local attractions, and the like. Hospitality is a very subjective concept, and the degree of hospitality a guest perceives has implications for the overall financial success of the hotel. Guests who feel they are not treated with respect or have not received full value for their dollar will seek out others who they believe do provide hospitality. This chapter is intended to instill in you, the future professional in the hospitality industry, a sense of responsibility for providing professional hospitality. As you prepare for a career in an industry that may differentiate its product by continual and efficient delivery of professional hospitality service, these basic rudiments will serve as a primer for your development (Figure 11-1).

This chapter was inspired by a book entitled *Service America!* (Dow Jones–Irwin, 1985), by Karl Albrecht and Ron Zemke. These management consultants were early proponents of the service concept in business. Their writings, as well as my own profes-

CHAPTER FOCUS POINTS

- Importance of hospitality to the hotel guest and the hotel entrepreneur
- Managing the delivery of hospitality
- Total quality management (TQM) applications
- Developing a service management program



Figure 11-1 A well-informed hotel staff contributes to an enjoyable guest stay. (Photo courtesy of Lincoln Plaza Hotel & Conference Center, Reading, Pennsylvania.)

sional experience in hotels and restaurants, are the basis of this chapter. A chapter devoted to hospitality seems essential, since the staff of the front office very often represents the only direct contact the guest has with the hotel.

Importance of Hospitality

Hospitality is a very important consideration for both the guest and the hotel entrepreneur. Every guest expects and deserves hospitable treatment. Providing hospitality to meet guests' needs involves not only a positive attitude but an array of services that make the guest's stay enjoyable. If the market being served by a hotel is composed of business travelers, a hotel staff will find that their needs revolve around schedules and flexible delivery of hotel services. The business traveler may arrive late and leave early. The hotel restaurant must be organized to provide a healthy and quick breakfast. Wake-up services must be located within the room or provided by an efficient staff. The hotel should also offer office services, such as word-processing capabilities, advanced telephone systems, fax and photocopying facilities, and computers. The guest who is associated with a convention may want early check-in, late checkout, and a full range of hotel services. If the convention starts at noon on Tuesday, the guest may arrive at 9 A.M. wanting to unload

and set up before the noon starting time. If the convention ends on Thursday at 3 P.M., the guest may want to retain occupancy of the room beyond the normal checkout time. While the guest is in the hotel, he or she may require flexible scheduling hours of the swimming pool, health club facilities, lounge and live entertainment, gift shops, coffee shop, and other hotel services. International guests may require assistance with using electrical appliances, converting their national currency into local currency, or interpreting geographic directions.

The success or failure in providing hospitality often determines the success or failure of the hotel. Capitalizing on opportunities to provide hospitality is essential. The failure to make the most of these chances directly affects the hotel's financial success, as Albrecht and Zemke indicate in *Service America!*:

The average business never hears from 96% of its unhappy customers. For every complaint received the average company in fact has 26 customers with problems, 6 of which are "serious" problems. Complainers are more likely than noncomplainers to do business again with the company that upset them, even if the problem isn't satisfactorily resolved. Of the customers who register a complaint, between 54 and 70% will do business again with the organization if their complaint is resolved. That figure goes up to a staggering 95% if the customer feels that the complaint was resolved quickly. The average customer who has had a problem with an organization recounts the incident to more than 20 people. Customers who have complained to an organization and had their complaints satisfactorily resolved tell an average of five people about the treatment they received.¹

What do these issues of delivering hospitality to the guest mean to the entrepreneur? They emphatically imply that the guest who is not treated with hospitality (remember that the definition of hospitality is very subjective) will choose to do business with a competitor and may also influence others not to try your hotel for the first time or not to continue to do business with you. The entrepreneur who is aware of the competition realizes that this negative advertising will severely affect the profit-and-loss statement. Albrecht and Zemke extended their concept mathematically. Let's examine the cumulative effects of poor service in the following example.

If a hotel does not provide the desired level of service to 10 guests on any given day, only 1 of the guests will bring the complaint to the attention of the hotel staff. If the complaint is resolved quickly, this person will almost surely do business again with the hotel. He or she will also have occasion to influence 5 people to use your hotel. On the other hand, the 9 guests who did not bring their complaints to the attention of the hotel staff will probably not do business with the hotel again, and each of them may tell approximately 20 people—a total of 180 people will hear their negative account of the hotel. If this model is extended to cover a whole year of dissatisfied guests, 68,985 people will have a negative impression of the hotel ($[180 \text{ people told} + 9 \text{ original dissatisfied customers}] \times 365 \text{ days in a year}$), and 2,190 will have a positive impression ($[5 \text{ people told} + 1 \text{ original satisfied customer}] \times 365 \text{ days in a year}$).

The financial ramifications of so many people negatively impressed with your hotel

INTERNATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS



Hotels throughout the world differ in the level of service they offer their guests. Some hotels provide the basic elements of service within standard operating procedures, while other hotels focus their efforts on delivering service. Much of the explanation for the differences relates to a nation's culture of service. Cultures of countries that regard service as subservience may produce employees who operate within standard operating procedures. But when service is viewed as a profession, the culture will produce professionals as well as employees who welcome the opportunity to minister, to attend, to facilitate, and to care for the guest. Hotels that operate in countries where service is not part of the culture have to develop systems that support employee success in the delivery of hospitality.

are clearly disastrous. Hospitable treatment of guests must be more than just an option; it must be standard operating procedure. It is a concept that must be adopted as a corporate tenet and organized for effective delivery.

Managing the Delivery of Hospitality

It is not enough for the front office manager to decide that the members of the front office staff should provide good service and display hospitality to guests. To provide satisfactory hospitality to all guests at all times, front office managers must develop and administer a **service management program**, which highlights a company's focus on meeting customers' needs and allows a hotel to achieve its financial goals. This program must be based on sound management principles and the hotel's commitment to meeting those needs.

Management's Role

This may seem an odd place to start a discussion of delivering hospitality. After all, aren't the front desk clerks, switchboard operators, and bellhops the people who meet and greet guests and fulfill their needs at the front desk? Yes, these employees do provide hospitality directly, but management must work behind the scenes to develop a plan that ensures that the employees' efforts are continuous and professional. For example, management may decide to implement one or two specific, immediate changes on learning that a guest's needs have been overlooked. Management may feel that the negative impact of the rude, lazy, or careless employee has unnecessarily caused bad public relations. If a group of employees is not performing to management's standards, the cumulative effects of the group will be perceived negatively by guests. This negative impression will take a toll in the long run. Although one or two directives may correct an individual guest's problems, that hotel will reap only short-lived gains. A comprehensive program aimed at meeting the needs of a hotel's prime market—guests who continue to do business with

the hotel—provides the foundation for long-term successful delivery of hospitality. This is what will make a hotel profitable.

Management's commitment to a service management program must be as integral to the organization as effective market planning, cost-control programs, budgeting, and human resources management. In fact, service management is the most visible responsibility because it affects all the other objectives of the hotel. Often the people in staff positions in hotels become so involved with their day-to-day paper shuffling and deadlines that they forget why they are in business. They may not necessarily mean to forget, but it happens all too often. Service management ensures that there is a commitment to a long-range effort by appointing someone within the organization to be responsible for developing, organizing, and delivering it.

John W. Young, executive vice president of human resources at the Four Seasons Hotels, tells us:

We expect our general managers to respect the dignity of every employee, to understand their needs and recognize their contributions, and to work to maintain their job satisfaction with us—and to encourage their growth to the maximum extent their ability and desire allows. General measurement is based on detailed employee attitude surveys, conducted by an outside firm as well as such factors as employee turnover, employee promotions, both within the hotel and to other hotels. Also specific people-related goals are set according to the hotel's needs or the manager's personal needs, and measured, e.g., implementing a planned change in response to concerns in an attitude survey.²

The front office manager usually supervises service management efforts. Other key department heads who supervise employees who deal with guests, such as the food and beverage manager and director of marketing and sales, rely on the organizational leadership of the front office manager. It is important to note that the responsibility of delivering hospitality to the guest in each department is always a part of the job of each supervisor or **shift leader**, the person responsible for directing the efforts of a particular work shift. The organizational efforts provided by the front office manager serve as the basis for a homogeneous plan for the hotel.

The owner and general manager must make a financial commitment to ensure the success of the program. An important component of the program is motivating employees to deliver hospitality on a continual basis through incentive programs. **Incentive programs**

FRONTLINE REALITIES



The daughter of an international guest approaches a front desk clerk and indicates that her mother is experiencing chest pains. What hospitality opportunities are available for the front desk clerk?

are management's organized efforts to determine employees' needs and develop programs to help employees meet their needs and the needs of the hotel. Such programs reward employees for providing constant and satisfactory guest service and often involve money, in the form of bonuses, which must be budgeted in the annual projected budget. These incentives may involve the employees' choice of a monetary bonus, higher hourly rates, shift preference, or additional holiday or vacation days.

Mark Heymann, managing partner of UniFocus, based in Irving, Texas, indicates that customer satisfaction and employee satisfaction (in hotels) should be considered simultaneously. He says, "Given today's extraordinarily tough labor market, dissatisfied workers don't stick around. So a happy staff is the key to happy campers." Mr. Heymann also reports on feedback from hotel property clients with UniFocus, saying, "Money is not the key driver when it comes to holding on to staff. It's the interaction with management and the environment."³

The goal of any lodging establishment should be to extend the same degree of hospitality to a guest who arrives on a busy Monday morning and to a guest who arrives on a slow Saturday night. Management's ideological and financial commitment, along with the organizational efforts of the front office manager, will ensure that both of these guests are treated equally.



Figure 11-2 Owners and managers must commit financial resources and establish priorities for the operation of a successful service management program. (Photo courtesy of Radisson Hospitality Worldwide.)

The Service Strategy Statement

To produce an effective service management program, management must devise a **service strategy statement**, a formal recognition by management that the hotel will strive to deliver the products and services desired by the guest in a professional manner. To accomplish this, management must first identify the guest's needs.

Those of you who may have taken entry-level jobs in a hotel as a bellhop, desk clerk, switchboard operator, table attendant, or clerk in a hotel gift shop may have some feel for what guests want. They want quick and efficient service. They want to avoid long lines. They want to find their way around the hotel and the immediate vicinity. They want the products and services in the hotel to work. They want to feel safe and secure while residing in the hotel. If you use these observations as a baseline for beginning to understand guests' needs while they are away from home, you will be able to better satisfy their needs.

John Young, of the Four Seasons Hotels, reports, "Market research, internal guest comments and our regular employee attitude surveys all confirm that what has set and will continue to set Four Seasons apart from our competitors is personal service."⁴

As Eric Johnson and William Layton note, "It is only through the eyes of a customer that a definition of service quality can be obtained. Senior management cannot adequately determine what is desired at the customer level until a comprehensive evaluation of customer preference is established through a systematic consumer research study."⁵ Thus, in addition to identifying generally what guests want, management should survey guests about the particular property to determine what services they expect and how they want these services delivered. The general manager of the hotel may assign this task to the marketing and sales director, who may start by reviewing and summarizing customer comment cards, which are usually held on file for six months to a year. A review of the areas in which the hotel has disappointed its guests, like that shown in Figure 11-3, will provide a basis for determining where to begin a guest survey. The problem areas identified from this study are then used as the focus of a simple survey form similar to Figure 11-4.

The survey may be administered by a member of the marketing and sales department at various times during the day. This information, as well as that gleaned from the comment cards, will give a general indication of what the guest wants. Sometimes pinpointing guest needs is not easy, because they change over time. In the example shown in Figure 11-3, speed of service delivery, high prices, poor selection of products, low-quality products, and rude personnel are problem areas in which the hotel failed to meet guest expectations. These areas, then, should be the focus of the service strategy statement, as they appear to be the primary guest concerns.

Ernest Cadotte and Normand Turgeon have analyzed a survey concerning the frequency and types of complaints and compliments received from guests of members of the National Restaurant Association and the American Hotel & Motel Association. They report:

Figure 11-3. This report highlights areas of customer service and customer feedback.

<i>Times Hotel</i>				
CUSTOMER COMMENT CARD SUMMARY, SEPT.–DEC.				
<i>Product/Service</i>	<i>Sept.</i>	<i>Oct.</i>	<i>Nov.</i>	<i>Dec.</i>
Overbooked	41	20	8	20
Slow check-in	50	31	12	25
Slow checkout	10	15	10	4
Room rate too high	10	7	9	8
Delay getting into room	35	12	18	5
Slow room service	90	3	3	10
Poor food in restaurant	6	10	2	8
Poor selections on menu	2	5	7	12
High prices on menu	2	10	10	20
Dirty room	3	4	8	15
Poor selection of amenities	—	—	5	—
Bedding insufficient	10	10	12	5
Lack of response from housekeeping	9	15	7	9
Rudeness from bell staff	1	—	5	—
Rudeness from dining room staff	1	—	10	—

The data seem to fall into a four-fold topology that compares how likely an attribute is to garner compliments versus the frequency of complaints.

1. Dissatisfiers—complaints for low performance, e.g., parking.
2. Satisfiers—unusual performance apparently elicits compliments, but average performance or even the absence of the feature will probably not cause dissatisfaction or complaints, e.g., atrium-type lobbies.
3. Critical variables—capable of eliciting both positive and negative feelings, depending on the situation, e.g., cleanliness, quality of service, employee knowledge and service, and quietness of surroundings.
4. Neutrals—factors that received neither a great number of compliments nor many complaints are probably either not salient to guests or easily brought up to guest standards.⁶

Albrecht and Zemke also identify general guest expectations as follows:

- Care and concern from service providers
- Spontaneity—people are authorized to think

Figure 11-4. *This individual hotel guest survey asks guests for their opinions on delivery of service.*

<i>Times Hotel</i> Guest Survey	
1. List and rate the services provided by the bell staff.	
_____	excellent good fair poor
_____	excellent good fair poor
2. List and rate the services provided by the front desk.	
_____	excellent good fair poor
_____	excellent good fair poor
_____	excellent good fair poor
3. List and rate the services provided by housekeeping.	
_____	excellent good fair poor
_____	excellent good fair poor
4. List and rate the services provided by the food and beverage department.	
_____	excellent good fair poor
_____	excellent good fair poor
_____	excellent good fair poor

- Problem solving—people can work out the intricacies of problems
- Recovery—will anybody make a special effort to set a problem right⁷

Their conclusions add another dimension to the service strategy statement. In addition to certain recognizable products and services delivered at a certain speed and level of quality, guests expect employees to accept the responsibility for resolving problems. The guest should not encounter unconcerned staff or be bounced from employee to employee in order to have a problem solved. Management must develop a staff that can think and solve problems. This dimension to the service strategy statement will make the delivery of professional hospitality a challenge!

DEVELOPING THE SERVICE STRATEGY STATEMENT

Once management has identified what guests want, it can develop a service strategy statement. The statement should include:

- A commitment to make service from top-level ownership and management a top priority in the company

- A commitment to develop and administer a service management program
- A commitment to train employees to deliver service efficiently
- A commitment of financial resources to develop incentives for the employees who deliver the services

These directives will serve as guidelines in the development of a service management program. More important, they force management to think of service as a long-range effort and not as a quick fix.

John W. Young states that the service strategy of the Four Seasons Hotels centers on offering

exceptional levels of personal service. People are our most important asset. Each person has dignity and wants a sense of pride in what they do and where they work. Success in delivering excellent service depends on working together as a team and understanding the needs and contributions of our fellow employees. [We must] train and stimulate ourselves and our colleagues. [We must] deal with others as we would have them deal with us. [We must] avoid compromising long-term goals in the interest of short term profit.⁸

Here is one example of a service strategy statement:

The owners of The Times Hotel, management, and staff will combine forces to establish a Service to Our Guests program, administered by management and delivered by staff. Delivery of service to our guests is crucial to the economic viability of our hotel. The owners of the hotel will provide financial support to the people who deliver hospitality on a daily basis.

Another version of the service strategy statement is as follows:

The hotel, in its continual efforts to maintain a leadership position in the hotel industry, will develop a VIP-Guest Service program. The administration and delivery of this program are essential to the financial success of the hotel. This program will include incentives and has received a priority budget line for this fiscal year.

These statements, however worded, convey the message from owners and management that a successful service management program depends on the support of all levels of management and staff.

Financial Commitment

Throughout the previous discussion on service management, financial commitment from management was stressed. Managers who want to develop and deliver a successful service management program must provide adequate staff time to think through a plan and to develop methods to motivate their employees. Scheduling time for planning and strategy

FRONTLINE REALITIES



A general manager has proposed a service management program to the owner of her hotel. The front office manager has developed a plan with a \$7,500 budget that includes incentives for employees. The owner of the hotel likes the program but wants the budget scaled down to \$0. The owner feels that employees should be responsible for their own motivation. If you were the front office manager, how would you justify the budget in your plan?

sessions can increase the labor budget. Determining and offering motivational opportunities will also increase the financial investment. Often, lack of planning for these financial considerations will impede the desire to implement a service management program.

Total Quality Management Applications

The previous discussion of developing a background for managing the delivery of hospitality is essential for adopting total quality management (TQM) practices, as discussed in Chapter 2. Hotel owners and managers who fail to develop a clear service strategy statement and make a financial commitment to delivering hospitality experience extreme difficulty in applying the principles of TQM. TQM requires an immense commitment of labor to analyze guest and employee interaction, reallocation of responsibilities and authority to foster an improvement in services, and a long-term commitment for learning a new method of management. Preparation for adopting TQM is a requisite for success.

W. Edwards Deming's principles of TQM⁹ have many aspects that can be applied to front office management practices. Deming's principles require managers to focus on a distinct level of service at the front office. Managers and frontline employees must view the interaction between customers and service providers. A front office team develops a **flowchart**, an analysis of the delivery of a particular product or service, to illustrate what occurs after a customer has verbalized a request for a product or service. Analysis of this interaction by the group of people who deliver the product or service allows for suggestions for improvement. A key component of TQM is a commitment to continuous analysis of the delivery of guest services and plans for improvement.

Developing a Service Management Program

Employee involvement in planning a service management program is as important as obtaining a financial commitment from owners in establishing such a program. Too often, when the employees are not included in the planning stages, they look at the final plan

HOSPITALITY PROFILE



Patrick Mene is vice president of quality for The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company, L.L.C. His organization is the winner of the 1992 and 1999 Malcolm Baldrige Award. After he graduated from college, Mr. Mene went to work as a management trainee at Hilton. He has also worked in management positions at Hyatt, Westin International, Omni, Portman Hotel in San Francisco, and L'Ermitage Hotels. He has performed a great deal of research, particularly on the teachings of Joseph Juran.

Mr. Mene states that in addition to the Malcolm Baldrige Award's being a prestigious recognition of excellence in overall performance, leadership, profitability, and competitiveness, the participation in the competition for the award provided great feedback for the hotel. He continues by explaining that the hotel was organized vertically; it is now organized horizontally to concentrate more on the critical processes that drive the company and to provide more employee empowerment. For example, a traditional hotel may have 30 departments, while the Ritz-Carlton has only four; each one is run by a horizontally organized team. One team focuses on the pre-arrival process (customer contact with the sales office; making reservations; preplanning meetings, conferences, or banquets), one team focuses on

arrival (laundry, housekeeping, front desk), one team runs the restaurant, and one team is responsible for banqueting. This horizontal structure creates a "leaner, linked, empowered organization." Mr. Mene describes the managers in this type of organization as "coaches and advisers," while managers in traditional organizations are more "chief technicians and problem solvers."

Mr. Mene reports that customer dissatisfaction has decreased. The new structure has resulted in fewer breakdowns and less need for rework. In the past, the hotel experienced problems with incorrect or late honor-bar billings; guest rooms were always clean but were sometimes missing supplies; and at times, when guests called for information or assistance, agents were not available and calls went unanswered. These problems have been dramatically reduced.

He states that quality management science is a whole new branch of knowledge. Traditional methods of management that concentrate on selling hard, raising prices, and forcing a profit cannot identify and eliminate waste. He adds that, in any hotel, 30 percent of expenditures are the result of quality failures and are unnecessary. He feels that for those organizations that participate in TQM and make it work, it is the most effective way to achieve revolutionary results.

and remark, "This is ridiculous; not for me. Let the people in marketing and sales worry about it." In many cases, service is perceived as just another fancy concept proposed by management. Management needs to address that attitude from the outset. When employees are involved early, they are much more likely to buy into the program, since they are already a part of it.

Guest Cycle

The front office manager responsible for developing an effective service management program, along with other department directors, should first take a look at the employees they supervise. Representatives from all job categories and various shifts should be in-



Figure 11-5 *This TQM team is analyzing the delivery of a particular service to a guest. Managers and frontline employees provide an objective review. (Photo courtesy of Radisson Hospitality Worldwide.)*

cluded on the planning committee. Planning by committee can be cumbersome (scheduling, planning meetings, incurring additional payroll, etc.), but it can ensure that an effective program is developed. It allows the plan to be altered in the planning stages by those who must implement it and ensures clear, workable operational methods. It gives the employees time to adjust to the new concept while allowing time to develop adoption procedures. At each planning phase, employees learn how they will benefit from the program. This is a realistic approach to focus management's efforts in adopting this important concept.

Once the members of the planning committee have been chosen, the next step is to analyze the guest's perception of the hospitality system:

Visualize your organization as dealing with the customer in terms of a cycle of service, a repeatable sequence of events in which various people try to meet the customer's needs and expectations at each point. It may be the instant at which the customer sees your advertisement, gets a call from your sales person, or initiates a telephone inquiry. It ends only temporarily, when the customer considers the service complete, and it begins anew when he or she decides to come back for more.¹⁰

Figure 11-6 illustrates the cycle of service, the progression of a guest's request for products and services through a hotel's departments. This outline is presented only as a

Figure 11-6. *This review of the cycle of services that the guest may encounter provides the basis for developing a service management program.*

Marketing

- Customer surveys (before and after stay)
- Advertising: billboards, direct mail, radio, television, print, Internet; incentive promotions, solo and with other hospitality organizations

Reservations

- Toll-free numbers, fax, national reservation system (ease of access), Internet
- Telephone manner of reservationists
- Cancellation policy (reasonable restrictions)
- Credit-card acceptance
- Accommodation availability (value and cost considerations)
- Complimentary services/products (value and cost considerations)
- Information on hotel shuttle and public transportation

Registration

- Hotel shuttle and public transportation
 - Greetings (doorman, bell staff, front desk personnel)
 - Assistance with luggage
 - Check-in procedure (length of time in line, ease of check-in with preprinted registration cards or self-registration machine)
 - Room accommodations (value and cost considerations)
 - Credit-card acceptance
 - Complimentary services/products (value and cost considerations)
 - Room status/availability
 - Information on other hotel services
 - Cleanliness and interior design of lobby, elevators, room
 - Operation of air-conditioning, heat, television, radio, plumbing in room
 - Amenities available
-

working tool for front office managers to use in analyzing the hotel services the guest will encounter. It is not intended as a complete listing. It is important to remember that these services are provided by the employees of the hotel. In developing a list for a specific hotel property, employee input will be very useful.

Another benefit of analyzing the cycle of service is that it may highlight inefficiencies built into the system. Rectifying these inefficiencies will assist in delivering first-rate hospitality, as the following example, reported by Nancy J. Allin and Kelly Halpine of the quality assurance and training department at the Waldorf=Astoria in New York, indicates:

While there can be many reasons to combine the positions of registration clerk and cashier, and many aspects were considered at the Waldorf=Astoria, the decision was driven by a desire to improve guest service where its impact is most obvious—at

Guest Stay

Other hotel departments:

- Food service department (menu offerings, hours of operation, prices, service level, ambience)
- Gift shop (selection, souvenirs, value/price)
- Lounge (prices, entertainment, hours, service level)
- Room service (menu offerings, prices, hours of availability, promptness in delivery and pickup of trays)
- Valet service (pickup and delivery times, prices, quality of service)
- Housekeeping services (daily room cleaning, replenishment of amenities, cleanliness of public areas, requests for directions in hotel)
- Security (24-hour availability, fire safety devices, anonymous key blank and distribution, key and lock repair service, requests for directions in hotel)

Front office:

- Requests for information and assistance (wake-up calls, hours of operation of other departments, transmittal of requests to other departments)
- Telephone system (assistance from staff)
- Update of guest folio
- Extension of stay

Checkout

- Reasonable and flexible checkout time deadlines
 - Assistance with luggage
 - Elevator availability and promptness
 - In-room video checkout
 - Length of time in line
 - Immediate availability of guest folio printout; accuracy of charges
 - Additional reservations
-

the front desk. Cross-trained employees speed the check-in and checkout process by performing both functions, as the traffic at the desk dictates. Registration clerks can cash checks and cashiers can issue duplicate room keys, in many cases eliminating the necessity of having the guest wait in two lines.¹¹

Moments of Truth in Hotel Service Management

Central to the development of a guest service program is the management of what Albrecht and Zemke call **moments of truth**: “episode[s] in which a customer comes into contact with any aspect of the company, however remote, and thereby has an opportunity to form an impression.”¹² Every time the hotel guest comes in contact with some aspect of the hotel, he or she judges its hospitality. Guests who are told by a reservationist that

FRONTLINE REALITIES



Shortcomings in providing guest services at the front office in The Times Hotel have become critical in one particular aspect—knowledge of special events in the local area. Guests have complained that front desk clerks do not give clear directions, estimates of travel time, information on timing of events, cost of admission, or suggestions for public transportation. Guests approach desk clerks and are given a brief response to their questions.

The front office manager has decided to use total quality management principles to resolve this situation. The hotel has stated a commitment to service and a financial commitment to this goal.

If you were the front office manager, how would you proceed?

they must “take this room at this rate or stay elsewhere” will not feel that hospitality is a primary consideration at this hotel. When a potential guest calls and asks to speak with Ms. General Manager and the switchboard operator answers, “Who is that?” the guest will expect the same kind of careless, impersonal treatment when (or if) he or she decides to stay at the hotel. The guest who is crammed into an elevator with half the housekeeping crew, their vacuum cleaners, and bins of soiled laundry will not feel welcomed. All these impressions make the guest feel that service at this hotel is mismanaged.

These examples are only some of the moments of truth that can be identified from an analysis of the guest service cycle. Whether a guest considers an event a moment of truth or barely notices, it is a cumulative review of the delivery of hospitality. Albrecht and Zemke tell us that each guest has a “report card” in his or her head, which is the basis of a grading system that leads the customer to decide whether to partake of the service again or to go elsewhere.¹³ If a guest is to award an A+ to the hotel’s hospitality report card, it is essential that these moments of truth be well managed. This challenge is not to be viewed as mission impossible but rather as an organized and concerted effort by owners, management, and employees. Keep this “customer report card” concept in mind as you develop your ideas about service management.

Employee Buy-in Concept

As Albrecht and Zemke note, “in any kind of retail or service business, the factor that has the biggest effect on sales is the ‘last four feet.’ It’s up to the people in the store to take over at the last four feet.”¹⁴ In other words, all the sophisticated marketing programs, well-orchestrated sales promotions, outstanding architectural designs, degreed and certified management staff form only the backdrop for the delivery of hospitality. The frontline employee is *the* link in the service management program. He or she must deliver the service. It’s a simple fact that still amazes many people. How can front office managers ensure that frontline employees deliver a consistently high level of service?

Albrecht and Zemke offer the following suggestions:

To have a high standard of service, it is necessary to create and maintain a motivating environment in which service people can find personal reasons for committing their energies to the benefit of the customer. People commit their energies to the extent that what they do brings them what they want. What they want may be psychological—a feeling, a status, or an experience. Or it may be material—greenbacks are an excellent form of feedback. In any case the job of management is to engineer a motivating environment.¹⁵

John W. Young, of the Four Seasons Hotels, echoes their ideas: “The challenge is to motivate your employees to deliver the required level of service to your customers, and do it consistently. . . . If we are to succeed in delivery of exceptional service, we have to convince every new employee of the benefit of ‘buying in’ to our philosophy and standards.”¹⁶

In short, a consistently high level of service will be provided only by employees who are committed to the service management program. This commitment is fostered by management. It is such commitment that allows the front desk clerk to tell the newly registered guest about the special musical combo group playing in the lounge or to ask how the traffic coming in from the airport was or to suggest consulting the concierge in the lobby for directions to points of interest in the city. Chapter 12 further discusses employee motivation, and those concepts are crucial to the development and administration of a service management program.

Consider each employee in each hotel and determine how to stimulate their commitment to service. If money will motivate them, financial incentive programs that reward positive expressions of hospitality are in order. Employee stock ownership programs also provide an incentive for employees to realize financially the importance of delivering a consistently high level of hospitality. Other reward systems may include preferential treatment in scheduling shifts, longer vacations, and extra holidays. Long-range rewards may include promotion opportunities.

Screening Employees Who Deliver Hospitality

Another factor to consider in developing a service management program is the employee character traits needed to provide hospitality. When evaluating candidates for frontline service positions, interviews should be structured to screen out employees who are not able or willing to deal with the demands of guest service. Albrecht and Zemke offer these considerations for choosing frontline employees: “A service person needs to have at least an adequate level of maturity and self-esteem. He or she needs to be reasonably articulate, aware of the normal rules of social context, and be able to say and do what is necessary to establish rapport with a customer and maintain it. And third, he or she needs to have a fairly high level of tolerance for contact.”¹⁷ And John W. Young, of the Four Seasons Hotels, notes:

The motivation process begins with the selection of employees, which is all important. The average person applying for a job is interviewed by at least four people. When Four Seasons opens a property every single employee hired is interviewed by the hotel general manager. First we look for people who are already motivated. Our compensation policies have been designed to support and reinforce our efforts in hiring, training, and development. We look on them not only as a motivator, but as a way of sending signals to our employees consistent with our philosophy and business strategy—almost as an employee communication program itself.¹⁸

Group discussions among the managerial staff will help to highlight the attributes of a person who will be able to deliver hospitality. These discussions should lead to a rather informal procedure for screening employees. Questions that determine whether candidates display maturity and self-esteem, are articulate, possess social graces, and have a high level of tolerance for continued guest contact can be discussed in group settings. Managers who are aware of what they are looking for in employees are better able to secure the right people for the right jobs.

Empowerment

Empowerment—management’s act of delegating certain authority and responsibility to **frontline employees**, those people who deliver service to guests as front desk clerks, cashiers, switchboard operators, bellhops, concierge, and housekeeping employees—is one of the rudiments of service management programs. The process of empowering employees requires front office managers to analyze the flow of guest services and determine how the frontline staff interact with the guest. Are there any points of service at which the guest may request variations in the level of service provided? Might there be times when a guest may question standard operating procedures, such as billing, guest room access, or room accommodations? Do frontline employees constantly inform guests, “I don’t have the authority to rectify this matter. You’ll have to see the manager”? If the review of the guest cycle reveals opportunities for delegating responsibility and authority, then empowerment should be exercised.

ADOPTING EMPOWERMENT INTO FRONT OFFICE MANAGEMENT

Front office employees who are not accustomed to solving problems and are not treated as members of the management team may be reluctant to suddenly take charge and make decisions. Employees who have become comfortable with having their managers solve all the problems may see no need to change the established routine. However, it is becoming increasingly apparent to front office managers that a supervisory style that does not allow for employees to be involved in the decision-making process will not be successful. The challenge to the front office manager, then, is to begin to introduce empowerment into the front office.

The analysis of the guest flow (described earlier in this chapter) is the best way to start

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A guest in room 284 calls to the front desk and wants to order pizza from room service, but there is no room service menu in the guest room. The desk clerk relays the request to housekeeping, only to have the phone call go unanswered. Next, the desk clerk calls the restaurant and asks the hostess to call the guest and take care of the request. What underlying total quality management efforts are working in this situation?

the empowerment process. However, this analysis must be performed by the front office manager in conjunction with frontline employees. If input from frontline employees is not included in the analysis, valuable data may be overlooked and an opportunity for employee ownership will be lost. The opportunity for an employee to participate in the decision-making process will ensure positive initiation of empowerment.

PARAMETERS OF EMPLOYEE EMPOWERMENT

The authority and responsibility that underlie employee empowerment must be fully articulated and communicated to employees. If an analysis of the guest flow reveals opportunities for a guest to question a billing amount, then the billing amount needs to be discussed. If the amount in question is less than \$5, do cashiers have the authority to credit the guest account for that amount? What if the amount in question is less than \$25; do cashiers have the authority to credit the guest account for that amount? Or what if the amount in question rises to more than \$25; do cashiers have the authority to credit the guest account for that amount? Along with setting parameters for employee empowerment is a management feedback system that provides information on cashier financial activity and guest satisfaction. For example, a cumulative tally as well as individual tallies of a front desk clerk's authorization of refunding charges that have been disputed by guests should be reviewed by front office managers. Financial totals that exceed the parameters of employee empowerment should be questioned.

TRAINING FOR EMPOWERMENT

Employees need training sessions to prepare for empowerment. Some issues that training sessions will cover include the feeling that management has abandoned its responsibility by asking employees to resolve guest concerns. Employees may also experience anxiety in dealing with guests who are upset. Front office managers will need to develop flexible but relatively routine methods for employees to use to achieve a uniform delivery of service.

Training for empowerment begins by asking employees how they feel about providing guests with good service. Front office managers might ask employees how they think the hotel can make the guest feel most comfortable in this environment. Questions that per-

tain to some of the employees' recent personal experiences at the time of check-in or checkout may initiate some opportunities for discussion. Training continues with a list of empowerment policy standards, which describe the authority and responsibility that are included in their job description. Employee-manager dialogue about these standards will help clarify employee understanding and concerns and identify manager communication issues. The manager will want to demonstrate and have employees go over the use of empowerment policy standards. Managers will also want to have follow-up training sessions with review of employee performance and opportunities for employee feedback.

Training for Hospitality Management

Part of a service management program involves employee training to deliver hospitality. Just as managers discuss what they want in an employee, managers decide what must be done to convey hospitality to travelers who are away from home. Of course, this discussion is not performed in isolation and requires input from employees. Using the guest service cycle (see Figure 11-6), the planning group determines what each frontline employee must do at each point to extend hospitality.

The key to making training pay off is knowing what we want the trainees to be able to do when they have finished the program. An effective training process starts with a performance analysis. We must analyze the various jobs to be done in serving the customer well, and then spell out the knowledge, attitudes, and skills required of the person doing the job.¹⁹

You cannot take it for granted that the desk clerk knows to maintain eye contact with the guest during the check-in procedure while using a computer, that the switchboard operator knows to alert a security supervisor when a guest mysteriously hangs up in the middle of a call for information, or that a bellhop knows to check the operating conditions of the heating, ventilating, and air-conditioning unit and television when he or she brings the guest's luggage to the room. The communications of hospitality must be identified, so that each employee can be trained to convey them.

Evaluating the Service Management Program

Any program requires methods for evaluating whether the program has successfully achieved its goals. This chapter opened by defining hospitality as the generous and cordial provision of service to a guest. How do the owners and managers of a hotel know that hospitality is being delivered?

Albrecht and Zemke base the development of a sound evaluation procedure on identifying the guest's moments of truth.²⁰ Figure 11-6 outlines the moments of truth in the guest service cycle. This outline can serve as a guideline for what should be evaluated. The more research put into identifying the components of the guest service cycle for a specific hotel property, the more effective managers and employees will be in evaluating

service delivery. Specific desired behaviors can be identified and measured. For example, if part of the registration process depends on a prompt hotel shuttle van to pick up and deliver guests to the hotel, then complaints from guests about late or slow service will tell the owners, managers, and employees that frontline employees are not delivering the necessary service correctly. Customer comment cards provide one of the ways hotel management and staff can receive feedback. However, not all satisfied or dissatisfied guests complete these cards. Owners, managers, and employees who are committed to a service management program will develop additional methods for determining guest satisfaction.

One other method that can be used to obtain useful feedback is by having frontline staff, such as a desk clerk, inquire about the guest's visit during checkout. Simply asking "Was everything all right?" is not sufficient. If the guest folio indicates the guest charged meals, beverages, room service, long-distance calls, or valet services, the front desk clerk should inquire about the delivery of service for each: "Was your food delivered hot, on time, removed from the hallway promptly?" or "How did you enjoy the live entertainment in the lounge?" A method of communicating guest responses to the appropriate departments, which can rectify the errors or reward the frontline employee, will complete the process of evaluating the success of a service management program. For example, a quick call to the manager on duty that relates the information received from the guest can assist in remedying a potential guest service problem.

An inquiry from the desk clerk at checkout provides feedback about service quality after the fact. Supervisors of the dining room, lounge, bell staff, housekeeping department, maintenance crew, and the like must develop communication procedures with their employees to monitor the guest's experience as it occurs. The host or hostess must develop a sensitivity to a guest's reaction to menu items and prices; the bellhop must constantly be aware of the guest's needs for information, directions, or assistance with luggage; while the housekeeping employee must be aware of the guest's needs for additional amenities, linens, or cleanliness of the public areas. All feedback must be communicated to the frontline employee for continuous improvement of service.

Follow-through

Vital to any service management program is the continued implementation of the program over time. In the hospitality industry, continued implementation can be very difficult. A hotel operates every hour of every day, and innumerable jobs are involved in keeping it running smoothly and profitably. Management can begin a service management program with the best of intentions, but too often it is dropped or neglected in the day-to-day flurry of operations. Albrecht and Zemke remind us that "isolated change and improvement programs tend to run their course and then to run downhill toward the performance levels that existed before the program. The difference between a program and continuous commitment is management."²¹ Management is the key to implementing an effective guest service program. The commitment to hospitality is not a casual one; it requires constant attention, research, training, and evaluation. Only with this commitment can a hotel ensure hospitality every day for every guest.

Interfacing with Other Departments in Delivering Hospitality

One of the many benefits of employing total quality management is the participant's ability to understand fellow team members' job responsibilities. Teams that are composed of various departments in the hotel provide opportunities for insights into fellow members' jobs. Sometimes the process of TQM can seem like a maze of charts, processes, interactions, and the like, which tend to confuse the uncommitted. But from that process rises a thorough understanding of how the guest moves through the hospitality system and the jobs of the providers of these services. Participants in TQM come to realize that the delivery of hospitality is not the responsibility of any one person. This may come as a startling revelation to some employees because they feel alone in bearing the responsibility for guest satisfaction. TQM allows all participants the opportunity to see how each employee from the other departments shares in the hospitality activity.

The "that's not my job" syndrome is a very easy attitude to adopt in a management system in which TQM is not used. Employees who feel they have distinct job duties within and between departments and are not paid to venture beyond those guidelines may contribute to the delivery of unacceptable service. Department managers who use TQM have the opportunity to prioritize service concepts and methods to deliver service with employees. This interaction gives managers and employees the occasion to air concerns about how restrictions resulting from narrowly written job descriptions affect their ability to provide service to the guest.

A typical TQM team will assign representatives from various departments in a hotel to work on improving a particular guest service. For example, guests may complain that there are not enough towels in a guest room. This complaint, especially after housekeeping has closed down for the evening, causes a reduction in guest satisfaction and additional work for the lone front desk clerk on duty.

At the outset, the answer may be to "just put a few more towels in each guest room." The controller of the hotel may see this as additional costs of inventory purchase and laundry. Housekeepers realize that excess supplies in guest rooms have a tendency to vaporize and result in an increase in costs. However, a team approach to this seemingly simple problem will provide a list of possible solutions that an individual employee might overlook. A team of desk clerks, housekeepers, bellhops, servers, cooks, switchboard operators, cashiers, and supervisors will review this particular service and how it is delivered. Objective analysis of the components of the service will give employees insight into how departments interact to accomplish their tasks. Brainstorming sessions identify

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A guest in room 1104 has requested that housekeeping tidy up after a cocktail reception in his room. He is expecting additional business guests within two hours. He wants you to ensure that the housekeeping department will respond within the next half hour. What should you do?

possible improvements that can be debated by team members. Additional meetings will find team members crystallizing concepts and gaining insights and respect for jobs performed by team members.

The team may decide to have front desk clerks alert the housekeeping staff when more than two people check into a guest room. The housekeeping staff can then routinely bring additional towels. This decision not only solves the problem of guest dissatisfaction caused by too few towels but provides an opportunity for frontline employees to develop and deliver a guest service. It is no longer a front desk problem or a housekeeping problem, but a team effort to produce a satisfied guest.

An example of a service management program is Hilton's "Hilton Pride Program," which recognizes exceptional hotel performance and customer satisfaction. "The Pride Program reinforces our pledge to maintain exceptional levels of customer satisfaction while building pride in the workplace. This sense of pride enables us to create a level of service that brings our customers back, said Dieter H. Huckestein, executive vice president, Hilton Hotels Corporation and president, hotel operations owned and managed.

"The performance criteria include the following items:

- Customer satisfaction tracking studies
- Guest comment card responses
- Mystery shopper evaluations
- Team member surveys
- EBITDA (earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortization)
- Room RevPAR
- RevPAR index
- Brand management and product standard"²²

Delta Hotels received the Canada Awards for Excellence Trophy 2000 from the National Quality Institute (NQi). Mr. John Johnston, president, Delta Hotels, remarked, "Not only does this award recognize our ongoing commitment to excellence, but more importantly our commitment to our guests." The selection process included "[NQi] assessors [who] visited six Delta hotels and the Corporate office to review examples of quality in action. Delta Hotels met the rigorous criteria in the Excellence Framework by demonstrating outstanding continuous achievement in Leadership, Planning, Customer Focus, People Focus, Supplier Focus, and Performance." Prior to this award, Delta Hotels established an internal quality control program—Quality Business Assessment. "With this process, Delta Hotels trains internal assessors to conduct individual hotel assessments and develop a quality improvement plan. Every two years, a hotel will undergo an initial three-day assessment and a subsequent five-day assessment to ensure that ongoing quality measures are incorporated into Delta's culture and all aspects of [its] operations. External assessors are also invited to conduct assessments, ensuring that assessments meet the professional standards of NQi." Mr. William Pallett, senior vice president, people and quality, says, "Our goal is to ensure a seamless approach to quality, so that it is part of our culture. Problem Solving Teams regularly monitor process for improvement oppor-

tunities.” Tangible results of Delta’s program include a one-minute check-in guarantee for guests and a guarantee for employees “to receive their review within 30 days of their anniversary date or receive one week’s vacation with pay.”²³

Solution to Opening Dilemma

An immediate response to correct this guest service situation is to have the desk clerk register the guest at \$95 per night, discuss the situation with the supervisor after the guest departs from the front desk, and then have the front desk clerk call the guest to confirm the room rate. However, a more effective way to handle future situations is to work with the general manager and owner to develop a service strategy statement and obtain financial resources to support a service management program. Exploration and application of employee motivation and empowerment are necessary to make a service management program work. Total quality management teams will help employees determine tasks required to deliver service. New front office managers should not take the delivery of good service for granted. Quality service is planned—not happenstance.

Chapter Recap

This chapter has stressed the importance of delivering continuous quality service in hotels, as defined by the guest. Successful extension of hospitality starts with management’s commitment to a service management program. Preparing a service strategy statement will focus the planning efforts of the owners, management, and employees. Principles of total quality management provide a manager with an opportunity to involve frontline employees in analyzing the components of delivery of service and methods to improve existing services. The development of the service management program requires the involvement of frontline employees, discussion of the guest cycle, moments of truth, employee buy-in concept, screening of potential employees prior to hiring, empowerment, training, evaluation of the service management program, follow-through, and interfacing with other departments in delivering hospitality. A long-term commitment to a successful service management program is necessary.

End of Chapter Questions

1. How important do you think hospitality is to a guest in a hotel? If you are employed in a hotel, ask your manager how he or she feels about the importance of providing hospitality to a guest.

2. How would you develop a service strategy statement? Why is this an important first step in the planning process?
3. Why should frontline employees be involved in the development of a service management program?
4. How would you apply TQM to a particular situation at your place of employment? What challenges do you think will be presented in the application of this management concept? What suggestions will you make to your manager to resolve these challenges?
5. If you are employed in a hotel, prepare an outline, similar to that in Figure 11-6, of the guest service cycle at your place of employment.
6. What are “moments of truth”? How can a front office manager identify them?
7. Why must an employee “buy in” to a service management program? What would you do to ensure employee commitment?
8. Discuss some techniques that are useful in determining whether prospective employees have the attributes needed to extend hospitality.
9. Why is training an important component of the service management program? How could a front office manager begin to identify the skills needed for delivery of hospitality? If you are employed in a hotel, did you receive training in delivering hospitality?
10. How can a front office manager measure the effectiveness of a service management program?
11. Why is follow-through so necessary in the continued delivery of hospitality?

C A S E S T U D Y 1 1 0 1

The new owners of The Times Hotel have just boarded a plane at a city in Asia. Their stay in the Mandrian Hotel was superb. The attention to service was excellent, and they felt quite pampered. During the flight, one of the owners reads an article in a popular magazine concerning the mediocre service in hotels in the United States. The article details the lack of concern for the guest in many properties, the high cost of hotel rooms, and the abrupt attitudes of the hotel staff. The owners think of their hotel and realize that many of the problems mentioned in the article can be found at The Times Hotel.

The next day, at the general staff meeting, the owners share their concerns with the management staff. As the group listens attentively, they cannot help but think, “We have heard this before—another idea from the owners that will make more work for our already overworked staff.” However, this time, the owners declare they don’t know where to begin; they feel overwhelmed by the size of the problem. “Let’s develop a plan,” they suggest. All managers must do some research on this topic and return for a brainstorming session in two weeks.

The front office manager, Ana Chavarria, finds

this to be a challenge! She has read some of the articles on service management in the trade journals and decides to do more research on the topic.

Through her reading, Ms. Chavarria learns that there must be a financial commitment by the owners and a managerial commitment by the staff to make this work. If the employees become involved in the planning stages, it should work just fine. She thinks that getting the cooperation of the employees will be easy if the owners pledge their financial commitment. She guesses that the rest of the management staff will probably halfheartedly go along with the project—if it is forced on them.

At the scheduled brainstorming session, Ana outlines her findings. The owners are reluctant to incur

additional expenses to motivate employees. The owners respond, “Let’s find some more creative ways.” The other managers suggest preparing posters with photos of employees who do a good job, placing names of employees who do a good job on the marquee, and placing a suggestion box in the employee lunchroom. Continued focus on the financial aspects distracts the group from discussing the content of a service management program. After two hours of futile effort, the owners decide to table the service management program.

If you were the front office manager, what would you have included in your presentation for developing an effective service management program?

CASE STUDY 1102

Ana Chavarria, front office manager of The Times Hotel, and Lorraine DeSantes, the hotel’s director of marketing, learn that their city will be hosting the next Olympic Games. The city council and the tourism board are planning to meet to work on a program to ensure that quality service will be delivered by all agencies, private and commercial, to the many guests. There will be individual groups (hotels, restaurants, public transportation, etc.) that will meet and decide on a course of action. Margaret Chu, general manager of The Times Hotel, wants Ana and Lorraine to represent the hotel on the Hotel Hospi-

tality Commission. Since the next games are several years away, there is ample time to involve various constituencies in developing a plan for implementation.

After a few meetings with the commission, the group feels it should break into smaller teams to discuss developing specific components of delivering quality service. Ana and Lorraine are heading the “Service to the International Visitor” planning team. What suggestions would you give Ana and Lorraine as they lead this team? Prepare an agenda for the first meeting of their team.

Notes

1. Karl Albrecht and Ron Zemke, *Service America!* (New York: Dow Jones—Irwin, 1985), 6–7.
2. John W. Young, “Four Seasons Expansion into the U.S. Market” (paper delivered at the Council on Hotel, Restaurant and Institutional Education, Toronto, Canada, July 30, 1988; edited July 17, 2001), 29.
3. Cheryl Hall, “Data Crunchers at Irving-based UniFocus Help Hotels Improve Customers Service, Maintain Employee Morale,” *Dallas Morning News*, July 16, 2000. Reprinted with permission of the *Dallas Morning News*.