

Putting the "Hospitality" back in the Hospitality Industry

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By Brenda Fields

What other industry is so directly involved with serving its customers in many significant areas to their well being? Food, drink, and sleep are three of the most important needs of an individual. But just meeting these needs does not ensure a successful operation or ensure client loyalty. Nor does it ensure that the customer's needs were met with good service in a hospitable manner.

As an industry, we discuss "service" and more often than not, rely on the integrity and good nature of the employees to deliver the required service(s). Many of the large companies provide service standards on everything from how to answer the front desk phone to when to replace the soap in a guest room. Service and hospitality go hand in hand but are actually two different concepts. "Service" can be defined as the "act" of providing a service, whereas "hospitality" is the "cordial attitude" of the person providing the service. It's the difference between a pianist who hits all the notes with impeccable timing and one who evokes feeling with his playing. How many times have we tried to resolve credit card disputes, question telephone charges, or return merchandise, just to feel that the customer service person did not hear our legitimate perspective and was inflexible in their positions? We are thankful when we deal with a representative who not only works to resolve our problems, but does so in a helpful and kind way.

This article will address the opportunity and benefit for the hospitality industry to be the leader in providing hospitality and setting standards for other industries to emulate.

What is "hospitality"?

According to two dictionary definitions, hospitality is: "**Cordial reception. Kindness in welcoming guests or strangers**" and the act of being "**friendly and solicitous towards guests**".

When a customer refers to "Great Service", it is service which is delivered by a person who is warm and caring or in other words one who is *hospitable*. What better industry to lead the way in service and hospitality as the "hospitality" industry? Hospitality should actually be the industry's most natural strength. A dedication to this on every level will set the hospitality industry apart from other industries and foster profitability. Service + Hospitality = GREAT SERVICE.

Listed below are just some of the benefits to owners and managers to take on the leadership role of "hospitality":

Attract better employees.

As labor is one of the largest expenses of a hotel operation, hiring the best staff and reducing turnover is important to positively impact the bottom line. Not only does the guest benefit from a warm, caring staff, but owners and managers do as well as they tend to be easy to work with. Who wouldn't enjoy a meal served by a person who was warm and attentive and made you feel that he or she truly wanted you to enjoy the entire experience? Chances are that you would return to the restaurant over and over if you were recognized and felt truly appreciated. Therefore, when hiring staff with direct customer contact, look for that warm, caring attitude on the first meeting. If it's not there, it is unlikely that training will create it. Hospitality is the element that will create guest loyalty despite service lapses, product deficiencies, or minor inconveniences. Hospitable staff will seek out industries and companies that foster and encourage their helpful attitudes.

Build occupancy.

One of the most cost effective ways to increase or maintain business is to provide great service with hospitable, caring staff. It costs the same to hire someone with a great attitude as to hire someone who just performs their responsibilities on the most basic level.

In fact, one of the greatest competitive advantages of independent hotels is the service aspect. Without some restraints imposed by the bigger hotels companies, the independents can encourage their employees to truly go above and beyond, to ensure guest satisfaction and guest loyalty.

Hiring warm and service-oriented people is the number one ingredient. Without that, no amount of training or service standards will result in the desired result i.e. offering guests a truly great experience. No one is fooled by unsympathetic and uncaring staff, even if all the right notes are hit. It's really the spirit of the employees that will transcend product deficiencies, competitive disadvantages, and marketing exposure. The same amount of money is spent on a caring employee as an uncaring employee, so why not go for the gold?

As a result, guests will return over and over, without additional expenses incurred by the owner or manager to attract the business. Marketing expenses will be fully exploited to attract new business, which will quickly become repeat business and the cycle continues.

Improve average rates.

Great service can also help overcome rate resistance and insures that the customer perceives a fair price/value ratio of the product. A "can-do", caring attitude of the staff will most likely add perceived value to a property. A five-star property with all of the five-star attributes, but lacks exceptional service, will most likely be perceived as priced too high. If a five-star restaurant charged \$70.00 for Dover Sole, but great service was not there, the restaurant would be hard pressed to maintain customers willing to pay that amount. Conversely, a limited service property that provides great hospitality will be in a stronger position to gain business from its competitive set. So, whether the property is five-star or limited service, great service has a value to its guests and will translate to improved average rates.

Therefore, whether you are an independent property or CEO of a large chain, why not lead the way and devote the time and resources to put the "hospitality" back in the hospitality industry and enjoy the positive financial results as well as the satisfaction that the hospitality industry is leading the way and setting the standards for other industries to emulate.

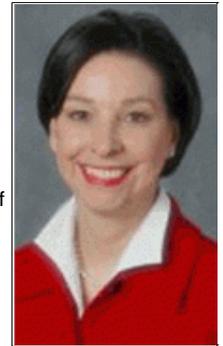
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Brenda Fields is a marketing and rooms specialist in the lodging industry. Her twenty-four year experience includes senior marketing management positions in luxury, boutique, and convention hotels.

With extensive experience in pre-openings and repositionings, Brenda was responsible for the successful opening and stabilization of Paramount in New York City, one of the first boutique hotels by developing and executing a unique direct sales and yield management program as well as a national and international marketing campaign.

Brenda is President-Elect of the New York City chapter of Hotel Sales and Management Association International; serves as a member of the Editorial Board of National Hotel Executive; is on the Advisory Board of Boutique Hotels and Resorts; serves on the NYC Board of HSMAI; is a member of the Real Estate Board of NY; and is a regular contributor to the international publications eHotelier, Hotels Online, Hotel Resource Weekly Network News, and 4Hoteliers. Brenda Fields can be contacted at brenda@fieldsandcompany.net or call 518 789 0117 or visit www.fieldsandcompany.net.



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