



HOME RENAISSANCE FOUNDATION
RENEWING THE CULTURE OF THE HOME

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Perception of People's Needs

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Perception Is Reality

Our value system is developed as we grow up. In the first few years of our life our parents are the sole influence. As we grow other outside influences like friends, school, religion, the media, sports and clubs start to shape the way we think, and the values we believe in. This has a direct impact on how we operate in the hospitality work environment, how we deal with guests, staff, suppliers, and owners, from different cultures, socio economic backgrounds and demographics. Often our belief system already has certain perceptions in place and therefore we tend to provide service based on these perceptions. In hospitality we are mainly selling an intangible product called service. People's perception of the service they receive is their reality regardless of whether they have perceived it correctly or not. The perception of the service provider is likewise of capital importance. Jan Carlzon's much-quoted phrase is key: "In the 1990s we saw a customer in every individual. In 2000 we see an individual in every customer."

Every hotelier's dream is for the customer to feel so welcome that the hotel is a home away from home. There is no better comment than this that can be made to a General Manager by a guest staying at their hotel. What is it we all like so much about home that hoteliers try and replicate in their hotels? In my mind it is the following: predictability, familiarity, relaxed environment, safety, genuine service and staff, and home cooking. (It is hard to believe that one of the most popular dishes on our room service menu is sausages, mashed potato and peas.)

A home, ideally, offers a comforting environment, the familiar sounds of music or TV or friendly voices, the smell of fresh flowers (and the absence of offensive odours), the feel of laundered linen, and the taste of home cooking. In their efforts to create a homely environment for their guests, hoteliers start with the five senses. The first visual impressions are lasting. The look of the public areas, the uniforms on staff, the layout of the room all have to be visually pleasing. The ambience created by background music, running water, the quietness of the guest room, the quality of the TV sound are all worked on behind the scenes. They create a sense of safe familiarity with fresh flowers in the public areas, non-smoking floors, fragrances of bathroom amenities, the fresh smell of clean linen, and fresh cooking smells. The quality of linen, towelling, crockery, cutlery, and glassware, and the general feeling of cleanliness, are just some of the areas that impact on the sense of touch.

Why do Hotels call people who stay with them Guests, when they actually pay for the privilege? Being a Guest normally means free of charge. Preparing a meal at home will vary depending who is going to attend the meal. Think about how we would prepare a meal for the following scenarios: A family member, the boss, a friend. The first thing you do is try and understand the needs of the person having dinner and the outcome you would like to achieve. The same principles apply when dealing with guests from different market segments. A corporate guest wants

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fast efficient service where everything just works. Leisure guests have more time on their hands and want more interaction and generosity of time. A tourist wants added value by way of information on local amenities and services. Air crew need rest, and probably the offer of a friendly wake-up service. If you get the service mixed up you end up with frustrated and unhappy customers. This would happen in the home, if you prepared a meal for your boss in the same way as you would for a family member.

The family home is where important hospitality skills are developed. A family meal requires all the people participating to communicate, listen, share, anticipate each other's needs, have manners, help in the preparation, serving and clearing. All these are essential skills in the hospitality industry too. These skills are translated into proactive service, attention to detail, good communication skills, the ability to work in a team, and a strong work ethic.

When teaching employees to deliver service to our guests, the fundamentals are based on the same values that are taught in the family home. They can be summarized with the acronym S.E.R.V.I.C.E. These fundamentals would be:

Smile / Self Esteem: Smiles are universal. Whether the guests speak English or not, everyone understands the message of a smile. For self-esteem, hotel managers need to hire positive people and to treat them as they themselves would like to be treated.

Eye Contact / Exceed Expectations: Staff need to make regular eye contact with guests to show they are listening and understanding what they are saying, and also to show that they are approachable and willing to help. Staff can exceed expectations by being consistent in all their dealings with guests. They cannot argue with customer perceptions; but they can learn from the manager to anticipate changing market needs, and to treat customers consistently well.

Recognition / Recover Opportunities: Staff need to use guests' names whenever possible, and remember details about them. This shows them that they are important to the hotel, and helps them to feel at home. Guests' complaints are opportunities for staff and manager to improve the level of service in ways that might not have occurred to them otherwise. They should therefore listen carefully to guests' complaints, without assuming that the guest is merely being difficult. To be pro-active in this area, managers can ensure that they find out what their guests really think of the hotel, by setting up surveys, contacting regular users, and employing "mystery shopping" techniques.

Voice / Vision: Staff need to take the time to speak to guests, especially those from abroad, in a clear voice. This conveys a sense of service and assists guests in understanding what is being said. The manager should ensure that his or her vision for the hotel is shared by the staff, creating a culture dedicated to service excellence. This includes planning and preparing for the future – today. The manager should take into account the lifetime value of customers, since repeat business is extremely valuable.

Informed / Improve: All staff must know the answer to basic questions about the hotel, its services and the products it provides. Employees and managers must take the initiative in looking for better ways of doing things, mindful of the fact that in service provision, little things can make a big difference. Another way for the management to improve is to invest in training and continuous development for all staff, including themselves.

Clean / Care: Staff presentation conveys the professional impression of the hotel. All staff must be clean and well presented, which gives the guest confidence that staff care not only about themselves but about the guests. This confidence cannot be just a surface impression – employees must genuinely care for their work and the guests they are providing services to. The management's care of the guests includes ensuring that the hotel uses customer-friendly systems for reservations, requests, and payment, making easy to do business with the hotel. In the area of quality service provision, "near enough" is not good enough for guests.

Everyone, Everywhere / Empowerment: Staff should take ownership of simple guest requests: no matter what a guest asks them for, as long as it is legal and moral, staff should do their best to deliver and should not refer the guest to another department. Management should aim to make employees responsible and answerable for holistic service to guests, and should make every member of staff a valued team member. This will involve taking calculated risks and learning from mistakes, as well as supporting and coaching employees.

Setting the Benchmark

The family environment creates a strong platform to teach children the value of genuine "willingness to please". This sets the benchmark for people's future actions and attitudes. A hotel manager needs to interview and hire staff on the basis of their desire and willingness to provide genuine "anticipatory" service. It is not easy to teach someone to do this after they enter employment – it must have been a value taught from a young age.

To finish with four quotations covering the various areas discussed above:

•*The quality of our work depends on the quality of our people.*

Unknown

•*Home ought to be our clearing-house, the place from which we go forth lessoned and disciplined, and ready for life.*

Kathleen Norris

•*Being on par in terms of price and quality only gets you into the game. Service wins the game.*

Tony Allesandra

•*The voice of parents is the voice of gods, for to their children they are heaven's lieutenants.*

Shakespeare