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Service Excellence 101: Be Welcoming

As a follow up to my article about being eager to serve, it is important to highlight the importance of the entire welcome experience. There is a popular saying that goes, *You never get a second chance to make a first impression*. While it is possible, it can be difficult to bounce back from a poor welcome experience.

Importance of the Welcome

On a recent trip, I drove up to the hotel where I would be staying. After receiving instructions from the doorman on where to go for self-parking, I made my way to the hotel and was immediately struck by how well-designed everything was. There were glass sculptures and beautiful chandeliers throughout the lobby. I was impressed. When I got to the front desk, there were two receptionists talking with each other. One of them eventually stopped talking, looked down at her computer, sighed, then said, “Hello, may I help you?” That question was asked with no eye contact, no smile, and no interest. That experience was the exact opposite of a warm welcome. The agent rushed through a scripted series of questions (Name? ID? Credit card?). It was abundantly clear that she either:

- a) Disliked her job.
- b) Disliked guests
- c) Was having a bad day
- d) A combination all three

Whatever the reason, I was very disappointed and felt unwelcome. That was clearly a wasted opportunity to make me feel welcome and set my expectations for what the rest of the service could potentially be like. Whenever a customer enters your building, everyone must do all they can to create a welcoming atmosphere.

Imagine you haven’t seen a favorite relative or a close friend for several years, and they come to visit. How will you greet them? More importantly, how will you make them feel? When a customer enters your building or walks up to your desk, they are entering your home.

Let’s contrast that experience with a recent visit to the Relache Spa at the Gaylord Opryland Resort in Nashville, TN. As I entered through the spa’s front door, I was immediately greeted by a receptionist with a big, warm smile...before I even got to the registration desk where she was. After welcoming me, she asked if I had a spa appointment. When I told her that I did, she quickly (yet gracefully) glanced at her appointment log, then proactively used my name to welcome me once again. She then

gave me an overview of the spa service that I reserved, along with a mini verbal orientation of the spa facilities.

That spa receptionist clearly:

- Loved her job
- Loved her guests
- Was having a great day (probably because she was in a job where she could fully use her talents for making others feel welcomed).

Needless to say, the rest of my spa experience, was on par with the warm greeting I received.

The Receptionist

Many organizations severely undervalue the importance of the receptionist/greeter. That position is, by far, one of the most important in any service-driven business, regardless of the industry. That person can turn your bad day into a good one, or your good day into a bad one. Yes, that is how much power their smile (on non-smile) can have on the customer's experience. No one wants to walk into a restaurant and the hostess looks like she's been sucking on a lemon.

The receptionist, or whomever the first person is that your customer sees, should have the most natural smile on the entire team. They should love people and love making them feel welcome. They should come from behind their desk and periodically check on their guests. They should work the reception area/lobby, by straightening furniture, magazines, etc. They should be people filled with joy. Not necessarily people who are happy, because happiness is based on happenings. If the happenings are good, they are happy, and if the happenings are bad, they are unhappy. Joy is innate and grounded. Joyful people are appreciative. They appreciate that they have a job in the first place and they appreciate the opportunity to positively influence their customers.

So, here are my recommendations to design or re-design your welcome experience.

- Commit to only hiring truly joyful people who can't help but to smile. These types of people literally have to try NOT to smile because smiling is such a part of who they are.
- Work with your team to clearly articulate how you want your customers to feel everyday for every guest.
- Identify the key service touchpoints in the welcome experience of your business (i.e. the parking lot, front door, reception desk, etc.)
- Make deposits at those touchpoints and look for opportunities to enhance them.

At the welcome experience, every customer should feel honored, as if they were the guest-of-honor at a banquet. So greet, smile and engage your customers from the moment that you see them. Not because you have to, but because it truly is your pleasure to do so.

Engaging Service: 22 Ways to Become a Service Superstar

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