



*We exist to serve others so they may better serve the world.*®

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November 22, 2010

## **Service Excellence: Inspect What You Expect**

If we truly want to serve in an exceptional manner, then we must regularly look at service from our customer's perspective. It can become quite easy to get so caught up in the day-to-day operation of our jobs, that we unintentionally overlook simple service errors. We, as service providers, can become very focused on giving service, and forget that it's all about how our customers receive that service. As I've stated before, service is not about what we want to give...it's about what the other person wants to receive.

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On a recent hotel stay, I decided to order dinner through room service. I wasn't that hungry, so I only ordered a bowl of chicken noodle soup. The chicken noodle soup came as planned. The utensils were wrapped in a cloth napkin (as I've seen before in many other food & beverage operations). When I unfolded the napkin, however, I noticed there was a fork, knife, and teaspoon. Given that I ordered soup, the only utensil that I could actually use was the teaspoon, which was not an ideal choice. A soup spoon or, at least, a dessert spoon would have been more appropriate.

The following morning, I ordered oatmeal and once again, I received the same utensils. This time, I asked the server to please bring me a bigger spoon. Do you think that the server took note of my request and relayed the information to her boss so the team could improve the annoying utensil situation? Not sure...actually, probably not. Ideally, the hotel would have a process whereby a room service employee would call the room a few minutes after the food was delivered to inquire if all was well. That way, the room service team would proactively have a system in place to identify and address service errors before the customer becomes upset. Inspect what you expect.

When I placed the oatmeal order, there was an option for 2% or skim milk to accompany the oatmeal. What do you think the milk is supposed to be used for? You guessed it...to pour into the oatmeal. The oatmeal came with a glass of milk...not a mini-pitcher or some other tool to effectively pour, but a full-fledged wine-glass with milk in it. Of course, when I tried pouring the milk into the full bowl of oatmeal, the milk spilled all over the place. Inspect what you expect.

Upon checking out of the hotel, I told the front desk agent about the soup and oatmeal issues (she also happened to be the front desk manager). As we know, most guests don't complain, they just leave and don't return. Then they'll talk about you, write blogs about you and make internet videos about you. As a manager, regularly "shop" the service experience that your team provides. Give feedback and make improvements daily. Teach

your team to be quality auditors. Have them ask themselves, “What does my guest need in order to fully enjoy what I’m serving?” Encourage your team to solicit feedback, review the collected feedback as a team, then make improvements accordingly. You’ll be surprised at how many improvements are quick-fixes.

Make it a scheduled activity to audit the customer experience. The same way you have budget meetings and manager meetings on your calendar, please put the service audits on your calendar as well. It is that important. When inspecting ask yourself, “What are my guests seeing, hearing, touching, tasting and smelling? In addition to personally inspecting what you expect, another great way to capture the customer’s experience is to intimately solicit feedback from your customers. Be sure to get a nice cross-section of long-time customers (ambassadors), not quite long-time customers and new customers. This is to get multiple perspectives. On a quarterly or even a semi-annual basis, schedule an informal meeting or conference call to thank them for their patronage and to simultaneously solicit ways to better serve them. Some customers are more likely to open up and be thoroughly honest via these types of methods than the traditional comment card system.

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Regardless of the setting, service always boils down to someone being the recipient of someone else’s products and/or services. Your guests deserve the best you have to offer every time. Tell your team that serving others is a beautiful thing. Having the opportunity and privilege to positively impact someone else’s day is a gift they should be proud of giving. An anonymous author wrote it best, “No one is more cherished in this world than someone who lightens the burden of another”.

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