



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

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## **The Best Service School**

Many people believe that the perfect place to learn about how to provide world-class service is in a luxury hotel or a renowned hotel school. While that may be true in some cases, I found another place that is an even more powerful training ground. On a recent trip to Charlotte, North Carolina, I saw and heard about service that was so memorable that it prompted me to ponder... "What if every person who gets hired to serve others, must first spend one-week training at a hospice?" Yes, you just read HOSPICE. For those who do not know, a hospice and palliative care facility is a place that specializes in easing the distress and discomfort of a dying or chronically ill patient. Those ladies and gentlemen who choose to devote their professional lives to serving patients and their families in such a potentially traumatic time give, perhaps, one of the most vivid examples of what engaging service looks like in its purest form.

One hospice executive said it best, "It is an ultimate privilege to take care of others. We don't get a second chance. We **MUST** do everything right the first time". I was fortunate to be taken on a tour of the **Levine and Dickson Hospice House** in Huntersville, NC. Like a luxury hotel, everything looked and felt exceptional. The furniture was exquisitely staged, the artwork was eye-catching and there was absolutely no clutter to be found anywhere. Most noticeable, however, was how happy, focused and professional the staff was. From the nurses to the housekeepers, to the receptionist...everyone beamed with immense pride. They were proud that they were "called" to serve others. For them, they don't have *jobs*, they have a deeper sense of purpose to humbly and happily be hospitable. There is no such thing as *no*. As long as the patients and family's request is clinically and morally permissible, the team will find a way to make it happen. Isn't that what world-class service is truly about?

One employee happily recalled a recent stay of a terminally ill boy who wanted to see a fire truck. The staff eagerly surprised him with a visit from the local fire department and one of their big, red shiny fire trucks. Another patient had a craving for a vanilla milkshake with fresh strawberries. So the nursing assistant went out and bought the milkshake for the patient. Another couple in the hospice had been living together for several years, but never got married. The couple's interdisciplinary care team organized a wedding ceremony, complete with a chaplain, held in the couple's room. Those are just a few stories out of many that was shared with me.

Although I heard many examples of great service provided to patients, I was also the recipient of engaging service. **Hospice & Palliative Care – Charlotte Region** hired me to deliver a keynote session for one of their semi-annual all-staff meetings. The audio/visual coordinator loaned me his remote control handheld mouse to advance my

PowerPoint slides. Before I began my presentation, I asked him about the remote mouse's brand because I was interested in getting one for myself. At the end of my session, he gave me a note with the full name and model number of the mouse, along with a website I could buy it from. He even wrote his email address if I had additional questions.

Also, since I was going back to the airport after my presentation, one employee gave me a small brown paper bag filled with snacks that I could take on the plane with me. She even wrote "Happy Trails!" on the bag.

I often wonder when everyone in the service business will realize that service is not about specific tasks you do in a job, but rather, a way of thinking and living. If the purpose is understood, then the functions will take care of themselves. In my view, there is nothing more powerful than one person finding joy in being able to serve someone else. We can all learn from hospices and the purity behind the service spirit that hospice employees have. If everyone had to fully depend and rely on someone else to take care of them at some point in their lives, then the true meaning of "service" might be fully understood by all.

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