

## The Difference between Exemplary and Indifferent Hospitality

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I recently had the opportunity to stay at an historic hotel in Santa Maria, located on the central coast of California. Upon driving up to the hotel, I noticed a special 15-minute parking spot for people checking-in and also observed that the hotel had built a new tower in addition to an older section that seemed to be under renovation. I grabbed my bags out of the car and went to the front desk to register. A friendly young lady affirmed my reservation and courteously directed me to my room. In order to get there, I had to go through the restaurant, pass the bar, and walk down a long hallway where servers had the right-of-way, not the guests. They crossed the hallway between the dish station and the dining room and did not stop for anybody. Coupled with the smell of food going into the trash cans and the din of a commercial dishwasher, it was not a pleasant experience.

Upon entering my room, I realized that I had forgotten my toothpaste. I decided to make the trek back up to the front desk and see whether toothpaste was an amenity available for forgetful guests. The young lady who checked me in proceeded to ask if I needed shaving cream, a toothbrush, or a razor. She was quite willing to go to the full extent to make me feel comfortable and I remembered that. After she gave me the toothpaste, I walked back to my room, plowing through the entourage of dining room servers going to the dishwashing station. There I was, in the way again.

Once back in my room, I read the amenities list and saw that Internet service was available. I turned on my laptop but could not get a connection. I called the front desk and was told that the cable could be found behind the armoire that contained the television. There were no directions in the room to indicate that one could find the cable there, but it was there. The front desk agent informed me that they get calls about this all the time, as it's not listed in the hotel guide located on the bedside table.

After working a bit, I figured that it was time for a few moments of relaxation and decided to go to the pool area. There were about four or five other people swimming in the pool and most of them were speaking German. It appeared that a German tour group had booked most of the rooms in the property. As I was doing my laps in the pool, I noticed a guest flag down one of the waiters and ask for a glass of Prosecco. Instead of trying to bridge the language gap, the waiter didn't know what she was asking for and walked away, never coming back. I figured it was time to intervene, between her broken English and my broken German, I was able to suggest she ask for sparkling wine instead of Prosecco. Then, being the hospitable guy that I am, I put on some dry clothes and went to the bar to get her and her friend a glass of sparkling wine.

Reflecting back on some of the service related scenarios that played out during my stay, there were a few good things and a few not-so-good things. The young lady who went above and beyond the requirements of her job description, was exemplary. The employees who just barely did their jobs seemed indifferent and even bored. Then, the "waiter" by the pool's behavior was not even acceptable in a service environment. I usually hold management accountable for customer service glitches, but

the level of service was so varied at this particular hotel, it may have reflected individual department heads delegating their own style's of management.

In my odyssey through the kitchen on my way to my room, I noticed that there was a sign on the wall that said, "Smile, the Customer is Always Right" next to the servers' station. I wondered if that wasn't the extent of their customer service training. Personally, I do not think that you can mandate the quality of service simply with signs or scripts that employees have to follow.

One of the key areas in the hospitality industry is being able to hire the best-qualified individual for the job. Large companies, with great reputations, such as Ritz Carlton and Nordstrom's effectively hire good employees by applying more of a scientific approach. These companies take the time to find the right person and traditionally do not just hire "warm bodies" to fill a position.

One of the techniques used by the better hospitality industry companies is behavior-based interviewing. I don't believe that this property took the same approach. The premise of this interviewing technique is that past behaviors exhibited in a previous job will indicate how a potential applicant will perform in a future position. This style of interviewing avoids questions that require a "yes" or "no" response. The format of the questioning would include examples such as "Tell me about a time when..." I can just imagine asking the waiter at the pool the following question during an interview "Tell me about a time when you were asked by a guest for a specific product that you were unfamiliar with, and how did you handle the situation." Or how about asking the front desk agent the following "Tell me about a specific time when a guest called you from their room looking for something that they were unable to locate. How did you handle the situation?" This type of questioning could better determine whether they end up with the right employee on their doorsteps. Although an interviewer may not be able to witness an applicant in action on the job, the type of answers reflecting past behaviors will indicate what type of employee he or she may be in the future.

On a final note, in order to effectively hire the right people for the job, you have to ask the right questions. The good news, it doesn't require any additional financial investment for this particular interviewing process than would using less effective interviewing methods. However, the outcomes could be completely different. Ultimately, the positive impact that exemplary employees can have on the overall customer experience is priceless. Therefore, we provide the following resources for supervisory management to access consistent models of hiring practices. Specifically, here are some sites/articles associated with behavior-based interviewing practices:

[http://www.quintcareers.com/behavioral\\_interviewing.html](http://www.quintcareers.com/behavioral_interviewing.html)

<http://www.strategy-business.com/press/16635507/07103>

<http://www.mrichampions.com/behaviorbsd.html>