



Enhancing Guest Loyalty Through Advance Issue Elimination and Planned Service Recovery

by Evan Mills

For the most part, tribal casinos offer gaming, dining, lodging and entertainment options. So, an important aspect that makes a property truly special, irrespective of the location or format, is SERVICE. Think about it – a property can have the hottest slot machines, construct a modern hotel, offer new dining options, think of another unique way to give away \$100k and hire The B-52's to provide a memorable New Year's Eve. But it's all for naught if the slot department takes ten minutes to respond to a service button, if security is unresponsive to room noise complaints, if the value meals are anything but, and if promotions are perceived as being unwinnable.

Success in this business is determined by increasing guest loyalty. To help grow market share and differentiate an operation from the expanding competition, following are a few quick service tips that really do work.

Make Service the Strategy

As the saying goes, "Fail to plan, plan to fail." Even at a young age, many children know exactly where they want to go: Disneyland. If "The Happiest Place on Earth" can successfully engineer loyalty at such an early age, tribal properties can certainly generate the same intrinsic desire within the adult demographic, too.

One of the best examples of this approach is at Barona Resort & Casino near San Diego. Like Disney, they go to great lengths to produce the desire for repeat visitation with their picturesque setting, to the 'welcome wave' from a team member at the front gate, to friendly door greeters and beyond. Their attention to detail, focused staffing on the gaming floor and progressive guest service plan sets the tone for Barona's success because they've made service their strategy (and, have multiple JD Power Awards to prove it).

Advance Issue Elimination

As the motivational speaker Zig Ziglar once said, "The complaining (guest) represents a huge opportunity for more business." On the other hand, how many managers and staff actually believe this and take advantage accordingly?

Taking the time to first see the property through the eyes of a guest, with the intention of eliminating any hurdles they would encounter, should be an immediate goal. If for any other reason, it takes the responsibility away from reluctant team members to solve issues. Over time, staff will eventually come to understand that most guests simply want a

sympathetic ear, the opportunity to vent and the delivery of a speedy resolution to their liking. But until that magical day arrives, a thorough examination and alteration of processes from entry to exit will pay future dividends.

For example, there was once an issue with long players club lines at Gila River Casinos with the complaints to match. Signing up new members took a lengthy paper form, most marketing offers required a personal visit to the club and promotion entries weren't automated. Of course, an outdated system was producing frustrated guests that wouldn't return because of this experience alone. By examining the processes and embracing technological solutions, the average length of a players club visit has been reduced substantially, while card use has increased dramatically.

In short, guests tell us exactly what we need to do to be successful. If you're hearing things like "more penny slots!" and "beverage service is awful" over and over again, it's in your best interest to take them seriously and eliminate objections well in advance.

Planned Service Recovery

Even after troubleshooting, Murphy's Law dictates that problems will inevitably happen. However, the service recovery paradox suggests that a guest with a resolved issue will become even more loyal than a guest with a satisfactory experience. That bears repeating:

Guest A visits a casino, enjoys a meal and sees a satisfying concert, while nothing negative of note occurs. Guest B visits the same casino, doesn't get the wine they ordered at dinner until dessert because the key to the cabinet isn't available (a reference to Lee Cockerell's must-read book, *Creating Magic*) but are thrilled when the wine, and the meal, are both comped on-the-spot due to the mistake. Even though Guest A had a good time, it's much more likely that Guest B will return. In addition, studies suggest that up to 70% of guests will return by getting a caring response to their concern. However, that number skyrockets to over 90% if the problem is fixed beyond the guest's expectation.

To drive this point home, JL Watson Consulting uses a broken bone metaphor, stating, "If a broken bone is treated immediately and properly, it will heal so that the bone actually becomes stronger as a result of the healing process; stronger than it was before the break. Similarly, if a (guest)

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service failure is addressed immediately and effectively, the guest experiences a higher level of treatment and caring from the support organization than they would if the failure never occurred. As a result of that special treatment and caring experience, the guest has a stronger bond with the service provider, and their relationship is stronger than it was before the failure.”

The good news is that most service recoveries don’t require expensive comps, just compassion and a well thought-out response plan to build a positive relationship and regain the guest’s trust prior to them leaving the building.

In conclusion, by merely reexamining the way tribal

properties do business, seeking out models to emulate and formulating a strategy that eliminates guest issues while building loyalty, everyone wins. Market Metrix, a specialist in guest feedback analytics, suggests that an increase of just 2% in a property’s overall service scoring will equate to a motivating 9% boost in revenue. All it takes is a little effort – and, a focused service vision. ♣

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