



by Frank Neborsky

Guest Service: Making It Better

Not too long ago, guest service was as simple as a pleasant smile, a warm hello and a sincere thank you. With little or no competition, fewer entertainment options, and less economic stress on consumers, casinos were able to accept a somewhat casual approach to guest service. Decent service was good enough and there was no reason to change. Fast forward to present time with increased competition, shrinking discretionary bankrolls, greater expectations by the consumer, and the trend by casinos to incorporate more and more automation into their service delivery systems, and guest service as we know it has been forced to change forever.

Guest service has gone from a simple point of interaction “touch point” to an emotional connection that begins long before the guest ever enters your property and continues long after they leave. A pleasant smile, a warm hello, and a sincere thank you are just as important as they ever were, but the guest’s emotional connection plays a big part in their buying decisions, whether they’re planning a trip to your casino or going to their favorite restaurant. To best understand these concepts, think about your own habits as a consumer and which businesses provide you a happy emotional connection.

What is good guest service and why good isn’t good enough anymore? Guest service has become an emotion experienced by the guest, not just a single touch point that occurs when you or a team member encounters the guest. Service is a combination of conscious and subconscious emotions that define the guest experiences as a result of a series of encounters or engagements with persons, places or processes. This interaction has also been referred to as the 3P’s of service marketing. Simply stated the 3P’s are:

- 1) **People** – they are your team members that deliver the service and provide the human touch points and emotional connections between your company and its customers. Body language, appearance, personality and commitment say it all when it comes to who delivers the service.
- 2) **Physical evidence** – this is who you are and what you do. Your property location, your amenities and product offerings, your service standards and your guest recovery efforts are just some of the ways you communicate who you are and your level of service commitment to your guests.
- 3) **Process** – this is how you deliver your service and reinforce the emotional connection with your guests. Team member engagement, maximizing touch point opportunities and minimizing distractions and dissatisfaction all

play into how your service delivery efforts are perceived by your guests.

Why does someone go one casino over another or more importantly, why should a guest choose your casino over the competition or some other entertainment dollar opportunity? It comes down to the 3P’s and how they contribute to the emotional connection a guest has with a specific service provider or your brand. How your people work within their physical location to maximize processes to deliver outstanding guest service is the foundation to create the positive emotional experience that the guest wants and needs.

Remember that guest service has gone from a simple touch point to an emotional connection that begins long before the guest ever enters your property and continues long after they leave. Every guest who visits your casino creates an emotional connection. With the successful delivery of the 3P’s, the guest will have a good experience resulting in a good emotional connection. They depart your casino and that emotional connection becomes a favorable memory. That favorable memory sparks a desire to return and enjoy the experience once again. A return trip is planned, the guest returns to your property and the memorable service experience cycle continues – or so we hope.

When we are successful in delivering excellent guest service, we transform our guests from retail consumers into repeat customers. Both groups demonstrate a proven propensity to visit your casino, but they also are likely to share their bankroll with your competition. Ultimately, the goal of guest service is to elevate your guests to loyalists, advocates and evangelists – someone who will always (or almost always) choose your casino over the competition. If we fail, our guests remain somewhat satisfied as a retail or repeat customer but are by no means overwhelmed by the experience. They visit when it is convenient to them with no specific loyalty unless provided with a special offer or incentive. If we fail badly, the guest may never return, and worse they could become a defector – someone who shares their open dissatisfaction with one or all of your 3P’s or service standards with friends, neighbors, colleagues, and now on social media sites, touching virtual strangers with their dissatisfaction.

This is where the rubber meets the road and where we, as service providers, must clearly understand the expectations of the guests so they never become defectors. We also need to be honest with ourselves and determine if these service level expectations are reasonable and whether or not we can continue

to meet, and ultimately exceed, the expectations of our guest so that they become advocates. It is important to realize that the “wow” factor that comes from meeting expectations is only temporary, since today’s expectations become tomorrow’s service entitlements. To avoid this peril, businesses must find ways to continuously exceed expectations which is the ultimate goal and the most difficult part of the guest service delivery cycle and the 3P’s.

So how do you make your guest service better? There are several initiatives that could be considered or adopted when trying to address this goal:

- Know your guest. By soliciting guest feedback and monitoring their expectations on a regular basis, you put yourself in a position to know when to adjust or how to change your guest service delivery if necessary.
- You need to constantly evaluate and understand your guest’s expectations and provide a mechanism that identifies opportunities to exceed them whenever possible. Document the habits of your guests, their desires, likes and dislikes. Put together a strategic playbook of new guest service initiatives and opportunities that can be called upon and put into action in the future when needed.
- Once you see these expectations transforming to commonplace entitlements, call upon your playbook to implement a new series of guest service strategies to address the changes in guest and market expectations.
- Know your people. Once you understand the expectations of your guests do you have the right people in place to deliver the level of service needed to meet those expectations?
- Make sure you can clearly communicate your guest service expectations to your team. Great service emulates from a service orientated culture that is committed to the delivery of great service. Be prepared with on-going training and support as refreshers and to address new team members.
- Be proactive. Especially when things are going well. It’s very easy to become complacent and miss an opportunity to improve upon your 3P’s. Can you reduce wait times? Are we missing any touch points opportunities? Do we follow up when needed and is it meaningful?
- Know what your competition is doing. What do they do better, or worse, than you do for guest service?
- Identify and eliminate any obstacles to your progressive service excellence and monitor service delivery cycles. These could be operational, regulatory or physical in nature.

- Embrace change and the opportunities that it brings. Service complacency creates an opportunity for your competitors to excel.

How an organization chooses to approach guest service and the ways to enhance their guest service delivery process will differ but the end result is the same – happy, loyal guests that have developed emotional connections with you, your brand and your service.

Remember that exceptional guest service may be nothing more than a collection of differentiators in the mind of the guest and how they perceive you over your competition. These differentiators become guest expectations so make everything you do a differentiator. Make your people a differentiator. Make your physical evidence a differentiator. Make your process a differentiator. ♣

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