



Guest Service: A Thing of the Past?

by Quint Hanson

What ever happened to guest service? In today's fast-paced world it seems like a thing of the past. An antique, if you will. Guest service doesn't seem to have the importance it used to have as part of building and growing a business. Still, you hear all of the big operators, from the fast food chains and airlines, to rental car companies and retailers, talk about how important guest service is to their success. But when you venture into their world, guest service is practically non-existent.

Perhaps this is because as guests we have learned not to expect good guest service; we have gotten too accustomed to poor guest service. Or maybe the organization we work for does not consider great guest service as a priority in its business model. It could be because we don't hire the "right employees," or that once we hire them we don't train them properly and provide them with the tools necessary for them to be successful in their jobs.

Is this also what is happening in your casino operation? Is this how you explain your poor guest service? The statistics state that 90% of guests who are dissatisfied with service never return, while only 4% of dissatisfied guests complain to the company. The statistics seem to indicate that most guests are simply used to bad service and accept it as a fact of life. Great guest service, however, can be a clear point of difference and a strong advantage for a growing business.

How does the guest service in your company rate? Do you want the service to enhance the overall guest experience or do you have so much business that great guest service is not as important to your organization's success? If great guest service is something you, as an operator, want to be proud of and you believe that you can improve the guest service, then build a plan to have great guest service.

How are you currently assessing the guest service in your organization? Are you using these tools as part of that assessment:

- Guest comment cards
- Feedback from your management team
- Current revenue trends
- Current guest counts

Now that you want to improve your organization's guest service, where exactly should you start? You must identify your guests' issues with your guest service, both the positive and the negative. Elements in this process should include:

- Polling the middle management team
- Making self-addressed, prepaid comment cards available throughout your property for guests
- Utilizing "secret shopper" surveys

- Casino host feedback
- Reviewing current guest count and revenue trends
- Mailing comment cards to your players club members

The gathering of this information should take a minimum of 30 days, but should also be an ongoing process from this point forward. Once you have obtained this information, set up a team of key management members to assist in analyzing it and to develop an action plan process. Set up a system to analyze the comment cards using only the cards that include guests' names and addresses. The names and addresses provide an external feedback source, so be sure to respond to them.

Your analysis of this information should identify your guests' key areas of complaint. Once these key areas have been identified, arrange meetings with the departments involved to discuss possible solutions. Agree to a plan of action to correct the deficiencies, including specific goals, timeframes and a method of measuring the action plan's success.

Also arrange company-wide meetings to discuss the goals and plans to improve guest service throughout your organization. Request input from the hourly employees, in both written and verbal formats, and provide an easily approachable vehicle for this feedback. To demonstrate progress, share the positive comments with department employees on a weekly basis.

Once you are approximately 30 days into the action plan, conduct another round of secret shopper visits directed at the aforementioned areas of concern. The information these visits will collect will tell you whether or not you're on the right track and whether your guest service issues are being resolved.

Write letters to those guests who filled out comment cards asking them to return and including gift certificates. Poll your player's club members again, asking specific questions about guest service concerns. Keep holding employee meetings at 30-day intervals to discuss the progress being made. Also consider offering some type of award, such as a staff party. Beginning a guest service award program is another great method to remedy guest service problems. Give awards on a quarterly basis, with a monetary reward that will have meaning to the employee or employees that receive this distinction.

Great guest service is an ongoing program and will only be as successful as you deem it to be. If you only pay lip service to guest service, then you will have mediocre service. However, if guest service is made a priority, your organization can achieve outstanding results. ♣

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