Customer Service: Trends and Challenges

A discussion facilitated by
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Agenda

- Objectives & Background
- Summary of responses
- Insights
- Trends & Challenges
- Dilemmas & Proposed resolutions
- Reflection questions
- SLAP at CUHK
Objectives

• Provide an opportunity for exchange of views and observations on customer service (CS) as well as its trends and challenges;

• Share questions (or dilemma) in relation to CS and probably the resolutions; and

• Explore the possible differences in different countries.
• Concerning customer or guest service (CS), we often hear that:
  - To create added value, investment in our customers is crucial..., I am absolutely determined to put our customers at the heart of everything we do.
  - (~ British Airways CEO Keith Williams)
  - (http://www.eturbonews.com/print/25264; Sep 16, 2011)
Background…

• More:
  – Delight our guests every time by creating engaging experiences straight from our heart
  – Passionate about delivering exceptional guest experiences
  – Provide authentic hospitality by making a difference in the lives of the people we touch every day
  – Ensure our customers receive outstanding service and memorable experiences
Background…

- Although CS has been the business core in the hotel industry, recently, we have heard that the service quality tends to drop as the education level increases.

- It stimulates the query of the current situation of CS in the hotel industry.
• Therefore, questions are raised.

• Questions raised include:
  – What is CS now
    • How about 10 years ago
  – What is CS in the mind of senior management as well as different levels of hotel employees
  – What are the guidelines on CS
    • Any drawbacks
Background...

• Questions...
  - What are the factors associated
    • Any other considerations
  - Is CS attitude inborn or trained
  - If inborn – what is the corresponding selection
  - If trained – what training should be provided
  - Any differences in different countries
    • Is CS affected by culture
  - Trends and challenges…
Discussion with the participants

- Participants receive the questions about 2 weeks before the meeting.

- Participants are encouraged to respond to the questions raised and send their responses to the Coordinator 1 week before the meeting.

- Johnny sends his views to the Coordinator 1 week before the meeting.

- The Coordinator will consolidate all responses and provide a summary for all participants.

- Finally, let us discuss our viewpoints in the meeting.
Summary of responses

(Not disclosed)
Insights for CS
References


Insights from Evenson

• CS is the way customers are being treated.

• Providing exceptional CS is no longer an added benefit, it is a necessity.

• CS should include:
  – Displaying courtesy & respect
  – Communicating well
  – Building strong relationships
  – Handling customer skillfully
  – Satisfying upset customers
Insights from Cornell’s

• Hospitality and service are at the heart of our business.

• People can be trained, but impossible if they do not have such a push inside.

• Hospitality people are:
  – Affected by the power of past experience
  – Looking for learning-oriented relationships with colleagues, supervisors & clients
  – Looking for challenging work
  – Looking for extrinsic rewards
Cornell’s...

- Hospitality leaders require specific skills in:
  - Sense making (especially in complex environment)
  - Visioning
  - Being inventive
  - Being open & flexible
  - Listening
  - Attention to detail
  - Multinational
  - Networking
Cornell’s…

• Hospitality people have to:
  - Learn the “why” behind corporate standards
  - Prepare for culture shock especially during the first encounter with a new culture
  - Not “go local” (if that “local” is of a lower standard)
  - Understand and predict customer choices
  - Guide the guest experience
    • According to the sources of pleasure (sensory, aesthetic, achievement)
    • Providing experience before arrival
• For hospitality management:
  - Corporate culture – walk the talk
  - Turnover hurts efficiency and quality
  - Outstanding services are from the staff
  - Making the job pleasurable
  - Emphasis on staff relationship
  - Compatible guest measurement and complaint handling
  - Emphasis on service quality & consistency
  - Understanding of financial concepts (e.g. business cycle)
  - Importance of brand image to staff
• For hospitality management in relation to human capital:
  - People-focused culture
  - Flexible job design
  - Rigorous recruitment & staff procedures
  - Comprehensive T&D
  - Transparent performance evaluation
  - Competitive incentives
Trends & Challenges
Trends

• Guests
  – More international & domestic first time travelers
  – More sophisticated, more demanding
  – Young – more use of technology
  – Less respect & patience to staff
  – Belief in bargaining (even with threat)
Trends...

- Hotel
  - More competitive
  - More concern for brand standards
  - Less budget, tighter on expenses
    - Possible conflict with quality consistency
  - More use of technology
  - An industry not as preferred as before
  - High staff turnover
  - Lack of suitable staff especially in developing countries
• Staff
  - Accept staff can be trained, but impossible if they do not have such a push inside
  - More demanding for the management concerns
  - Not so capable for multi-tasking
  - Younger workforce
  - Possible gaps between generations of staff
    • Especially between managers and rank-and-file
  - Young – lack of passion & interpersonal skills
    • Seems they have no burden of making a living
  - Less role models
    • Procedures supersede
Challenges

• Though guests are becoming more demanding and difficult to understand especially for the staff from different cultures, they are so far well handled and therefore not regarded as a major challenge in the eyes of both managers and rank-and-file staff.

• However, the HR issues have become crucial to CS in Hong Kong. Most managers worry about the stability and quality of the staff will affect the provision of high standard service to the guests.

• More interesting is, senior management has a worry about the capability of the middle managers in developing their staff for CS.
Challenges...

- **Young staff**
  - Stability (experiencing high turnover)
  - Interpersonal skills
  - Lack of passion
  - Demanding more care and direction

- **Supervisors & managers**
  - Some are young and not so experienced
  - Lack of role models (with respect to corporate culture and values)
  - Lack of coaching skills (impatient to listen)
Dilemmas

There are always two sides of a story...
Dilemmas

• Demanding guest
  – A guest yells at FO asking for late checkout free of charge (he got it before).
  – FO says unable to give it to him.

• Flexible boss
  – I am flexible even I see something off track.
  – Staff feels he is working hard enough to meet the standards.

• Growth need
  – I want a learning plan from my direct supervisor.
  – I encourage young people to learn through daily practice.
Dilemmas…

• Frustrated staff
  – I felt frustrated and even depressed when my proposal got declined.
  – I felt the proposal was too subjective and excluding many critical comments.

• Looking for change
  – I want to see how other hotels operate in the first few years after graduation.
  – I disagree with job hopping behavior. I am reluctant to employ them and even unlikely to train them to handle important tasks.

• Sharing experience
  – I like to have more time to learn from others.
  – We do not have spare time for group sharing.
Proposed Resolutions

• Recruitment in advance
  – Focused more on interns – their passion & behavior

• Rotation
  – Motivate variety seekers to stay

• Reframing
  – Align with the concepts across generations

• Role model & coaching
  – Recognize role models and develop them to be coaches
Reflection Questions

~ Check how the team is ready for CS from the HR perspective
Reflection Questions

• For supervisors and managers
  - To what extent you believe your subordinates are working in accordance with company’s culture and values
  - To what extent you believe your subordinates will observe your feedbacks to their work performance
Reflection...

• For staff:
  - How long have you been working in this hotel
  - To what extent you know your immediate supervisor has a learning plan for you personally
  - To what extent you believe your immediate supervisor understand your workload and feeling at work
Reflection...

• More for staff:
  – To what extent you think the hotel has considered the manpower for your work duties
  – To what extent you consider there are sufficient role models of corporate culture and values in the hotel
Service Leadership Advancement Program (SLAP)

- Standards & Industry
- Language & Culture
- Aspiration & Career
- Psychological Competencies
SLAP - Objectives

• Develop students with the leadership mindsets and practices to meet the needs and challenges in hospitality industries

• Provide a platform for industry leaders on developing talents for hospitality industries
SLAP - Learning Areas

- Standards & Industry
  - Explore the standards or requirements in hospitality industries

- Language & Culture
  - Learn the proper use of languages; appreciate different cultures

- Aspiration & Career
  - Develop passion & mindset; provide career mentoring

- Psychological competencies
  - Explore the psychological aspects of people and learn different related skills
Q & A
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