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Keys to Success Hospitality Tip: Focus on engaging the “high-touch” side of our business by instilling passion in our people #1

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How often have we heard the expression that “Life is a journey.”?

Global authors and writers have noted that that travel is one of humankind’s most enduring symbols of freedom and ability to enjoy life. The concept of travel is inbred into the human experience, and we as hoteliers need to be proactive in how we deliver that experience to each one of our guests.

In these times of continuing uncertainty in the cycles of the slow rebuilding of global economies, oil spills, seemingly illogical stock market responses to speculative stories and more, we as hoteliers and the travel industry need to maintain the uniqueness of our services, regardless of our style or location of hotel.

Travel and tourism is the number one industry of many countries of the world and considered the largest service sector export for the United States. It is one of the largest employers, developing workers at all levels and areas of expertise. We have all heard the statistics on the millions of jobs, the billions in payroll income and the substantial contributions to governments everywhere as communities of all sizes benefit as well with significant tax revenues for federal, state, and local governments.

Today’s every day reality is one that interacts with so many people, always seemingly in a hurry to get somewhere else. Time becomes even more precious, yet we run the risk of becoming a commodity or every day common product if care is not exercised.

I became fascinated with the hospitality industry at the age of 15 at what was then a tired Vermont resort, but the appeal of the industry was magnetic because of the very special personal interaction between guest and host (innkeeper, general manager, owner or whatever the title). Even though the hotel was “a bit worn” and

travel trends were changing, there remained an excitement about actually providing a unique experience.

This is the initial article in a series that will focus in short segments about how to deliver that experience today, whether you are an independent hotel or brand affiliated. One of the clients I served was interested in this topic and for those programs I reached out for some additional insight to someone I knew from the 17 years I proudly spent as a Tennessee hotelier. Johnny Walker of Nashville has been involved in the hospitality industry his entire career. Johnny Walker Tours is probably Nashville's most experienced tour operator, dealing with various riverboat and music festival packages, guide services, reunions, group business and much more. He also has a number of hotels and brands and served at one time as the CHOICE Hotel Owners Council President. Johnny and I are long time associates in the years we overlapped, as we served together on a number of industry councils, commissions and hotel association boards. When asked, Johnny shared three goals with me that he felt were important for the program I was preparing:

1. the message that "every room rental/stay must be viewed as an experience"
2. to explore practical ways to motivate the staff that delivers hotel services
3. we must all recognize that while we are in an electronic age at the ownership and management level, the front line staff delivering the services may not be or the guests may prefer the personal touch

The program content evolved into four objectives:

1. To understand and define the Experience Economy
2. To encourage hotel general managers and their staffs to *think* about the "guest experience" and how it needs to be built into the mindset of every hotel associate for every guest.
3. To recognize the danger of becoming a "Commodity", and ways to avoid becoming ordinary
4. To provide attendees with the opportunity to interact with each other on ways to immediately address challenges at their hotels.

The program featured attendees sharing specific examples of products that are commonplace today that avoided becoming commodities and contrasting them with others that have fallen into disfavor because of a lack of delivery of quality experience.

These attendee-inspired sessions moved quickly into the hospitality/lodging world and identified the "guest experience" of today's guest in three areas:

1. breakfast
2. sleeping and
3. staff responsiveness

Discussion on clear differences between products and services were held and recognition of what we are really trying to do was the outcome. In the next blog, I will share specific examples and insights on how we might engage our associates on the “high touch “ side of hospitality.

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