

TeleGRAM



Great American Hotel Group Newsletter

Another Year Wiser

Wishing a very happy birthday to our Great American Hotel Group office and property GMs:

Mercy Breitenbach (E Hartford) - July 22

Dave Akridge - August 14th

Tom Cherundolo (Quakertown) - August 20th

Gabrielle Smith - September 24

Around the Block

Wishing a "Happy Anniversary" to our Great American Hotel Group office and property GMs:

Linda Komornik - 18 years

RJ Greene - 13 years

Welcome Aboard

Welcome to our new General Manager at the Courtyard Lake Placid. Melissa Oliver has joined the team from DelMonte Hotel Group in Rochester, NY. Her expertise in sales, revenue management and event planning, as well as strong operational focus should be an asset to this great hotel and team of professionals. Please join us in welcoming Melissa and wishing her success in her journey.

A Laugh A Day...



Spacious and comfortable.

[Tour our rooms](#)

Finding "Value" In All The Right Places

By Dave Akridge - President

Great American Hotel Group is now an approved Value Place management company. RJ Greene, Suzanne Baele and myself, recently returned from the Value Place corporate headquarters in Wichita, Kansas after spending a day in headquarters and a half day in a Value Place property.

One might ask, 'what is a Value Place'? I would highly recommend you going to valueplace.com and taking a tour of their website. In short, it is an economy, extended stay lodging accommodation concept. Stay tuned! Because some of you are going to find out first hand, as soon as we do our first Value Place property.

I originally had the opportunity to attend the Value Place conference in San Antonio. Upon returning, aside from them being the market leader in the economy, extended-stay market, I really enjoyed the people that execute all facets of this unique brand. There core values are: Affordable, Clean, Safe & Simple. The entire corporate culture is geared toward delivering these core principles. The founder of this Brand is none other than Jack DeBoer. For those of you old enough to remember, Jack pioneered extended-stay lodging with Residence Inn and Candlewood Suites.

There are some notable differences between a Value Place and a traditional hotel. They are not open 24 hours, they do not rent by the night, and they don't have a traditional hotel staffing model. They are new construction, energy efficient, exceptionally "Affordable, Clean, Safe & Simple".



... Continued on Page 2 - Value

5 Phrases That Should Never Be Used In Customer Service Business

by Steve DiGioia

"Customer Service" is a term that too frequently is used as a catch-all for the experience received or given in today's business world. But what customer service is to me, may be different from what it is to you and what you expect, or tolerate.

It's strange that I mention tolerate since that is exactly what most of us have been doing when we are on the receiving end of many service businesses. We wait in long lines because the business didn't schedule enough staff to work the cash registers. We search down aisle after aisle to find an employee so we can ask where something is or if they have a particular product in store. This has become the norm and worst of all we have been willing to accept it.

Many of those in today's workforce are not trained in the nuances of customer service, let alone in the simple, courteous and professional terms that should be used during a conversation between a customer and store employee. Our conversations have been reduced to short, cutesy phrases that may be suited for friends at a party but not in a business setting. Here are a few examples:

"No Problem" - Just say, "you're welcome".

"How Are You Guys Today" - Why has the term "guys" become the standard way to greet someone?

"You Need To..." - I'm sorry, but as a customer of any business, the only thing I "need to" do is pay for the product or service.

"Are You Finished With That?" - One of the responsibilities of a server is to "read" the guests to determine how their dining experience is going to be concerned about moving guests along.

"Let Me Get My Manager" - The better response is, "I'm sorry that I am not able to fix this issue or help with this. Please allow me to get assistance from my supervisor. He/she will be able to resolve this right away. Will that be okay?" Isn't this a much more palatable way of handling an issue that needs another person's help?

Continued from Page 1 - Value ...

We embarked on our trip with the goal of total immersion. We stayed in the Value Place - West Wichita.

Upon our return from a full day of orientation and a nice dinner, we retired to our respective suites for the day. I ventured out about 8:00 pm to get my Diet Coke for the night and found none other than Suzanne Baele sitting in the hallway. Ms. Baele occasionally does odd things and anyone that has ever traveled with her knows to expect weather delays, lost luggage, and in short, bizarre happenings. I asked Suzanne what the deal was and she indicated that she was locked out of her suite and that they were trying to reprogram her lock. This particular lock set did not have a hard e-key. We were being assisted by the Safety Attendant Emily. Emily was extremely persistent, apologetic and doing everything she could to resolve the problem. After about an hour, she called her other Safety Attendant Chris. Now we had both of them attacking the problem. Finally, after a couple of consultations with the General Manager, the door opened.

What is notable here, is that notwithstanding that this type of situation only happens to our very own Suzanne Baele, but throughout this situation, Emily and Chris did a great job of handling a difficult situation. Their customer service skills were exemplary and in typical Suzanne fashion, we had to take a picture. (Chris is on Suzanne's right and Emily is on her left.) One of the things that a successful Value Place must have is a tight team that is cross

trained. More importantly, they have to trust each other and have each other's back. Emily was on duty, but when she called Chris, who was working another job, Chris was there. The GM was waiting in the wings to come in if necessary. Their mutual goal - solve the problem!



We went for total immersion in the Value Place culture and I don't know whether to say thanks to Suzanne or something else, but we received total immersion in the Value Place experience! As most of you know, things sometimes do go wrong. The greatest opportunity you have to create customer loyalty is how you deal with adversity. Chris and Emily get it. If you ask, or even if you don't ask, Chris and Emily will tell you they "rock". We agree. (As an aside, we were not getting the special treatment... while standing in the hallway, Chris and Emily were on a first name basis with every guest that was coming or going down the hall.)

1. a. 2. d. 3. c. 4. b. 5. a. 6. b. 7. b. 8. c. 9. c. 10. b. 11. c
Spring Has Summertime Trivia Questions Answers:

Stop 'Training' And Get Your Employees 'Learning' Instead

by Renie Cavellari

Have you ever heard a parent say, "I trained my child to ride a bike this weekend?" No, you probably say, "My child learned how to ride a bike this weekend." Just as kids learn, your employees learn how to do a job or improve a skill. And learning never stops. If you don't believe me, think about what you have learned over the last six months.

Of course, some learning happens proactively while other learning happens through the mistakes we make with our customers. That is not the best learning approach because of its direct impact on profits.

Why doesn't traditional training work?

- ♦ Training is event-oriented.
- ♦ Training does not deliver a change in competency. It delivers knowledge. "Knowing" is not the same as "doing".
- ♦ Not all people are motivated to apply the knowledge on their own.

How is learning different from training?

- ♦ Learning begins with getting the employee's head in the game. Share how his or her work affects others and the guest experience.
- ♦ Learning incorporates knowledge and application.
- ♦ Learning begins by first giving knowledge to someone and then showing them how to apply that knowledge so they can demonstrate it to others.
- ♦ Just telling someone how to do something is training. Learning involves demonstration and ongoing coaching to ensure competency.
- ♦ Learning environments create higher competencies and increase employee confidence. This, in turn, creates a pride and enthusiasm in the employee for his or her work and organization.

How does a company encourage learning? Organizations that have a culture focused on "engaged learning" naturally optimize their people and get big returns. The employee keeps learning, thinking and contributing more effectively. When you have long-term employees who are not learning in new ways, you have people doing things "the good old way," known as "the same old way," which costs money and limits your business potential.

Learning is the cornerstone to constant and never-ending improvement.



In The Good Old Summertime

It's time to break out our bathing suits, open the pool and plan your summer vacation. How much do you really know about the summer season? Enjoy! (*Answers to the quiz can be found on the bottom of page 2 of this newsletter.*)

1. Summer solstice occurs on what 2 sequential days in the Northern hemisphere?
a. June 20-21 b. July 14-15 c. July 20-21 d. August 9-10
2. What is the most traditional birthstone for the month of August?
a. Diamond b. Topaz c. Pearl d. Peridot
3. What are the 3 summer signs of the Zodiac?
a. Gemini, Cancer, Leo b. Scorpio, Sagittarius and Capricorn
c. Cancer, Leo and Virgo d. Capricorn, Aquarius and Pisces
4. What US President's daughter(s) celebrate a birthday on July 4th?
a. Amy Carter b. Malia Obama c. Chelsea Clinton d. Barbara/Jenna Bush
5. According to US agricultural statistics, which 2 vegetables have more sales in the month of August than all other months combined?
a. Corn/Squash b. Turnips/Squash c. Lettuce/Tomatoes d. Beans/Corn
6. According to US agricultural statistics, which 3 fresh fruits outsell all others during the course of the summer?
a. Grapes, Blueberries, Peaches b. Peaches, Watermelon, Tomatoes
c. Tomatoes, Watermelons, Lemons d. Blackberries, Blueberries, Coconuts
7. On 8/9/1944, the US introduced this public-service mascot?
a. Woodsy Owl b. Smokey Bear c. Iron Eyes Cody d. Sanitary Sam
8. The summer's *Dog Days* are named for what?
a. Dogmat, the Babylonian God of Summer and Patron of Canines
b. Doggrirhea, an ancient Semitic Goddess of Fire
c. Sirius - the Dog Star, which rises and sets with the sun and which ancients believed added heat to the summer
d. The annual week-long event in summer when ancient Greek athletes sacrificed dogs in the hopes of being blessed with bulging muscles and the ability to pee while holding one leg up.
9. In the US, which of the following observances does NOT take place in summer?
a. National Sandwich Month b. National Ice Cream Month
c. National Barbecue Month d. National Watermelon Month
10. In the US, what is the most popular selling grilling meat throughout the summer?
a. Hamburgers b. Hot Dogs c. Chicken d. Vegan Patties
11. What vitamin can be used as an effective sun screen by either ingesting it or allowing it to diffuse in water and then applying to skin?
a. A b. D c. C d. B-6

By The Numbers *Gabrielle Smith, Corporate Controller*

Thank you all for your cooperation this past month with the migration to our new timekeeping partner Inova. I am sure you will find the payroll program easier to navigate and their team supportive.



Our hope is that everyone will participate in the direct deposit feature which will eliminate the need to issue paper checks and save the property shipping costs. We are looking into other progressive features they offer. Stay tuned! Your feedback is valuable and appreciated.

Selling the Sizzle *Linda Komornik, Corporate Director of Sales & Marketing*

What you do before and after a sales call is just as important (if not more important) than what you do during the sales call. Really? Really! Preparing for a call, and debriefing after the call will keep you on track and make sure that you are targeting the right business, at the right price, for the right timeframe.

Coaches, spies, and sales people alike, use these techniques so they get better at their job, are more prepared to meet their “opponent”, and absolutely learn from their mistakes. An ill-prepared sales person won’t have the right information at their fingertips and will in fact, probably waste the customers time by not being able to address their concerns or needs.

I have often said, typed in an email, and/or communicated in my blogs - that it is very important to do your research prior to the call. Setting up Google Alerts so you see up-to-date news about your best customers gives you fodder to open conversations, congratulate the company on successes, and anticipate their hotel needs as their business changes. For example, you read an article touting the expansion ABC Company, and hiring of new employees. “Expansion” and “hiring” are trigger words for *corporate travel, training, and recruitment*, and all of these topics usually translate into travel. Noting this on your pre-call worksheet will show the customer that you have done your homework, are invested in their company and are proactively working hard to earn their business. These topics, coupled with other strategic questions should allow you to get all the info the first time you meet with the customer, so you are prepared to send them a bid, quote a rate, or develop a program without making 2-3 phone calls/emails to get info you should have obtained during the initial call.



Just as important as the pre-call, is the post-call debrief. Reviewing your own performance on things you did well, and things you could have done better, gives you an edge the next time you go out and meet with other customers. Ideally, learning from your mistakes or omissions will make you better. Football teams watch game film; spies debrief their missions, and so should sales people. Use your post-call debrief as an opportunity to improve through self-critique. In the end, the entire hotel will benefit from this process.

The post-call debrief should include the “next steps” and action items, so that you get the job done, and the next sales call picks up where you left off. Most sales calls don’t end with a firm “yes”. That is okay as long as the call moves you forward in the process. The next steps represent the tangible outcome of the call and the most important things for you and your team to focus on and remember.

If you need examples of pre- or post- call worksheets, just let me know and I will send you examples from my library of forms or, you can consult my website at www.theroomermill.net for blogs on most topics.

Operationally Speaking Bob Weiser/Rob Greene, Regional Directors of Operations

Do you have procedures in place to cater to the special needs of guests with disabilities to help them safely exit the hotel during an emergency? When a guest with special needs checks in to the hotel, does your staff note in the log book and on the emergency reports, those guests who might need assistance if an alarm sounds? It is important that you review these notes with each GSR and maintenance, shift-to-shift so that should there be an emergency, they can contact the room to see if they need assistance.

You are in a strange place and being awoken by a loud alarm. Even those guests without impairment might take a moment or two to get themselves together when an alarm sounds. In most cases, guests first turn on lights, then look out the window, and then probably open the door to see if there is smoke and the direction it might be headed. If the alarm continues to sound, they might get dressed, grab a few personal items and proceed to the designated exit. Imagine the same situation if you are in a wheelchair or hearing impaired - everything is harder and takes longer. Frightening moments like this for guests with disabilities can be avoided when a specifically tailored evacuation procedure is in place.



Do you have TDDY kits available at the front desk? Have you checked the batteries, and/or double checked the working order of the equipment lately? Do each of your GSRs know how to use the kits and where they are stored?

In an emergency, you need to instill the confidence to guests that you will be there to assist, and to have procedures in place to ensure guest safety. This is not just a matter of courtesy, but a question of safety and security.

I Am Human, I Am A Resource Suzanne Baele, Corporate Director of Human Resources

Hiring the right person for a specific position is always tricky. Interviewing a person who "thinks" they want to do one thing when they really are not suited for that position, oftentimes become evident at the onset of the conversation. Trying to convince them that they should be interviewing for one position rather than another position takes confidence, tact and aplomb.

For example, in my experience, the best front-desk agents are able to connect with guests quickly and empathize with their needs. While training can help teach employees what to do or what to say, it won't always train them how to do it or how to say it. Hiring employees with the right personality for the front desk will help put guests at ease, and put them in contact with the kind of people that can and want to enhance their stay. But what should hotels look for in these agents?

Selecting the right candidates

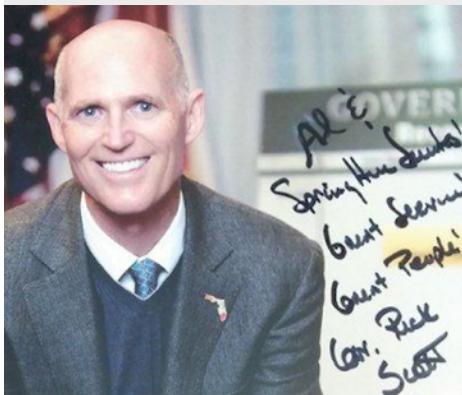


Front-desk staff should be curious by nature, have vibrant energy and show originality in solving problems. These qualities can't always be taught. There is not a formal moment in an interview where you can try to figure this out. Asking pointed questions such as, "What's a good place to eat?" or "Give me directions on how to get to the mall (or another landmark)" or "What's there to do around the hotel?" will give you great insight into the individual. Interview questions need to give the candidate an opportunity to have a conversation rather than to just answer yes or no or just give you a list of their skills. These conversations will show how comfortable they are in speaking with a guest, giving directions, making recommendations that are appropriate, and their command of professional language.

These interview techniques are also important when interviewing other potential associates. Housekeepers, maintenance staff, grounds keepers, etc. all have customer contact. The best associates are comfortable talking to people and carrying on conversations should the situation warrant. Ask a housekeeping candidate what they would do if a guest asked them about things to do in the area and see how they react. Put together a list of questions that might get a candidate to "talk" rather than "answer" questions and incorporate it into your interview format.

Roomer Has It

SPRINGHILL SUITES—Sarasota, FL
Governor Rick Scott, a recent guest at the hotel sent this very nice photo and message to the hotel and staff!



ATLANTIC HOUSE INN—York Beach, ME
The hotel GM received a really cute "cleanliness" compliment from an older guest. He said that the AHI was the most immaculate hotel in all their travels! He further explained that every time they check in some place his wife pulls everything out of the cabinets and washes all dishes, utensils, etc. She was floored when everything she found was so very clean! He said she kept looking but could not even find a dust bunny under the beds!

COURTYARD—Lake Placid, NY
A hearty "thank you" to former employee Mary Wagner (GM in Aurora, NY) who was available to help out at the Courtyard while we were waiting to onboard the new General Manager.

BE POLITE
say hello
offer to help
hold the door
SMILE
PAY A COMPLIMENT
use "please" & "thank you"



Catch Me At My Best!

For 25 years, Catch Me At My Best® has provided guests, managers and Hilton team members with the opportunity to recognize all acts of hospitality, big and small, that make hotels, properties and the brand so special. It is a way to celebrate the year-round commitment to hospitality, recognize teams for their efforts and reinforce the successful values and behaviors. The program runs from June 1 through August 31st.

When a guest, manager, or fellow teammate wants to recognize a team member, they simply fill out a Catch Me card and turn it in at the front desk. Catch-worthy acts include anything large or small that positively impacts guests, team members, the hotel or the community.

The Hampton Inn in Bennington, VT has taken the program a step further. General Manager Teresa Maynard divided the hotel into two teams (Team Friendly and Team Caring) and set up a challenge for the teams to try to get the most number of "catches". The team with the lesser amount of catches on August 31st will then have to wash the winning team's cars.

CATCH ME
*** AT MY ***
BEST.

"The goal is to motivate, instill teamwork, and make the guest happy," said Ms. Maynard. "Pride in a job well done will come as a by-product, and we think a little healthy competition is fun. Of course, there will be a celebration for everyone at the end of the summer and we will all share in the experience."



Feel the Hamptonality™

Congratulations to the team in Bennington! We look forward to seeing pictures of the car wash and hearing all the kudos from the guests.