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Empower luxury setting advocates for success

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Luxury setting advocates, or empowered employees, set the tone for guest comfort on property.

Highlights

- Employees should be put in an environment that allows them to self-actuate and flourish.
- Food and beverage lends itself easily and expectedly to areas of creativity and innovation
- Travelers expect a memorable total experience.

By Gene Ference, Ph.D
HNN columnist

Building a luxury hotel and creating luxury culture presents enormous challenges because the process is complex and dynamic. Coordinating better systems, resources, products and services is just as much about art as it is science. Successful managers of luxury properties know there is no one silver bullet to building a world-class service culture. Yet, there is an approach to building the finest organizational culture that enables employees, empowered as luxury-letting advocates, to self-actuate and flourish.

What do LSAs do? They establish conditions in which guests are provided pleasure, comfort and ease at the highest levels of quality standards, interpersonal satisfactions and personal-best service performance.

In short, they set the stage for total luxury experiences and follow through by successfully fulfilling each and every expectation of every guest, every time.

Luxury setting advocates

Following are some characteristics of LSAs.

- They use the finest possible materials and ingredients;
- provide services that hit all the right marks and at the same time do not sacrifice the LSA's warmth, personality and ability to delight;
- use innovation and creativity by carefully studying all elements in the environment from public spaces to room amenities to fine dining setups in order to make the product even better;
- maximize the combination of technical skills, creativity and interpersonal team-member awareness to carry them to the top ranks of performance;
- "walk the talk" regarding mission, core values and standards;
- demonstrate true passion for their position and for the organization;
- engage guests to the point of creating memorable connections;
- dedicate time in executive, departmental and pre-shift meetings to share and discuss stories about personalized engaging service and their success in creating memorable experiences with guests;
- look forward to participating in department meetings and robust discussions focusing on topics ranging from leadership, motivation and accountability to guest expectations and the analytics of employee and guest statistics;
- study human dynamics and how to best engage their guests and create devoted patrons;
- focus each meeting on discussing one singular performance topic;
- understand the strategic core principle that guests expect a complete quality experience from beginning to end; and
- know that especially in a stressed economy, companies have little if any room for mistakes. If there is a product defect or service hiccup, a pre-determined recovery strategy that "knocks the socks off" guests must



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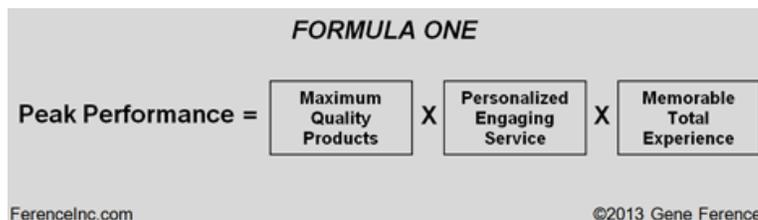
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be in place.

The formula

In today's hypercompetitive world, the trade-off between quality and service no longer exists. Rather, both elements meld together. But is that enough?

To achieve peak performance in another component, memorable-total experience needs to be factored into the formula. Please note the following equation does not simply add each element together but also considers the dynamics of each component and its multiplier effect when calculating results.



Key elements of peak performance provide employees with support infrastructure and excellence mindsets in order to perform at their best. Often employees are expected to strive for excellence but have inadequate systems, materials and tools, thus hampering them in their pursuits to achieve ultimate peak performance. Peak performance is achieved when employee and guest ratings are at 93% to 100% in satisfaction and engagement.

Maximum quality products

Ensure guests receive the best available when it comes to meeting and exceeding expectations. In achieving this, LSAs receive management's capital support and organizational infrastructure, allowing them to perform at their best.

Efficient systems, proper equipment and informative standards set the base for product performance. When not there, guests become frustrated over moments of truth where the devil is in the details: room service orders delivered late due to elevator backups; inadequate bread toasters on the buffet line causing lengthy wait lines; and evening turn-down service performed three different ways during a three-night stay. No one gets excited about products or services that meet only partial standards or simply fail.

Create and innovate

Food and beverage lends itself easily and expectedly to areas of creativity and innovation. LSAs in these departments should never be bored with, detached from or disengaged when performing in their positions.

Some employees are either not engaged or actively disengaged because they experience competency anxiety from inadequate training, are bored with daily routines, or have become company terrorists bent on sabotaging systems, products and the organizational climate.

Following are some examples of creativity and innovation for F&B.

- An executive chef features cotton-candy-on-a-stick in the dessert menu. The power of suggestion fills the room, with orders for cotton candy, and diners all sharing their childhood fantasies. Sales are through the roof!

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- Bartenders become “sommeliers,” putting together flights of wine customized to guest preferences followed by a journey of tastings and discussions all orchestrated by the bartender turned sommelier.
- A wine bar provides personal computer screens for guests to record their comments, then send their personal tasting notes to other patrons at the bar who ultimately meet together for personal exchanges.
- Culinary teams, sensitive to the increased demand for ethnic food and flavors, brainstorm menu ideas for preparing and merchandising fresh, local, farm produced foods. Buying local is here to stay.
- High-tech social media in conjunction with marketing departments inform people in the community of neighborhood events (festivals, art shows, theatrical productions) to advertise the hotel’s culinary specials and new menu items. One luxury property has grown their “social list” from a few hundred initial names to more than 7,000 in the space of six months.

Besides the quality products available, what do the above examples have in common? They promote greater social interaction and the development of new relationships. They also allow for greater product differentiation and increased sales.

Personalized engaging service

Personalized engaging service is provided by meaningfully engaging guests at their level of expectations. Engagement is creating human “touches,” connecting at the feelings level with guests and co-workers.

Guests want to know what ingredients are used in their dining experiences. They ask questions of service staff about where products are from, why foods are prepared in certain ways and what complimentary beverages to order. LSAs are proficient in explaining every item on the menu to include their historical significance. These added clarifications create interest and further opportunities to connect with the guest.

True luxury represents exclusivity and encompasses social cachet, identity and distinction. If service relationships fail to evolve, guests will be motivated to go elsewhere. At the luxury level, engagement has to culminate in an affectionate relationship where guests fall in love with the hotel.

Memorable total experience

Guests expect a memorable total experience. Travelers today are global explorers. They seek out total experiences and are quick to travel outside of their environment, physically and psychologically.

Luxury provides opportunities to serve a complete lifestyle experience. The key to luxury success is in understanding people and connecting with them. LSAs are fascinated with interactions between people. Moreover, adding interpersonal social aspects to products and services not only generates loyalty but also improves competitive advantage.

Peak performance

Peak performance provides the infrastructure that fully supports LSAs and enables them to provide personalized service at levels of perfection so that guests are delighted and form emotional attachments to the hotel.

For luxury settings, there is no sitting still. Organizations are either improving or declining. Products or services that consistently fail to improve the experience will eventually regress into the zone of mediocrity.

Luxury hotels offer maximum quality products, personalized engaging service and a memorable total experience. Multiplied together these three elements synergize into an energy force greater than their individual parts.

Dr. Gene Ference has developed Deliberate Cultures in the luxury hospitality industry since 1980. He is President of Ference Leadership & Strategy and Center for Survey Research – a global organizational development company – and is an active member of the International Society of Hospitality Consultants (ISHC).

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