

New Ball Parks, Old Innkeeping Lessons . . .

By David M. Brudney, ISHC, August 2000

**“People will spend money at or in a
place where they feel good”**

- - - Walt Disney

Last week I had my first chance to take in a baseball game at San Francisco’s new Pac Bell Park. What a terrific experience. As big a baseball fan as I am, the game itself was almost secondary.

Like many of its generation, Pac Bell is just the latest of clean, energizing, fan-friendly baseball venues that began to roll out in the mid-‘90s in Baltimore, Cleveland, Denver and Phoenix.

The biggest surprise for me was the stark contrasts with Pac Bell’s predecessor, the miserably cold, windy and raucous Candlestick, a.k.a. 3-Com Park.

“the look on the people’s faces”

The biggest difference between San Francisco’s old and new ball parks is the look on the people’s faces. Candlestick had sour-faced fans. Pac Bell has happy-faced fans. An amazing attitudinal change.

There was no reason to go to Candlestick Point unless you were taking in a Giants baseball or 49ers football game. The location and weather were horrible, rest rooms were too small and too few and the few true baseball enthusiasts who showed up were all too-often subjected to a bad team on the field and a horde of foul-mouthed, beer-guzzling rowdies throughout the stands.

Pac Bell has changed all of that. The location is downtown. The

surrounding area is a haven for trendy restaurants, delis and pubs. Inside, the wind is not a factor. Seats are closer to the field. Fans can choose from a wide range of food outlets, large, well-situated rest rooms and, best of all, there's lots of room to walk around the park and stop - - even stand - - to watch the game from a different direction or just gaze out on the spectacular view of San Francisco Bay. There's even a miniature field for kids to play ball and be video taped.

“feel better about who they are, what they're doing and where they are”

Most strikingly, however, are the smiles on everyone's face, especially the park employees. The fans are dressed better, laugh more and spend more. I think everyone - - fans, staff and players - - all feel better about who they are, what they're doing and where they are. I know for sure that I did.

I couldn't help but ponder what lessons many of my limited service hotel franchisee clients could learn from my Pac Bell experience. Here are just a few that came to me:

Do employees feel good about where they work?

Do employees take pride in what they do and what they wear?

Is guest greeting, eye contact and recognition an event or a habit?

Is staff aware of and sensitive to guest needs, desires and interests?

Is staff trained to take ownership of potential problems?

Is everything being done to enhance the breakfast function?

Is the hotel technology-friendly in view of emerging business traveler needs?

Do guests feel good about staying in the hotel?

Is everything possible being done to insure guest convenience, comfort and safety?

Are guests made aware seamlessly of neighborhood, value-priced, food and beverage options? Recreation and entertainment venues?

Are pricing structure and service levels appropriate?

“if people don’t want to come to the ball park, how are you going to stop them?”

. . . Yogi Berra

What can we learn from these new generation ball parks? Surely, we can’t all build privately financed \$330 million Pac Bells and we can’t all be located in a city as popular as San Francisco. But we would all do well - - limited and full-service - - by applying some of the same fundamental elements: giving the customers more of what they want and delivering the right kind of experience.

Have guests stopped coming to your ball park? Maybe it’s time to ask have you created the right environment for your guests to enjoy their experience so much so that they can’t wait to come back - - and tell others what they’re missing?

Is your property more like a Candlestick Park or a Pac Bell? Take your pick. Just remember, today’s hotel guests are pretty picky, too!

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