
More Theater, Less Zombies

By David M. Brudney, ISHC, December 2000

My last article ([“It’s The Experience, Stupid!”](#)) addressed the absence of memorable experiences in too many of the limited service hotels I visit regularly.

I think limited service hotels can do better!

My “experiences” of late have been nothing to write home about. I don’t know about you but I’m getting awfully tired of visiting limited service hotel after limited service hotel - - north, south, east, west, no matter - - where I find the hotels clean as a whistle, all the facilities in place but staffs that appear zombie-like.

I know, I know, I hear my colleagues and some of my clients saying: “it’s only limited service, David, it’s not full service and it’s not luxury or deluxe service, so, David, you have to deal with it.” Well, I don’t want to deal with it! There, I said it! I think limited service hotels can do better!

I read about the crisis in the work force, we don’t pay enough and how difficult it is to attract and retain good employees. Does anyone seriously believe we’d have significantly better employees if we paid \$2 or \$3 more an hour?

We’re in a very personal business

We’re in the hospitality business. Our front line employees are not cashiers at Best Buy. We’re not robotic-looking ticket takers at the AMC complexes. We’re not librarians checking out books. We’re in a very personal business. Our customers are guests who actually sleep in our work homes and wake up and come downstairs and have coffee and a continental breakfast with us. What terrific opportunities for

connecting with guests, for developing long term relationships, repeat business and future referrals (if we do it right)!

I don't think it's the pay. I think it's the environment we've created and the reluctance on the part of owners, operators and franchisees to become bolder and more creative. I think the employees I described in last month's column are enjoying their jobs because they have been allowed to become creative - - the chef at Benihana, the singing waiter at Papadakis and the salmon salesman at Pike's Place Fish.

Are your employees having fun at their jobs?

Mr. and Mrs. limited service hotel owner and operator: how many of your employees are having fun at their jobs?

Here's some ideas to consider:

- Start thinking creatively. Remember, it was nearly 50 years ago Disney turned staff members into cast members;
- Turn your front desk and breakfast function into performance stages;
- Be proactive with every guest at check in. Become involved. Initiate dialogue. Offer a great cup of complimentary coffee, bottled water or a juicy looking apple. Recommend dining and entertainment venues with great personal testimony. Connect, connect, connect;
- Hire a senior grandmother part time to oversee the breakfast function and work the room; put an apron on her with a big name tag that reads "Mom."
- Implement a themed manager's reception for Wednesday nights; costumes are "in!"
- Rewards for cast members who acquire 25 guest names and addresses;
- More rewards for cast members who sell guest certificates and get referrals.

Don't fall victim to taking a pass on this advice due to fear of projected costs incurred. Many of you can ill afford not to incur additional costs. And avoid the old innkeepers' saw of "we just can't find the right people" to perform such tasks. Maybe you've been looking in the wrong places? You may already have actors working for you now. Let them perform! There's plenty more out there everywhere, in desperate

need for audiences and stages. Less than 5 percent of all Screen Actor Guild members work regularly! Many find work where they can, restaurants, driving cabs, valet parking. And don't forget part time seniors!

While looking at trees, are we not failing to see the forest? The main focus for innkeepers always has been, is now and always will be the enhancement of the guest experience. Forget that point and it really doesn't matter about RevPar, penetration and bottom line improvement. You'll become just another shirt in that sea of gray flannel.

Owners and franchisees: it is your responsibility to create an environment in which bold and creative leadership can flourish.

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