

SERVICE POWER:

Tweak your customer or tweak your system?

By Ron Kaufman

The Disneyland Hotel recently tarnished Mickey's reputation with an influential customer from Seattle. Mark S. stayed at a hotel inside the park with his family for three days. He attended a legal seminar while his family enjoyed Disney rides, ate Disney meals and spent Disney plenty. His seminar ended at noon on the third day, but hotel checkout was 11:00 am.

On the second night Mark asked for a "late checkout" until 1:00 or 2:00 pm the following day. Staff at the Front Desk refused to give him an answer. They said it was too late and he would have to ask again at 7:00 am.

Mark was in the lobby promptly at 7:00 am. But when he asked for a short check-out extension, the Front Office Manager flatly refused. He said, "If I give you a late check out, others will want one, too."

Mark appealed for just two hours to complete his seminar and get his family with small children safely packed out of the room. The manager replied, "If you leave late, you'll mess up the schedule for our cleaners."

Ouch! So much for customer service when leaving the House of the Mouse. Too bad the Front Office Manager didn't know that last impressions are lasting impressions.

By contrast...

Raffles Hotel now has a policy of flexible check-in and check-out so guests may enjoy a full 24-hour stay, no matter what time they check in or out. Now that's convenient.

That's hospitality.

That's impeccable value and service.

"Raffles 24" is now available in all Raffles Hotels & Resorts.

No wonder they are among the fastest growing and most admired brands in the world.

Note: Implementing this policy requires more communication between hotel teams and departments. But what are your staff and systems really for? Scheduling cleaners or taking care of customers?

Key Learning Point: The purpose of your staff and systems is to serve your customers better. When customers make requests outside of normal procedures, your job is to tweak the system, not the customer.

Action Steps: When customers ask for service outside your normal procedures, you have a choice: either teach your customers to follow procedures (through advance advice and information), or adapt your procedures to please your customers (through innovation and continuous improvement).

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