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FEB 2021



DELIVERING SERVICE EXCELLENCE

A Feature Article By Mr Shaun McKeogh, Founder & President, Attractions Academy

Global growth within the attractions market has certainly seen the opening of some extremely impressive visitor experiences. Concept designs for future attractions are mouth dropping to say the least. Of course, at concept and during pre-opening planning, promises and expectations are really high in regard to the delivery of world class experiences. But for many attractions the reality of recruiting and managing 1000's of new staff as well as keeping all the parts moving the way it should be is a feat. Unfortunately for some of these new attractions and leisure facilities totally miss the mark when it comes to delivering world class service excellence.

Having worked on many world class attraction projects around the world, what would I recommend for MENA attractions as they develop and strengthen their strategic plans to deliver service excellence?

Here are my top 7 service excellence strategy tips:

1. NURTURE FOR HIGH EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Consistent surveying by research firm Gallup, make it clear that there is a **21% increase in the quality of service when there is high employee engagement present in an organization.**



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This is a valid reason to ensure that a strong Employee Engagement Plan is part and parcel of any service excellence strategic plan. When there is high employee engagement, an employee is more likely to put extra effort into their work in the form of time, thought and energy above and beyond the call of duty. From a service perspective that can make a huge impact to the quality of the work performed, the number of genuine smiles being shared with your guests, the quality of helpful and timely information to guests, and especially in the extra effort an employee will make to resolve a guest issue.

Since many MENA attractions rely on an international workforce, this puts an even greater need on the importance a quality and easy to deliver Employee Engagement Strategy. Including such areas as; attention to detail on critical factors like employee accommodation, the importance of creating community and care initiatives, employee communication processes, employment package benefits, development opportunities, community support opportunities, transport arrangements, etc. *It is important here to highlight that employee engagement is not about employee happiness, but rather, employee happiness can be one outcome of high employee engagement.*

2. CREATE A SYSTEMATIC SERVICE PLAN

When new attractions are conceived, designed and built, great time, capital and attention to detail goes into getting it right. The result throughout MENA are some truly impressive attraction facilities. But often at the same time, capital and attention to detail does not go into the process of planning to deliver the service experience through the people that deliver the product. World class attractions that get this right, ensure strategic planning takes place in regard to the quality-of-service delivery and this planning involves a process of continual improvement. Achieving the consistent delivery of service excellence happens only by design. For this reason, it is essential that a service excellence



system is designed, developed, documented, trained, coached, audited and continually improved. A service excellence system needs to detail how the organisation will achieve the delivery of service excellence consistently through its team. What are your designs for bringing a smile to the guests face? How do you communicate a strong welcome now that your employees are wearing masks? What are your detailed designs for empowering the employees



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to recover lost service? How should your employees manage a guest that refuses to follow social distancing protocol. It should all be detailed by design in your system.

3. FORM YOUR 'A TEAM'

No matter how good your policies and standard operating procedures are, your management team have a huge influence on the culture, employee satisfaction, and performance of your employees. If you do not put time and effort into forming your 'A Team', then your service delivery most likely will be 'B Class'.

Are your management team skilled and committed managers? Do they work as a team and all speak the same language? Does your management team carry out performance management following the same principals of leadership? Does your management team have a set of desired leadership behaviours established for your attraction? Are your management team, clearly communicating expectations, role modelling, coaching, reinforcing desired behaviours, and holding each other accountable for agreed service standards? Have you equipped your management team with the right training and skills to support the development of a service excellence culture throughout your organisation? Are your senior management truly present to your team, inspecting the attraction daily, encouraging and recognising employees for their service efforts? Time and effort spent forming your 'A Team' is a must for any attraction aspiring to deliver service excellence in every guest interaction, each and every day of the year.

4. RECRUIT FOR SERVICE DELIVERY

Have you hired the right people for the right job? World class attractions have recruitment strategies in place to ensure they recruit for service-focussed staff. They check that the candidate naturally smiles and is a true people person. Recruitment selectors ensure that the communication skills of short-listed candidates are well suited to the role of welcoming, informing and managing more challenging guests. The natural energy, enthusiasm and attitude to fun are also considered in candidates, to ensure they can deliver the positive presence that is required all throughout the day within our upbeat and themed attractions. Temperament testing is certainly a best practice. Recruitment sessions would normally also include some group interview techniques where candidates must demonstrate their interaction and communication skills. Don't forget to make the commitment to reference check so that every new person you invite into your team is assured to be a valuable contributor. A failure to recruit for service delivery will most certainly set your attraction up for failure as you attempt to deliver consistent service excellence delivery all throughout the attraction.

5. ATTENTION TO DETAIL IN THE TRAINING ROOM



The training room within attractions can sometimes be viewed as the 'one stop solution' to solving all customer service issues. These sentiments would be a mistake. When the visitor surveys come back and the data indicates service delivery is terrible, some attraction operators demand all the employees attend a customer service training program to get things right again. 6 weeks after the entire workforce has visited the training room, the training content has been forgotten, the motivation lost and service standards drop again.

Training on its own doesn't solve anything! Training needs to be one part of a comprehensive service excellence system solution. In a world class attraction, service training is constantly taking place and isn't a one-time appointment in the training room. World class service excellence training needs to be planned, skill based, and embedded into the policies and procedures of the operations. Service excellence training needs to be fun and memorable, engaging, practical, and developmental. Service excellence training has got to be for both team members and managers. World class attractions throughout MENA invest considerable time in introducing the service culture during quality induction programs. These invaluable programs which have a major component on service, ensure everyone leaves being able to define the guiding service principles and expectations of the business. New employees then know what the business and guests expect of them and learn skills and practical strategies to deliver on these expectations. Since MENA attractions often have a large international workforce, the need for training in English skills, local language skills, and cultural awareness training cannot be highlighted enough in their contribution to supporting the delivery of service excellence. Most importantly, what they learn in the training room, is reinforced back on the job, and managers continue the service training process through coaching, role modelling and reinforcement.

6. EQUIP YOUR TEAM WITH THE TOOLS & RESOURCES TO DELIVER SERVICE

Have you equipped your employees with the essential tools and resources for all service scenarios? World class attractions equip their employees with resources to 'Wow' their guests and equip them



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with the tools to use in an emergency. When it's needed, ensure your employees have access to service recovery resources, whether it be tickets, vouchers, products or experiences. Provide them with the training and guidelines for using these resources appropriately and empower them to '*think like a manager*' especially when it comes to service delivery. When a guest informs one of your employees that it's their birthday today, what tools and resources do they have available to them to acknowledge and celebrate that special occasion?

7. RECOGNISE DESIRED SERVICE BEHAVIOURS

Managers at world class attractions go out of their way to recognise and celebrate desired service behaviours. This shouldn't only be focused on recognising outstanding service achievements from individuals or teams but, focused on reinforcing the individual behaviours that contribute to employees delivering service excellence all throughout the day. This might include for example; the quality of the guest interactions, the way in which the conflict management strategy was used, or the high energy shown throughout the day to engage the guests. Ensure you have formal recognition programs that promote and rewards good service behaviours, so that both managers and peers can give credit where credit is due when it comes to keeping our guests smiling and coming back.

Check for your attraction that you have a focus on each of the 7 service excellence tips highlighted above, to be confident that your attraction is right on track when it comes to service excellence delivery to keep the guests smiling and the turnstiles turning for all your returning guests.

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The advice shared above is based on a high-level view of best practice when delivering service excellence at leisure and entertainment venues. It is however important that you speak with and follow the recommendations of the local authorities and regulations in the countries that you operate. Their guidelines will help you to create your own Operating Procedures, Staff Training Plan and documentation to ensure your service delivery initiatives meet the requirements of your individual country, the regulations and recommendations of your local authorities.