

## Gettin' touchy

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When engaged in international consulting marketing, it is not unusual to live in a hotel room for weeks. Life becomes routine in a hurry, especially when English is a second or third language and you are not accustomed to cultural nuances. Hotel staff become familial and the walls begin to close in. Metaphors of imaginary life behind bars start tripping through the mind and most of the dishes on the menu have been had.

Unwittingly, I have become a student of the 5<sup>th</sup> P of the marketing mix – people.

A brand's touch point is its people. It is the staff of a hotel that caters to guests and influences the overall customer experience. Generally, dining room staff is trained in the fundamentals of service. Tables are set properly, cutlery clean, staff approach at the right time to take a beverage order, present a menu and take the order. Grounds staff are uniformed or identified in a way that you know they are employees. Courtesy is the rule and that is present in abundance, along with the obligatory smile and perhaps a greeting. Bar staff is well trained in the handling of alcohol and routines are well-managed to encourage the second round. Security is present yet not obvious and willing to help with accessing services offsite. Basic training is clear all the way to room service and the people who sweep the halls. It is the little things, however, that make the experience memorable and exceptional.



Westerners tend to speak English rapidly and there are numerous accents. Even when hotel staff is well-schooled in the English language, there is often incorrect messaging when English-speaking guests speak too quickly and use slang and jargon common to the society from which they came. Polite staff nod and seem to understand what was said, but they really don't understand the detail. English-speaking guests must slow their speech, speak clearly enunciating words, and use words that although simple are not patronizing. Hotel staff who know how to help guests communicate in a friendly animated way rate high on my list.

There is a group of people that make a big difference in customer experience management and they are the bar tender and wait staff. The bartender knows how the hotel works, and the staff that stay and leave because the bartender often becomes a fixture of the establishment. Wait staff knows who the long-term guests are and what to expect when there are hotel events. Wait staff can tell you who people are if you are seeking someone and can make introductions. If their service is remarkable, like serving the right drinks quickly, bringing snacks without being prompted, and keeping the table clean, it is very hard to not recognize them and the establishment for excellent service.

The ladies (seems to be always ladies) that clean your room and bathroom daily, place fresh linens, wash floors and restock rooms with soaps, lotions and packets of coffee, tea and accessories receive little attention. Incredible! It is the cleaning staff that delivers

the most basic needs of a guest. Every day rooms are restocked, cleaned and fresh bedding prepared for a safe rest. Rarely are they recognized. Most work for minimum wage; any gratuity is appreciated and makes a difference with the level of care given to your room.

The 7 Ps of the marketing mix are vital in positioning a brand in the marketplace. In all sectors of the service industry, people determine whether a brand attracts loyal customers and repeat sales.