

How Was Your Stay? – and other stupid questions

By Kelly Watkins

If you have a policy that requires your employees to ask generic questions such as, “How was your stay?” “Did you find everything you need?” or “How was the food?” – then you should be fired immediately! That’s right. You, the leader, should be fired. Unless

Unless your employees are empowered to do something about the response. If, as a leader, you haven’t given your employees the responsibility to take care of the customer, and if you haven’t given them the proper training, tools, and resources, then creating policies is a waste of time.

In fact, you are doing more harm than good. Here is an example of why giving employees foolish wording is not in the best interest of your customers or your company’s profitability.

Awhile ago, I was in some hotel somewhere. As an international consultant, I spend a lot of time in hotels. The stay began okay. Nothing outstanding. Just an ordinary stay at an ordinary hotel. (Of course, “ordinary” is unacceptable, but that’s another story.)

Then, little problems began, and they escalated. By bed time, I was irritated. No disaster had occurred, but too many little things had gone wrong.

In the morning, I had forgotten my difficulties from the evening before. I cheerfully faced a new day and headed to the front desk to check out. I was greeted. No, that is definitely not the appropriate term. Let me try, again. The person behind the counter *spoke* to me. She asked in a flat tone, as if reading a script, “How was your stay?”

This question caused me to reflect upon my recent experiences. I began to recall all the annoyances I had previously forgotten. I sighed deeply and replied, “Well, not very good.”

While waiting for her response, I took a breath, preparing to tell her about the entire list of things that had gone wrong. Instead of the anticipated inquiry, she responded in a complete monotone (without even looking at me), “I’m sorry.”

There was a thirty second pause. Then, she handed me my paper work. “Please sign here.” She spoke not another word to me.

As a leader, do you create policies and procedures that you expect employees to follow like robots? Of course not! At least, that is not your intent.

But, how are the policies working in reality? When you institute a new policy, are you ensuring that employees understand and are implementing the procedure? Really? How?

You need to conduct some research and do a little more work to ensure success. For example, do you talk with employees about what they are doing? Are you listening to feedback, or are you focused on playing policeman to ensure they are enacting your rules? Are you asking for comments about productivity, or are you just checking to make sure staff is doing what you told them to do – “following orders, sir!”?

Is your staff required to say or do certain things without being given authority to act on customers’ responses? Remember - internal customers are just as important as external customers.

Maybe you have told your managers to tell employees they are empowered, but do they know it? Are you sure? Have you asked them?

The more layers of managers and supervisors there are between you and the front line staff, the more opportunity there is for communication break down when you share new initiatives or policies. How can you ensure that what you say is what everyone hears?

These are tough questions. Spend some time thinking about the answers, as you look around your office, restaurant, hotel, or store.

Make sure any initiative you undertake consists of more than handing your staff a required “to do” list.

True *customer* satisfaction begins and ends with employees who are given the authority to serve customers. True *employee* satisfaction comes from employees who are empowered and feel valued.

By Kelly Watkins, Thought Leader on Women’s Global Leadership – Sharing experiences from all 7 continents to improve employee effectiveness. Do you have Executive Professionalism™? Find out: www.ExecutiveProfessionalism.com

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