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HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY AND THE SERVICE CULTURE IN EUROPE

Abstract

The purpose of this article/research is to explore and analyze three most important factors that directly can affect the Culture of service in European Hospitality Industry. The paper of this study showed that relationship between the quality of education in Hospitality and Leisure, the poor recruitment and especially the lack of continuing education influence the guest's service and its quality. The findings reveal that the employee's culture of service is a critical attribute; while unsatisfactory recruitment, low education and the most critical element lack of continuing education influence negative the guest satisfaction and expectations.

Keywords guest service-culture, multicultural attitude to serve, continuing education and training, effective recruitment, guest satisfaction, authentic guest experience, impeccable and sophisticated service

JEL Classification J60, L80, L83

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INTRODUCTION

In today's global environment the hospitality industry is a notoriously difficult and more sophisticated industry: with new trends, challenges, hard practices in concurrence and fully aware of the threats of smart technology to increase business profit.

In the last years in hospitality field, I have observed a "renaissance" alongside guest's service and their satisfaction: personalized interactions and a special attention to the top-notch service for the guest.

Today the hospitality industry, with myriad categories, ranks as the largest employer in the world (after the government) offering a wide range of positions.

Especially in Europe, tourism is an important driver of economic, social and cultural development.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

A new Europe-wide study by EY (formerly Ernst & Young), shows that the hospitality sector "...plays a critical role in fighting youth unemployment" by offering jobs and growing the quality of life.

In accordance with EUROSTATMT the hospitality sector plays a meaningful role and is a major contributor to the European labor market in 32 European countries (27 European Union (EU) member states and 5 non-EU countries). It focuses on the employment patterns in the tourist accommodation sector.

According to Kent Nyström, President of HOTREC (The Trade Association for Hotels, Restaurants and Cafés in Europe) "…Hospitality is one of the most important gateways to the labor market, which is crucial in the current times of high unemployment, especially amongst young people in Europe; and can secure 10 million jobs directly employed in hospitality...".

More than one third of tourism accommodation employees have a lower level of education.

The general level of education remains lower in hospitality sector than in the whole EU27 economy. The majority of employees in hotels and restaurants have a level of education that corresponds to "lower secondary" or "upper secondary" and this group is larger than in the overall workforce of the EU27.

In many European countries the education system is not adequate enough to provide a qualified workforce in hospitality industry. The need for more qualified staff in the sector has been identified in such countries as Austria, Slovenia, Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania, Slovakia and Cyprus.

As a consequence, social partners sitting on the industrial committee for vocational training in hotels and restaurants have introduced more innovative skills to training courses: IT knowledge for all levels of employees, leadership/management skills, food and health, tourism/hospitality knowledge, and last but not least social skills such as different languages.

What's happening with the guest service culture? Why is it hot topic in hospitality industry today?

One of the most important topics for the new hospitality era is unfortunately forgotten by many employers: the need for tourism employees to learn guest service skills and the culture to serve. Training is critical to ensuring quality service and meeting these objectives (Brown et al., 2009). The need for this kind of training is serious and urgent, because the international guests have multi-cultural background: from diverse cultures, religions and ethnicities. Otherwise, they will be unsatisfied guests.

Quality guest service is an experience of feeling valued or heard. It is the most important competitive advantage of tourist business, "the key to competitiveness". And it's a critical factor for tourism success, both as a mean of satisfying ever-increasing customer expectations, and as a way to achieve business profitability (Erdly & Kesterson-Townes, 2002). In fact, service quality represents the gap the between the expected service and the actual perceived service. The high service quality includes not only the professional skills and experience. Moreover, the quality of services doesn't depend only on the brand name, location or facilities. It includes the employee's manners, attitude, behavior and professional etiquette, their respect to the guest etc. The personal relationships between employees and guests must be authentic and showing gratitude!

Many hospitality and tourism businesses spend important budgets and time just for customer service training, without visible improvement of the company's service. The answer is simple: the lack of employee's service culture and/or low service culture education.

2. HOW TO BUILD A CORRECT HOSPITALITY CULTURE OF SERVICE?

2.1. Academic Staff in Tourism and Hospitality Management

All secondary and tertiary schools for tourism and hospitality should teach students to build a multicultural intelligence, open them the real world of tourism and "form" the students for a cultural diversity of the further work environment. Is all academic staff prepared for this?

For specific courses modern academic teachers should enhance their general knowledge with historical, literary, geographical and social knowledge. The aim of hospitality education is not just

personal growth but learning and practicing the service of hospitality spirit, which is the guarantor of the guest's satisfaction.

After many years of teaching in hospitality I can say, that the main challenge of hospitality educators in the twenty-first century is to provide a higher education system: academic curricula with more practice, a better integration between theory and practice in a specific professional courses; mandatory hotel internship that will help students to develop their hospitality experience and built their service culture.

High percentage of students of tertiary educational institution has the high expectation to work after graduation as hotel's manager or at least department's manager. Simple participation in a prescribed set of courses of theory only creates a considerable gap between what is learned and the requirements in the real world of work and the needs, so that their education can't respond to the needs in hotel, restaurant and leisure field: how to set properly the table, to make a hotel bed or how to provide an effective warm welcoming with courtesy and professionalism at F.D. Office.

A German proverb says: "Practice is what makes a master".

In hospitality education programs, we have to teach the ideas of ethical values and principles of respect for all guests, to care and to serve them. How many of the instructors try to enhance the "self-know" of the students; their tools and educational techniques?

2.2. Continuing education and training of employees

Service culture focused training as "a planned process to modify attitude knowledge or skill behavior through learning experience to achieve effective performance with the purpose to satisfy the current and future manpower needs of the organization".

Education and continuing professional development of the employees in hospitality industry: how to improve the work performance, to inform them the last rules and procedures, new techniques and trends, new behavioral and knowledgeable skills.

A major percentage of European hospitality workers are foreigners. Thousands of jobs in European tourism industry are filled with such persons. And there a big problem occurs: they don't know the language of the host country. Foreign employees in hospitality should learn the host country language for the following reasons:

1. For all employees who work at front-of-the house: for the guests they represent the hosting country, are messengers of the host holiday location, host culture and attractiveness.

2. Technically they can do their job only speaking in English (if they have the minimum knowledge of English language). But they are not able to communicate and to interact with other team members, what results in a lower quality of job productivity.

3. Enforcing local tourists to speak other language, for instance English, because foreign employees can`t speak the native language of host country. Dealing with a foreign language can be confusing, not comfortable and the guests do not always receive the quality service they were expecting.

Learning the language of the host country as quickly as possible is absolutely essential for progressing in jobs, offering great service and making friends.

Seminars especially for the new employees: a consistent and adequate training before they start their work. Nowadays, providing regularly training to all staff is one of the best ways to stay on the top for success in this very competitive leisure and hospitality industry. Even if a training seminar is free of charge, some employers/managers may find it too expensive in terms of time, location, working shifts etc. Some hotel managers demotivate the personnel, they are not interested in employees` new skills and/ or advancing their careers. However, less educated workers still receive lower salaries, but at the same time they don't possess the adequate knowledge and practices for a high quality of service and competitive service culture.

Good hospitality employees should understand that they have the crucial role in relationships

with the guests. In a high competitive environment well-trained employee should be:

Professional in order to represent not only the department, but the whole reputation of the company.

Host in order to provide the spirit of hospitality through the unique experience: the power of the first impression.

Public Relation person in order to promote the company, to share general information about the country (traditions, food, attractions, festivals etc.).

Effective communicator in order to impress the guest: speak less and listen more, show empathy, build trust among all employees. "The most important thing in communication is hearing what wasn't said".

Committed in order to ensure guests satisfaction and to do whatever it takes to keep guests happy and also create respectful business.

Serve the guests with love and respect. The employees of today can be the leaders of tomorrow. In all hospitality departments and positions, to be successful it is necessary to "know what you are doing; love what you are doing and believe in what you are doing" (Will Rogers).

2.3. The right recruitment

Effective recruitment, which uses new strategies and tactics, helps to find the right staff in hospitality industry.

Unfortunately, nowadays many recruitment agencies don't care about one but the most important thing: characters of the interviewers.

The real problem is that many of human resources offices/agencies can't provide appropriate services to tourist and/or hospitality companies, because they don't have any idea of what is happening in practice. The job of such agencies nowadays - to find the right people in the right jobs, and not hiring disaster – looks very simple (lack of follow-through on the part of HR, no follow-up, to ignore a candidate after interview, or just to decide that the candidate is "over-qualified").

The HR recruiters should take into account that the real value of a hotel, restaurant or other business in tourism and leisure come from the ladies and gentlemen, who bring the organization to life and success. "10 percent is the platform, but the rest is people" (Simon Cooper, Chief operating officer and President of the Ritz-Carlton Hotel Co. L.L.C.).

They have a fix set of ideas and stereotypes of how to recruit personnel for this field. And their practices in selecting and recruitment must demonstrate more dignity, respect and fairness for all persons, because "labor should not be treated simply as variable costs, but as human capital".

When HR recruiters receive a new order the core of their job is just to fill the new position. Horst Schulze wrote: "Don't hire people to fill a position, select people to fulfill a dream and to serve a purpose".

CONCLUSION

Nowadays, the aim of great service culture in hospitality industry isn`t just to satisfy the guest, but to create a unique, unforgettable, authentic experience with impeccable and sophisticated style of service. All of us have to take the responsibility to put into practice the highest standards of guest's service and to improve the culture of service. For all employees in hospitality and leisure business (front- and back-of-the-house employees, at all managerial levels, from the gardener to taxi driver, from the hostess to the seller in the souvenir shop, from hotel representative to rent a car agent, new and old employees; guest or local employees) the cornerstone of their work is to create the unforgettable holiday experience. It`s often very hard to provide the best quality of services, but at the end of the day, it's about our guests, because they "are the leaders, we are the servants". Through the power of work in our hands is the key of success. The service guest is to be focused on our guests: it is the heart of hospitality!

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