



Make a Difference With Service

Many Hotel Features Can Be Copied, but a Real Human Connection Is Harder To Imitate

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As you walk into an Apple store, you are greeted by a friendly team member ready to log you into the queue with their iPad. When checking out at Trader Joe's, a bell rings signaling when there's a line and a new register with a happy crew member magically opens to ease the wait. And at an Ace Hardware store, you'll get what you need quickly because employees are walking the aisles looking to help customers.

These brands stand out for a reason. Their deeply embedded service approach, which reflects their brand values, makes their customer's lives easier. Is your hotel delivering service interactions that make a difference in people's lives? If not, you might be getting lost in the sea of choices.

Hotel leaders often invest time and money trying to differentiate their brands through design, amenities and messaging — and then deliver unremarkable service. Many hotel features can be copied, but the special ways in which your team interacts with and creates a human connection with your guests are much more difficult to imitate.



When your service culture makes customers feel engaged, important and cared for, that elevates your brand. If service experiences are disjointed, inconsistent or not representative of what they know and love about your brand, it can do harm.



Why Service Culture Is So Important — and Who’s Getting It Right

ISHC Global Insights is a partnership of Hotel News Now and the **International Society of Hospitality Consultants** to bring in-depth analysis to the hotel industry.

Whether your hotel has five employees or 5,000 — whether you’re a luxury brand with a high guest-to-employee ratio or an economy brand with a few employees who do it all — your service culture makes a difference.

Providing good service will help get people through your door. However, providing special, memorable service will get people to return and share their experience with others.

Hampton created a word for how their values translate into excellent service. “Hamptonality” represents a commitment to going the extra mile, being friendly, authentic, thoughtful and caring. They look to hire candidates who can provide “excellent guest service consistent with the property’s service standards, culture and brand attributes.” I experienced it firsthand when I was lost, frazzled and stopped at a Hampton for directions. Even though I hadn’t stayed the night, I was warmly welcomed, even offered breakfast to take with me as I went on my way.

The company has historically used regular team huddles to focus on service and emphasizes service through communication channels and training tools such as online courses and “learning maps.”

The Ritz-Carlton Gold Standards are another service culture hallmark in the industry. With a focus on “Ladies and Gentlemen Serving Ladies and Gentlemen,” team members greet guests by name and strive to immediately resolve guest problems. The service culture is reinforced at daily meetings and staff embodiment of that culture is acknowledged in quarterly awards.

The Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas has a playful, intriguing brand that delivers service with a wink and encourages “thoughtful, genuine conversation and polished yet authentic encounters.” Employees are called CoStars as they “stand alongside The Cosmopolitan and behind our guests in a critical supporting role, one that’s redefining luxury.” In 2022, the Cosmopolitan awarded every one of its CoStars a \$5,000 bonus for their work during the pandemic for “maintaining a youthful, exuberant brand.”

Just like these standout examples, your service culture can put your business ahead of the competition. Let’s talk about how to do that.

Building Your Service Culture

Here are five best practices for developing a strong and memorable service culture:

1. **Walk the Talk of Your Brand** — Identify and codify how [your brand positioning and promise](#) translate to the service your hotel staff delivers every day.
2. **Build the Dream Team** — Find people from the top down who will serve, treat, respond to and speak with your guests in ways that represent your values.
3. **Show Them How It's Done** — Provide immersive training that demonstrates how your service culture might be carried out across every role, from front of the house to heart of the house.
4. **Repeat, Reinforce, Repeat** — Constantly practice and reinforce your service culture expectations using an omni-channel approach with daily stand-up meetings, signage, strategically placed interactive screens and prominent messaging in spaces where employees gather.
5. **Reward Good Behavior** — When employees represent your service culture well, acknowledge it and reward them, whether in an informal conversation or recognizing them in a more public forum, such as a team meeting or awards banquet.

Why should a guest choose your brand? Think about what you deliver that is different from competitors. It's not just about better amenities, design or location. Your unique service culture can be the key to connecting with guests at a deeper level — putting your brand ahead of the rest. *Karen McSteen is principal of consulting firm brandMatters and a member of the International Society of Hotel Consultants.*