



Article Title

Sales skills in the hospitality industry

Citation

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Abstract

The study examines important skills that are necessary for employees to be better in sales. Presentation of the results of these surveys is preceded by commentary from the literature and from selected hotel sales executives regarding the unique nature of sales in the hospitality industry.

Methods

Two surveys were conducted with the intention of increasing insight into the nature of sales in today's hospitality industry. One hundred U.S. hotel sales and marketing managers were surveyed about attitudes within the hotel sales community regarding training, salesmanship, qualities of effective salespeople, and related issues. Also, the training directors of fifteen hotel companies were interviewed concerning their training programs for entry-level salespeople.

Results

Of the 43 responding, 100% felt that communication skills and product knowledge were "very important in sales training programs", nearly 10% felt that sales technique was (only) of average importance; a majority - 62.8% - felt that corporate orientation is of either average importance or no importance at all; 60% of those surveyed concluded that market research is 'very important' in sales training (see Figs. 1-6). The survey therefore emphasized the relative importance of communication skills and product knowledge in training programs, especially as compared to corporate orientation (37.2%) or market research (60.4%).

Conclusion

While certain recognized skills of selling are broadly applicable to all industries, sales and marketing executives must modify these skills to suit their particular product or service. The survey of sales and marketing executives presented emphasizes the importance of communication skills to sales performance in the hotel industry. Communication between the salesperson and prospective client is made difficult by the intangibility and variability of hotel services. Hotel salespeople cannot rely on demonstrating or testing a physical good to convince meeting planners of the value of their hotels' services. Similarly, the variability of hotel services makes it harder for the salesperson to promise any given level of performance. Despite the paramount importance of communication skills, most hotel sales training programs emphasize product knowledge; in many hotel companies trainees spend close to a year in non-sales departments to expand their knowledge of operations. Given the findings of this study, it appears that hotel sales training programs should be focused at least as much on developing communication skills.