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OPINION ARTICLE

18 March 2009

# Remember To Embrace the Essentials In Sales

## A Common Sense Approach to Success in the Hospitality Industry

Lessons from the Field | By Dr. John Hogan, CHE CHA  
MHS

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"Knowing is not enough; we  
must apply. Willing is not  
enough; we must do."

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749 -  
1832) German dramatist, novelist, poet,  
& scientist



## REMEMBER TO EMBRACE THE ESSENTIALS IN SALES

Revenue and net profits can often depend on how one of  
the most fundamental practices in sales- how incoming  
phone calls are handled.

must respond to a basic phone call or inquiry. Many smaller to medium size hotels do not have separate telephone departments, but basic courtesy and professional handling of calls can make the difference of whether your hotel will even have a chance to be considered, especially for group business or the meetings market.

In challenging economic conditions such as are in place today, hotels of many different price points and facilities are being considered. It is arguably more of a buyer's market in many locations, with lower demand than the past two years, and the need for the basics to be understood by all guest contact staff is essential.

Howard Feiertag, my co-author of LESSONS FROM THE FIELD - a COMMON SENSE APPROACH TO EFFECTIVE HOTEL SALES, has written and stated numerous times over the years that meeting planners are constantly astonished by the lack of professionalism displayed by too many hotel salespeople in the performance of their jobs. From the handling of an inquiry to the solicitation effort to the booking stage and follow-up, he feels that salespeople at every type of hotel should constantly assess their competencies and habits in order to continue to improve their performance.

From the beginning, we too often tend to put people in a bad frame of mind when incoming calls are answered tersely, unpleasantly or if the answer is so long that it comes out jumbled.

We have all heard this "greeting" slurred together in one non-stop sentence:

"GoodMorning,ThankyouforcallingtheGreenTreeInnandConferenceCenter,

*Where thegrassisalwaysgreener, thisisTodd, mayIhelpyou?*

*Oneminute, whileputtheothercalleronhold please...."*

welcome sound to a caller, and can make the caller feel welcome and at ease. Well-operated hotels frequently are reflected in the promptness by which the phone is being answered, as well as the attitude of the hotel being displayed through the manner in which the call is taken.

As a starter, people calling in may be "turned on" or "turned off" by how the phone is answered. When the caller is connected to the sales or manager's office, the same opportunity exists to either impress or annoy the caller.

How many times does the general manager's or sales department phone ring before it is answered? Once, ideally, and not more than twice, hopefully. What then is the attitude displayed by the secretary or sales person answering the phone? A positive, friendly, eager-to-help voice is often the key to a successful sale.

## Abrupt Questions Can Be A Turn-Off

If the caller has to answer too many questions before s/he speaks to the person wanted, the call (and possibly a lead or a piece of business) may be lost forever. Too often, a caller has to answer questions such as, "Who may I say is calling?" "ah, what is the name of your company?" or "What is the nature of your call?"

These can all be real annoying or offensive. If the call is for a particular person in the sales office, it should be taken immediately and without questions. Salespeople should take every call without screening. It is at times much easier getting through to the president of a large corporation than to the sales manager. When was the last time you arranged to have someone call your office as an external party? When was the last time you called your own hotel and office in the

Sales staff also should examine the number of calls they do not get right away, and how others handle those calls.

- If salespeople are out making sales calls or traveling on business, this is something the caller is able to easily accept.
- If the salesperson being called is busy with a prospective client such as showing the hotel or helping plan a conference that, too, is understandable.
- However, when a prospect or client calls and the salesperson is "in a staff meeting", the meeting should be interrupted so the salesperson can take the call.
- In fact, a good policy for salespeople to follow would be to have all in- house staff meetings before 9 a.m. or after 4:30 p.m. All other time in between needs to be available for selling.

Another area regarding the telephone is the length of time it takes to return phone calls. Some calls naturally have priority over others. This can usually be recognized by the name of the caller, the company name or the messages left. Many calls are made and messages left by what may appear to be "bothersome" callers; however, one never knows. The one call never responded to, which may have appeared to be a magazine sales representative trying to sell magazine advertising, could very well have been that person trying to setup a sales meeting for the people from the magazine,

It is helpful to prioritize telephone messages, but at the same time, good salespeople always manage to respond to phone messages within 24 hours. The sales personnel at a property need to look at themselves and the manner in which they answer the phone. Enthusiasm shows up very easily, as does the lack of it. Finally, they need to look at the sales support staff and other people in the department and how the hotel main phone line is answered.

## After all, it is OUR livelihood – all of us !

Feel free to share an idea for a column at [johnjhogan@yahoo.com](mailto:johnjhogan@yahoo.com) anytime or contact customized workshops, speaking engagements or me regarding consulting.

Autographed copies of *LESSONS FROM THE FIELD – a COMMON SENSE APPROACH TO EFFECTIVE HOTEL SALES* can be obtained from THE ROOMS CHRONICLE [www.roomschronicle.com](http://www.roomschronicle.com) and other industry sources.

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### Contact

John Dr. John Hogan CHA CMHS CHE CHO

[Send Email](#)

John Hogan is a successful hospitality executive, educator, author and consultant and is a frequent keynote speaker and seminar leader at many hospitality industry events. He is CEO and Co-Founder of [HospitalityEducators.com](http://HospitalityEducators.com) , which has more than 2000 resource pages and has become the #1 independent website for hotel owners and managers. He is also the Principal of [HoganHospitality.com](http://HoganHospitality.com) , which offers hotel expert witness services and hospitality consulting..

#### Contact us for assistance -

[John.Hogan@HospitalityEducators.com](mailto:John.Hogan@HospitalityEducators.com) **602-799-5375**  
[HoganHospitality.com](http://HoganHospitality.com) : [john@hoganhospitality.com](mailto:john@hoganhospitality.com)

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