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"Heart Failure": The Leading Cause Of Bad Reviews

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and guest surveys, it's easy to recognize a common theme across all lodging operations: "Heart failure." More specifically, I am referring to the failure to understand the true heart of hospitality, which is "caring about as well as caring for others."

When we care "for" others, we provide the minimal requirements of a positive guest stay, the foundation of which is a clean, well maintained "physical product," (the accommodation and public facilities), delivered promptly and efficiently. Yet when we care "about" others, we understand the hospitality business is truly centered on personally providing "human travel experiences," which is why it is not called "the room rental industry."

As part of our pre-training assessments for our hospitality workshop clients, I always read their surveys and/or online guest reviews. Authors of poor reviews generally start by writing about one of two themes: either shortcomings of the guest room and facilities (such as cleanliness, view, location, décor or amenities), or a lack of service efficiency (slow service, overlooked / unfulfilled requests, long lines etc...)

Alternatively, authors of the most punishing reviews tend to comment on the attitude of the staff as being the biggest issue. They typically mention that their problem began with one or more of these shortcomings, then express that their biggest disappointment was how the staff responded. Comments such as "The worst part was that no one seemed to care..." or "The receptionist at the front desk didn't even apologize..." are constant themes of poor reviews.

So what can be done to prevent negative guest experiences that cause the most stinging reviews? Certainly, it is essential for service providers to promptly resolve the actual shortcomings guests experience with the "physical product"

when possible - move the guest to an alternative view or room with a bed-type that is acceptable to them.

Yet the most important part is to prevent your staff from having "heart failure" by training them to understand the "heart of hospitality" as defined previously. Here are some training tips:

- When guests complain, what they need most is "validation," which is a uniquely human need. In this context, the best definition of the word "validation" found on Google is "Recognition or affirmation that a person or their feelings or opinions are valid or worthwhile."
- First, listen interactively and let the guest vent their frustration without interrupting.
- Then provide validation by using <u>sincere</u> statements that show empathy and understanding.
  - "I understand how you might feel…"
  - "I can imagine how that would be…"
  - "Given the situation, I can see how that would be very disappointing…"
- Provide validation <u>before</u> you apologize and before you resolve the guest's issue or complaint. Indeed, apologizing before validating their emotional distress will seem insincere and disingenuous. Simply fixing the problem will seem even more heartless.

Just fixing what is "broken" will probably bump-up a potential one-star review to a two- or three-star. However, adding validation and an apology to the equation will turn an upset guest into a potential social media promoter who says: "What went wrong was _____, but it was amazing how the staff reacted to resolve my issue."

I will now frame this concept into something all frequent travelers like me regularly experience, which is to return to

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happen when my room is far away from the elevator, when I'm late getting back to my room for a conference call, or when I'm simply very tired at the end of a long journey. Back I go to the front desk, key in hand, waiting patiently while the front desk colleague services other guests.

Finally, when it's my turn and I say "My key doesn't work," about 75% of the time the front desk colleague simply hands me a new key and replies with something like "Okay, here's a new one." This is a complete "heart failure." Another 15% of the time they add what to me sounds like an insincere apology such as "Sorry about that sir." Rarely do they provide what I need the most, even as grown-up middle age adult, which is empathy and understanding that leads to me feeling validation. "Okay, Mr. Kennedy, here's your new key and by the way I noticed that your room is at the end of the hallway. That must have made for a long walk back here. I can imagine how you might feel and I apologize for the inconvenience."

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