



OPINION ARTICLE

27 March 2007

Seven Habits of Highly Effective Hotel Sales People

By **Brenda Fields**

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For hotel staff working on Christmas morning, either behind the front desk or in the housekeeping department, a rooms sales position may look like a pretty cushy job! Sales people usually don't have to work holidays or weekends and seem to have the freedom to come and go as they please. But, in reality, a sales position bears its own challenge and responsibilities to the property. Sales has the primary responsibility to generate room revenues for the property i.e. building occupancy in low demand periods and increasing average rates in peak times.



But, in order to do this successfully, it is important that a sales person is at the top of his/her game. An effective sales person should be able to produce results despite market conditions and product drawbacks and to develop existing business by taking one meeting and turning it into four.

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It is also important to understand that “sales” is a skill, not a personality trait. Expert sales skills can produce business despite product deficiencies, rate structure, or market conditions. Since most owners and operators do not have perfect properties and supply/demand dynamics can change, it is even more critical to ensure that each sales person is highly skilled to generate business and to deal with client objections and problems effectively. A dedication to expert sales skills, thru a formal training program, is the best insurance for market share and profitability.

Although formal sales training is necessary, it is not the entire solution to ensure that each sales person is effective. This article will address some important “habits” that are demonstrated by the most effective sales people, to assist owners and managers in developing a highly effective sales department.

- Habit #1: Know your product and know your competition.

Unfortunately, it is far too common that an established sales person has never been to a competitive property. Without that first hand knowledge, it is impossible to sell effectively if a customer is shopping your property as well as your competition. The first step in effective selling is to know your property i.e. its strengths and its weakness and what it offers to its target audience. The

inspection and honest assessment will place the sales person in a position of strength in convincing a customer to book your property over the competition.

- Habit #2: Know who your customer is.

There are few products, if any, that are all things to all people. Hotels are designed and built to attract a specific segment of the market and financial projections are based on certain assumptions of rates and occupancy generated from those specific markets.

Therefore, it is important for a sales person to understand the positioning of the property and to know its target markets. Without this basic foundation, valuable time is wasted in trying to sell to a customer who will never, never use your property. For example, a budget/limited service property will not appeal to a customer looking for 24-hour room service and Frette linens on the beds. And conversely, a customer looking strictly for the lowest rate, does not care about deluxe amenities and original artwork in the lobby. Kenny Rogers had it right when he sang the song, The Gambler, "Know when to hold 'um. Know when to fold 'um. And know when to walk away.....". If you know who your property was designed for, you won't have to gamble on finding the right fit with every customer.

- Habit #3: Listen to your customers. Understand their needs.

Having the first two habits in place will allow a sales person to fully address a customer's needs. Even if your property has the greatest swimming pool in the United States, it is important to let the customer tell you if that is a need of his or hers. Asking questions will help you understand what is important to your potential customers and will help you understand the level of

closing the business. For example, if close proximity to the airport is the most important need for a company bringing in international meeting attendees and your hotel is the closest, that will help keep negotiations focused if the client comes back to you with lower quotes from the competition which is located much further away. Taking the time to fully uncover needs and to understand the level of their importance will allow the sales person to keep the customer focused on those stated needs. If the property cannot fulfill the customer's primary needs, then the sales person can just gracefully move on.

- Habit #4: Balance good customer relations with fiscal responsibility to the owner.

Sales people tend to be attracted to "sales" because of their strong social or interpersonal needs. They like people, enjoy pleasing people and like to be liked. Therefore, sometimes a sales person is more committed to pleasing the customer at the owner's expense. But an effective sales person is able to leverage his/her good customer relations with their financial responsibilities at the property. The customer has respect and confidence in a sales person who understands the customer's needs, along with the property's market position, demand patterns, and is able to negotiate intelligently so that both parties are satisfied.

- Habit #5: Develop great administration skills.

Sometimes, people with strong people skills are not "detail" people. But attention to detail is tantamount to inspiring the confidence of clients. How can they expect a meeting to go well if the sales person has misspelled their names, given the incorrect title, or didn't include

names, titles, etc.). Be organized. A neat desk delivers the message that the sales person is in control and is organized, which again inspires confidence. And be responsive and consistent. Good administrative skills will always command respect.

- Habit #6: Be reliable and consistent.

Do what you say you will do. Or if circumstances prevent you from delivering on a promise, just communicate that to your client. Reliability and good communication develops trust. It is that trust that will inspire clients to book with a sales person over and over, even if the air conditioning breaks down or construction is going on across the street. Trust that the sales person has done his or her best and will honestly address every situation can inspire loyalty and help overcome any potential hard feelings if problems arise that the sales person has no control over. Return calls and send out correspondence promptly and follow up. Consistency is what constitutes reliability.

- Habit #7: Continue to grow and develop.

Business is ever changing and ever evolving because of new technology, new markets, and dynamic supply/demand factors. The consistently effective sales person understands that staying current with these issues will foster sound strategic planning. A well-founded plan allows for either new strategies or staying the course. Several suggestions for staying current are to join industry associations such as HSMAI (Hotel Sales and Marketing Association International), which offers invaluable opportunities to stay current with trends and new technologies. Read local and national newspapers. Stay current with local and national trends that impact your business. Join local community organizations. By

but a by-product is that the property he or she represents is promoted as well.

Therefore, to ensure that an owner or manager is getting the best ROI from their sales staff, formal sales training along with the implementation of these seven habits will assist owners and managers in developing and maintaining a highly effective sales department.

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About Fields and Company: Fields and Company, founded by Brenda Fields, provides in-depth analyses and cost effective sales and marketing solutions to help owners and managers achieve their revenue goals. Systems and procedures are devised and implemented to monitor results and to ensure staff accountability, resulting in success despite market conditions. We work on individual projects or provide on-going involvement and expertise on a retained basis.

Contact Brenda Fields at brenda@fieldsandcompany.net or phone 518 789 0117 in the USA, .

Contact

Brenda Fields

[Send Email](#)

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