

Hotel Online

News for the Hospitality Executive



Lessons from the Field

A Common Sense Approach to Success in the Hospitality Industry

By Dr. John Hogan, CHA MHS CHE, September 3, 2008

10 Hotel Sales Action Steps to Succeed in Today's Competitive Marketplace

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“Never let your persistence and passion turn into stubbornness and ignorance.”

Anthony J. D'Angelo, The College Blue Book

We have all heard the expressions about the need to try something different if we expect different results, as well as the message about working smarter rather than simply longer or harder.

In my career as in yours, we have all seen people unexpectedly succeed and others that we believed would be the likely winners falter.

In hotel sales, that can be especially true and I believe at least a portion of those outcomes are based on the “high touch” side of our industry. While we have the benefits today of technology that can track and measure statistics with incredible speed, the human interaction remains the fundamental core of success in hotel operations and sales.

In a recent column, I mentioned [10 mistakes to avoid](#). Here are ten action steps that should help increase the likelihood of success:

1. Take regular time to THINK and PLAN. To be effective, a sales manager needs to plan each week and day, allocating prime hours for selling, following up as needed, and measuring their activities against the marketing and sales plans. The truly great sales professionals, regardless of their title, regularly examine what they are doing, why they are doing it and how they are measuring their success. Sales is challenging and requires persistence, but it also requires quiet time to assess and re-

address. The economy plays a role, but there are always people looking for the services of a hotel like yours. Taking the time for THINKING makes the difference.

2. Listen Actively. Do not mentally prepare your response before the other person has actually delivered their message. While it is critical to be able to handle objections, respond to what your client actually is interested in or says. In this highly competitive marketplace in an uncertain economy, not listening to a potential customer is the surest way to drive them to a competitor. Whether you are a hotel sales manager or a general manager, we must remember the new multi-generational buyers and culturally diverse professionals in the market. While it targets the manager more than sales, it does provide an easy to follow structure for evaluating listening effectiveness.

3. Return phone calls within 24 hours. This one is not hard to remember, but a challenge to do. If one is taking the time to create action steps to meet the needs of the marketing plan and regularly THINKING about optimum ways to improve sales conversions, then being responsive to inquiries on the phone is a very basic way to build the likelihood of better sales. That means reviewing how messages are left in your hotel and establishing a protocol that is constantly met.

4. Position yourself as a problem solver for your clients. Between emails,, high speed internet access on our I-Phones and blackberries, webcasts and blogs, we are evolving to a point of information overload today. Technology is meant to help, and we can use it to solve problems of our clients, but this is still a people interaction business. When meeting with the potential client regardless if they are a corporate executive or a social group planning their 25th high school reunion, accurately noting the clients' needs and offering them options is crucial. Writing down what they are saying shows them you are listening, that you care and that you want to assist them. It encourages them to keep talking, which means you have an increased opportunity to match your hotel's services and features to their needs. The notes you take also can become part of the sales file and are helpful the next time you meet and are looking to book the next meeting or event.

5. Follow up punctually. Think of how many calls, emails and meetings we all face daily. A professional and courteous follow-up note keeps you in the prospect's mind and lets them know you are detail oriented. The simple follow-up that arrives a few days after your meeting can make the difference in how you are judged. It is a sign of personalized attention in an era of growing impersonal contact.

6. Keep in contact with current clients and customers. Create a system to get everyone that guest interaction to become part of this commitment. The front desk agents, the night auditor, the restaurant or breakfast servers all interact with guests regularly and can be excellent conduit points to building relationships. Sometimes incentives are the key to get staff to think about recommending your hotel and other times it is simply asking them to help themselves by offering the information about your hotel. Repeat customers are ideal, in that they do not need to be wooed each time IF they were satisfied. These people will not

become repeat customers or guests unless they feel appreciated and acknowledged.

7. Know when to ask for help. The role of hotel sales professionals is to try to serve the interests of the client and the hotel. This can be the classic win-win, if management and sales works together. The sales manager of today needs to pursue the guidelines of revenue management, space allocation, maximization of resources and attempt to meet or exceed the budgeted financial targets. If you as the person charged with sales activities and results are uncertain about one of those guidelines, it is much wiser to seek assistance. Continuous learning will provide the answers eventually, but the results will come much quicker when pride and ego are not obstacles to success.

8. Recognize the value of time – to everyone. We all feel pressed for time today, yet we in sales must still recognize there are stages in sales, include prospecting or qualifying, meeting, presenting and closing. At any given point during these stages, your objective is to complete the current stage and move on to the next at the right pace. This means active listening by following the lead of the person you are conversing with. Practice transitioning smoothly from one stage to another so that appreciation of time is recognized by all involved.

9. Maintain Professional Pride in your hotel and in your personal appearance and demeanor. Business casual may dictate that it is appropriate to forego the business attire on certain occasions, but there should never be a time when the professional appearance of the individual, the office or the hotel should be in question. First impressions remain important today – I just did a Google search on the term first impressions and the total number of links was 8,120,000. What does that tell us?

10. Constantly evaluate where you are in relation to your plans. Budgets at times seem unachievable and can be controversial, as they are often created 15-18 months out. In times of economic uncertainty, forecasts as short as 90 days out can quickly become dated. Effective sales professionals project within the hotel ownership guidelines but regularly re-assess the markets and adjust their action plans to maximize success. Communicating that strategy and action regularly to management and ownership builds credibility and positions the sales professionals as accountable and proactive.

Feel free to share an idea at johnjhogan@yahoo.com anytime or contact me regarding consulting, customized workshops or speaking engagements. 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 and other industry sources.

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John Hogan's professional experience includes over 35 years in hotel operations, food & beverage, sales & marketing, training, management development and asset management on both a single and multi-property basis. He holds a number of industry certifications and is a past recipient of the American Hotel & Lodging Association's