

By Bill Guertin

The 800-Pound Gorilla

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Intuitive Service: Tomorrow's Business Depends On It Today

I was attending an important conference in Washington, D.C., and to keep expenses down, I decided to stay for two full days and a single night. I chose the Hyatt near the convention center, and “lucked out” with a one-night conference room rate of \$239.

As I was checking in that afternoon, the Hyatt employee behind the counter was a young lady named Leah. Young, sharply dressed, and efficient, she was twice as fast as any of the others.

“I see you’re staying only one night, Mr. Guertin. Is this a company expense, or are you paying for this yourself?” she asked.

I was surprised at the question. “Yes, it is my own personal expense. Why do you ask?”

“Well, right now I’m showing that we have one of our Hospitality Rooms available. It’s quite large, but instead of a bed, it has a very comfortable pull-out couch. I can offer you that room for half of your quoted room rate, if you’d like.”

Half-price? I quickly did the math in my head. I’ll save \$120? In Washington, D.C.? During a convention?

“That would be great! Please sign me up,” I said, smiling.

As she typed in the change to my reservation, I asked her if she had been specially trained to look for clues to help people that were paying out of their own pocket.

“Yes and no,” she smiled. “I’ve been doing this for a while, so I know what to look for. Hyatt encourages us to do what we can to improve our service in a memorable way. This is just one that I use when I see an opportunity.”

The hospitality room was massive. It’s used primarily for hosting dinner parties and after-hours cocktail parties, complete with a dinette, wet bar, and several couches and easy chairs. The bellman showed me which of the couches pulled out into a bed, and it was easy to operate. Far from uncomfortable, it may have been the most restful night’s sleep I’ve ever had in a hotel.

I felt like a Middle East oil sultan. And all for only \$119.50. Cha-CHING!

Leah was demonstrating something I call “intuitive service.” Yes, she may have been trained to look for certain things, but Leah took it one step further. She intuitively saw a chance to delight me with an opportunity that I would never have asked for on my own.

It's the waitress that knows her good customers by heart, and suggests things she knows they'll like. It's the dry cleaner who knows how much shirt starch to suggest to a customer based on his experience. It's the nurse who knows just what to say or do for the patient and the family to help them all feel a little bit better.

What do people want to save most?

- Time - What can you do for someone that will help them save time? If you're an auto mechanic, can you juggle the schedule so that Mom can pick up the kids from school and get her oil changed? Can you deliver an item for a customer? Send a fax or an E-mail instead of snail mail? What else can you suggest that will help them feel special and get them on their way more quickly?
- Money - What do you know about your available products and services that can help someone save money? If you're a bank teller, is your 6-month CD a good place to put some money right now? Can you save someone on a length of pipe if they buy a certain quantity? Will something be on sale tomorrow that you can inform a customer about today? How can you make your customers feel like an "insider"?
- Trouble - Can you save someone from returning two or three times by asking questions that will help the customer choose the right item the first time? (One of the best questions I've found to do this in a friendly way is, "Sure, we have one of those. May I ask what will you be using it for?")

To be an intuitive service provider, you need to know three things very well:

- Your own products and services,
- Your customers' wants and needs at that moment, and
- What combination of the two is best for them.

You also need to listen closely and be observant. Do your people know what to look for like Leah does?

Managers, here's a suggestion for your next staff meeting. Ask everyone on your team this question: How do we save people time, money, and trouble every day? Let everyone answer, and let the newer people learn from your veterans. You will quickly find out who your intuitive service providers are... and you'll learn that they're not always the people who have been there the longest.

Every time I have a choice of hotels in major cities, I will choose Hyatt because of Leah in Washington, D.C. Here's the question for you and your staff: How many prospects will choose you tomorrow because of the service you'll render today?

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