

100 DAYS

To fight the recession

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Do It »

Make a good final impression



By John Ely

HWN CONTRIBUTOR

Your last interaction with the customer is your last opportunity to demonstrate your concern for the guest and your overall character. In the days of in-room or automated check-out processes, the face-to-face interaction should be viewed as a rare occasion and a chance to build guest loyalty.

I arrived at my destination feeling energetic and ready to take on a week of conferences, meetings, social activities and all the other trappings of a tradeshow. I barely remember checking into my hotel other than the thought that, "this place must be haunted!" It was an old resort (built in 1914) and looked very similar to the Stanley Hotel of "The Shining" fame. I got to the room with no problems and began preparing to talk and walk a lot.

By the end of the week, after all the talking and walking, that energetic guy who arrived just days earlier was now feeling tattered and worn out from all the activity. Anyone reading this who has ever worked even a one-day tradeshow knows exactly how I felt, and this was a four-day event! I dragged myself to the front desk to check out and the same friendly faces that greeted me on Monday were now there on Friday. But for some reason, I noticed them more. It was probably

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Cut It »

Use technology to cut labor costs

The continuing economic downturn has forced many hotel executives to give renewed attention to their hotel operations. A few, however, didn't wait for the recession to focus on labor costs.

At the 353-room San Jose Hilton, executives determined last spring that their labor expenses were higher than those of similar hotels.

The midscale hotel is one of six properties operated by DiNapoli Capital Partners of San Jose, Calif. Chuck Bond, the company's CFO, had months earlier achieved dramatic payroll savings at another DiNapoli property, the Hyatt Regency San Francisco. After installing a new labor management system designed by Heath and Co. of Roswell, Ga., the 802-room hotel achieved immediate payroll savings. Bond hoped to repeat the results in San Jose.

Though the San Jose Hilton looked fresh thanks to a recent \$11-million renovation to guestrooms and public spaces, the hotel's managers were using out-of-date technology. Notably, its automated payroll system lacked the ability to analyze data, says Scott Fischbein, the hotel's controller.

Like many hotels, the staff schedule tended to remain fixed, to grow larger over time and to respond inadequately to changes in business volume.

"We knew we had a payroll issue, that it was high," Bond says. "The tough part is, without this system, it is really hard to monitor if you are cutting in the right place. You could cut the wrong positions,"

he says.

"This was a great opportunity for us to review those service standards and reestablish new ones," Fischbein says. With new standards in place, the hotel operators could, for example, correctly match a given number of room nights with the standard number of front desk clerks or bellmen.

"We had situations where 'Jonathan' is always working Monday through Friday, but a big group is coming in on Saturday," Bond says. "Now he's working overtime. So, instead of scheduling according to business demands, we were often scheduling for fixed schedules. The business demands were forcing us to pay overtime."

The multi-module software system automates many functions and sets up tools for budgeting, forecasting and scheduling employees according to business volume, not the clock.

The return on investment was significant and immediate. Shortly after installation, payroll savings covered the cost of the system. Compared to the labor costs of the previous year, the hotel is now saving more than \$1 million a year in payroll and benefits.

The system also helped executives create complex schedules that could match employee preferences and seniority.

"You can set templates," Fischbein says. "So we were able to effectively adhere to union guidelines on staffing."

Source: Heath And Co., www.heathandco.com

Click It »

The first rule of Fight Club...

There's only one place for hoteliers, designers and everyone involved in the lodging industry to meet to discuss their concerns related to the recession: The "Fight Club" forum.

Visit www.HotelWorldNetwork.com/forums and click on the "100 Days to Fight the Recession" forum heading. Ask questions, offer tips, vent your frustrations or share good news and resources. This is one fight club everyone will be talking about.

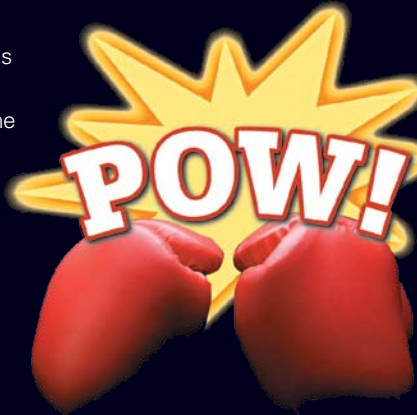


Create It »»

High Peaks Resort: PROMOTION OF THE WEEK

Okay, so this “100 Days” spirit is rubbing off ... almost. Lake Placid’s **High Peaks Resort**, in the heart of New York’s Adirondacks, is making this the Summer to Remember with a special value-packed promotion available exclusively through its social media channels. From now through Sept. 21 (101 days), the resort is remembering the 101 members of the Lake Placid Hall of Fame—the teams and individuals who contributed to the area’s rich history—by offering guests a chance to experience unbeatable values and create their own lifetime memories.

Each day, the resort will feature one of the 101 members of the Lake Placid Hall of Fame on its Twitter and Facebook pages and offer friends, fans and followers a room rate that will deduct up to \$101 off the regular rate.



For example, on day one of the promotion, for one hour and one minute (1:01), High Peaks will feature No. 101 of the Lake Placid Hall of Fame on Twitter and Facebook, and at the same time deduct \$101 from their regular rate for all online reservations made within that 1:01. On Day Two, for 1 hour and 1 minute (1:01), High Peaks will feature No. 100 of the Lake Placid Hall of Fame on Twitter and Facebook and at the same time deduct \$100 from their regular rate for all reservations made within that 1:01.

The Summer to Remember rate will only appear on www.highpeaksresort.com for 1 hour and 1 minute (1:01) between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. each day.

For updated information on promotional packages at hotels, visit www.hotelworldnetwork.com/listing/promotions.

Continued »»

because I really needed a friendly face at the end of my week, more so than at the beginning.

The valet brought my car around and the bell attendant helped load the luggage—all thanking me for staying with them. It’s funny how just a few days at a place can give you a sense of family and familiarity, at least at the well-trained establishments.

I drove in with no real expectations or preconceived notions about the hotel (other than the haunted thing), but drove away thinking this was one of the more charming places I’ve been in a while. I attribute much of my departing attitude to the wonderful check-out experience. While some check-outs have been simply a receipt and a quick glance to the next person in line, others have been sincere expressions of thanks and gratitude for my business. This was obviously the latter.

Why is check-out so important? This interaction with the customer is your last opportunity to demonstrate your concern for the guest and your overall character. In the days of in-room or automated check-out processes, the face-to-face interaction should be viewed as a critical point in time where an employee can help build guest loyalty.

Many of the same techniques used during check-in still apply at the end of a guest’s stay. Use the guest’s name to make the interaction more personal. If you are really good, comment on the guest’s reason for visiting. For example, “How was your tradeshow, Mr. Ely?” By analyzing the response, you will be better able to gauge the guest’s emotional state. In my case, the front-desk agent could easily see my energy was drained. Therefore, her efficiency and helpfulness was greatly appreciated, especially her call to the bell attendant who helped me with my luggage.

So many times I’ve felt staff were merely trying to “make room” for the next guests during the check-out process. It’s important to create a positive and memorable last impression in order to keep guests coming back to your hotel. There is no better way to say goodbye to a guest than to let them know you truly enjoyed their company and were happy they stayed with you.

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