

Industry interactions

In this section we feature conversations with professionals from the industry highlighting their views on customer service.



Vikram Cotah is currently the Senior Vice President of the Radisson Blu Hotel GRT Chennai and the Radisson Blu Resort Temple Bay Mamallapuram. He uses his 25 years of experience in - and passion for - hospitality operations and marketing to help senior managers in large organizations succeed by motivating and engaging them to realize their potential.



Q. Technology has consistently been replacing processes and expectations across industries. Do you believe it has affected or replaced the personal touch in customer service?

A. Nothing can be truer than the first part of the statement. The major trend currently in the hospitality industry is globalization and hotels need to embrace technology to keep pace. I don't think technology has affected or replaced the high-touch nature of hospitality. On the contrary it has supplemented service levels to a large extent. Today, guests expect their experience within a hotel to be totally personalized. This is aided by technology which creates a huge range of valuable customer preference data that is fed into hotel systems and delivers personalized, high quality service for each return visit. This is not just a case of linking the CRM system into the hotel operations - it is embedding the process of capturing guest preferences and proactively using that data.

Q. With more Indians travelling abroad, has the expectation of the Indian customer changed with exposure to hospitality across the globe?

A. Globalization is the buzzword in the hospitality industry today and the Indian traveler is more discerning than ever before. Today, an Indian traveler expects instant responses and an automatically generated reservation number for room booking on his smart phone; wants mobile hotel websites for bookings and to check facilities. Facilities like iPod docks, in-room tablet operated lighting systems / curtains and flat panel smart TVs are common in luxury hotels today and every traveler expects this as part of normal fare.

Q. Great service is expected at every touch point in the hospitality industry. In such a high touch environment, how do you differentiate from competition?

A. The first challenge is communicating that you are different. If you know your DNA and understand your brand promise but cannot articulate it: you are nothing. Having said that, gaining a competitive advantage today needs tight strategies and every level of the hotel needs to participate to win this advantage.

Q. What do you think professionals from other industries can take away from the hospitality industry with respect to customer service?

A. The Hospitality Quotient (HQ) as we call it. Every hotelier needs this skill set beside his IQ and EQ skills. HQ skill sets simply means having a hospitality bend of mind which worships guests as gods! A person with high hospitality quotient will have empathy towards people, virtues such as patience and honesty, great communication and persuasion skills, ability to be servile with dignity, pride in his job and loads of passion. The secret to great hotel service is nothing but engaging the guest emotionally with love. We even have a program in our hotels developed as a part of the culture training given to staff called 'Serve Love'.

Q. What has been your driving philosophy in all these years as a hospitality professional?

A. 'To serve is Divine' and one can do this only if you bring passion to your work and truly love what you are doing. A hotelier does not choose his profession, the profession chooses him. This profession has to be a way of life and of course needs a lot of hard work and sacrifice as it is not all glamour as it appears on the outside.



Catching them young

In this section we endeavor to understand what is being done at the breeding grounds of tomorrow's managers - B-schools - to sensitize them about customer service. We feature thoughts from the faculty at B-schools about what steps can be taken to improve the current status.

Customer Service – Industry & Education

Dr. Deepa is an Assistant Professor in Marketing and Business Communication at the Loyola Institute of Business Administration (LIBA). She is associated with the Dr. C K Prahlad Centre for Emerging India at LIBA, Loyola Institute of Business Administration is one of the leading B-Schools in Southern India.

In the present scenario customer service is 'the factor' which differentiates the different services on offer. Given that all the other factors are the same people orientation will ultimately be the only differentiating factor. So automatically the service sector is on the lookout for people who provide the 'wow' factor to the services they offer. Since recruitment is driven by this sector B-schools should look at leveraging this opportunity by sensitizing students to the delicate nuances of customer service management.



At LIBA marketing courses are offered in Consumer Behavior as well as Services Marketing and what sets apart these courses is the way in which they are handled. Along with the discussion of the core concepts, students are motivated to do live projects in the service industry which provide them with a live platform to experience the role of customer in the whole process.

During the Customer Relationship Management course the students learn to use and do projects on popular CRM software in real life situations. We also have constant interactions with the industry which helps us to revamp the curricular activities and incorporate ways and means of making our students customer sensitive in their future managerial roles. All these are further rounded off by the summer internship projects where students acquire much required hands-on learning.

To take customer sensitization of future managers beyond this level there has to be an ongoing collaboration between the industry and management institutions. Partnerships can be fostered where each course outline is charted out, integrating small hands-on projects with concerned groups of industries. There should also be the constant presence of a nodal person from those industries on campus who can coordinate these efforts. This will also enable ongoing projects in the core areas which will contribute to a much better understanding of the concepts. Another take on this will be outsourcing the execution of certain corporate social responsibilities by the companies through the campus as sponsored activities.

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