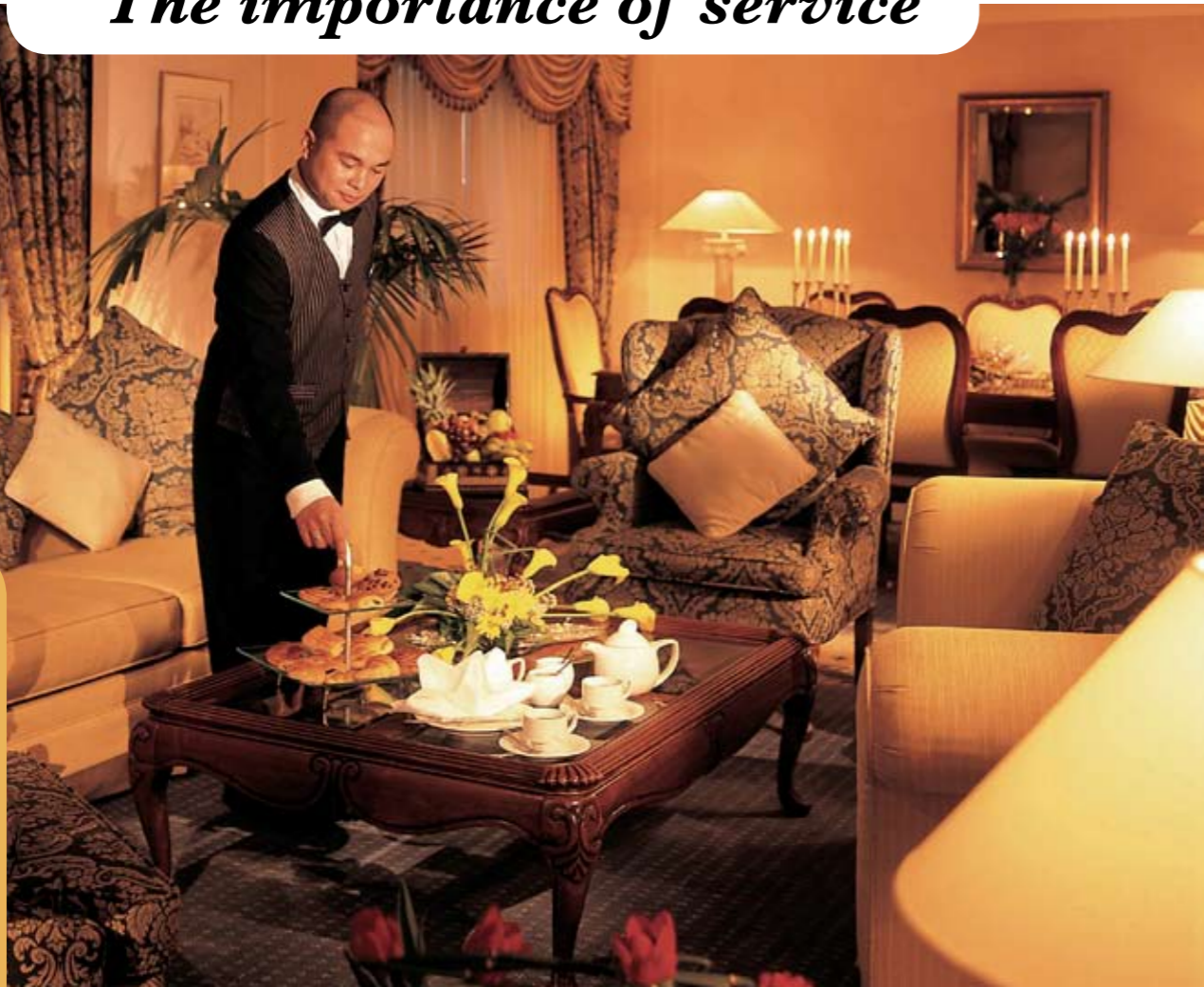


## The importance of service

Over the years there have been many different types of lodging facilities that have entered the hospitality world bringing with them many innovative service concepts. One of the most frequent service trends is to exceed guest expectations by adding attention to detail and providing special care to the experience delivered. Now more than ever, the main challenge for hoteliers is to deliver adequate interactions between the guest and the frontline employees. Finding the right talent, training staff and empowerment is on everybody's mind, especially hotel owners who rely heavily on operators to provide these services.



**Hotel operators can make a difference by investing in people – training their staff towards high standards of hospitality than just providing a service**

### The understanding of 'Service' versus 'Hospitality'

'Service' is defined as work done for others as an occupation or business. 'Hospitality' is defined as cordial and generous reception of or disposition toward guests, or an act or practice of one who is hospitable; reception and entertainment of strangers or guests without reward, or with kind and generous liberality. The synonyms are accommodation, cheer, companionship, comradeship, consideration, conviviality, cordiality, entertainment, friendliness, generosity, good fellowship, heartiness, hospitableness, obligingness, reception, sociability,

warmth, welcome. Are we working in the service industry or in hospitality?

The customer service dilemma is not just an issue for small businesses; it should also be a topic of conversation for large corporate boardrooms. The large upscale hotels think that because they dress in suits and ties, that they are providing customer service, when actually it has nothing to do with the service level offered. During the past few years, many new high-end properties came into the market and provided very similar products (typical impressive architecture with high-end finishing); but they differentiate themselves by offering this extra personal touch: 'hospitality'.

The operators can make a difference by investing in their people, and the owner must take this into consideration when selecting an operator. Having well-trained staff comes at a cost but the return on investment is much greater: additional revenue, repeat business and therefore, improved real estate value.

### Analysis of property needs

The hotel operation benefits from two main sources of training: 1) outsourcing hotel training services, 2) in-house operator training. Ideally hotel owners should rely only on the second option; however, external support has to be considered, especially in new markets with high growth in hotel supply (high turnover, employee shortage). There is no single winning or preferred formula, but the financial implications are so important that owners or operators should not hesitate to explore external support.

Hotel operators should consider two principle actions to tackle the service issues:

- Identify their service chain
- Re-structure and design their services

The primary objective is to identify the service chain, which is the cumulative guest experience: starting with reservation, greeting on arrival, front desk interaction... until the check-out. This process is an essential tool for the sales and marketing department as it enables them to accurately advertise the services and to offer consistency in delivering these services.

A thorough review is important to ensure accurate training resources and to avoid omitting some critical issues. An internal assessment should be performed by both the operations manager and the potential guest: having these two perspectives will highlight the issues in the service chain that really matter to the guest.

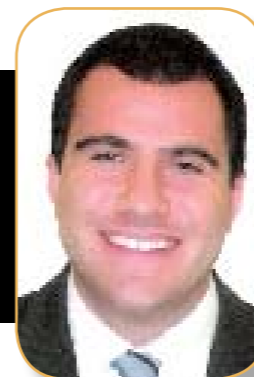
By identifying the service chain, the operators will

be able to re-structure their service strategy, identify the specific needs of each department, and adjust training appropriately. The main two objectives are to recognise the key positions and to appoint the ideal employees for each position, for instance: which employees have good direct guest contact, what are their strengths, what additional skills are required, what is the most appropriate training. A clear strategy should be defined prior to engaging costly training.

The training programs should be created and tailored to target all key revenue generating departments. The objectives will be to enhance skills, motivation, performance, brand standards and ultimately increase revenues in the various departments such as reservation, room, food & beverage, meeting and sales.

This training has a significant cost, and the return on investment must be measurable. Some third-party training companies often provide automated tracking and reporting systems, which interface to the property management system (PMS) and allow measuring the performance. Additional individual review is necessary to ensure that the training becomes a consistency way of working. This managerial support will boost the team cooperation, confidence, and will allow better employee retention.

Because training is ongoing, employees can benefit from their peers' experiences, too. Vehicles to exchange this type of information can be as informal as role-playing and round table discussions, or as structured as an employee newsletter. Incentives, acknowledgements, and rewards for excellent customer service delivery are an integral part of the training program. Successful training develops staff skills and unifies the team, which translates into profitable operations. Training is an investment in one's property that you cannot afford not to make.



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