



## Marketing Guest Service: Seven Steps to What Really Works

by Evan Mills

With over 2,700 team members at the three Gila River casinos in the Phoenix metro area, guiding our peers to embrace the importance of guest service (and then to actually deliver exceptional experiences to *every* guest *every* day) is a monumental task. But as you know, our experience isn't unique. The biggest hurdle we all typically face is making the concepts appeal to multiple generations and diverse cultural backgrounds, all with varied personal motivators for buying in - or not.

Regardless of the hurdles faced, we've found some prolonged success by utilizing the following examples, and hope that they can be adapted to reach the revenue, retention and guest service scoring objectives where you are, too.

### Discover Needs

Initially, consider taking the company's temperature by doing brief interviews with a broad sample of team members from floor representatives to executive directors by asking, "What service challenges are you facing? And, what should we do to fix it?" without fear of repercussions.

Soliciting honest opinions from multiple layers of staff is a great idea to discover what needs should be addressed, in order of importance. Of course, the first thing out of a team member's mouth is usually their greatest concern. However, discovering trends should be just as important so be sure to dig a little deeper past their main criticism.

The results will be surprising for two reasons: 1) team members are always closer to the solution than we are so the feedback will be refreshingly insightful, and 2) management can build a bridge by placing more value on the educated opinions of co-workers, if they haven't been solicited previously.

### Promote the Rationale

If you're building a service culture, the enthusiastic backing of executive management makes the process much easier, but isn't a deal-breaker. So if there's resistance where you are, just remember that a grassroots movement from the bottom up will work but it just takes longer. To be blunt, the re-trained supervisors of today will eventually become the supportive execs of tomorrow.

However, money is usually rationale enough for the toughest audience and the objective can be reached by simply illustrating guest service in terms of additional revenue. For example, Market Metrix published a whitepaper on this topic recently called, *The NEW Value of Casino Customers*. Within the research, Jonathan Barsky, Ph.D., makes the case that each

positive experience meant a +\$7,140 to the bottom line while each negative was -\$210 (after an extensive study of a 150-room hotel/casino). With numbers like these, it's easy to see how the "act" of being friendly affects the bottom line.

But most importantly, the underlying principle shouldn't be based solely on profits. Granted, increased revenue will be the end result and your property will be thrilled by the outcome. However, the main focus should always remain on the personal benefits derived from building positive guest relationships so the motive remains worthy of mass support.

### Hire "Friendly"

There's an old saying that you can teach just about anything... except how to be genuinely nice. So if you're really committed to making a difference where you are, a case can be made that any successful guest service program starts in human resources.

Increasing the number, strength and weight of interview questions based on guest service is a great place to begin. On the other hand, you might want to consider the addition of pre-interview service aptitude testing, too. Depending on the number of job applicants you process, the online cost can be as little as \$5 per selected interviewee to find those that are inclined to consistently deliver smiles and compassion to your guests.

Considering the U.S. Department of Labor's estimate that an \$8 per hour team member costs \$5,333 to rehire, the front end investment is worth far more than the cost of just one combo meal at McDonalds, while saving your company thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, on the back end.

### Establish a Standard

The next step is constructing a service standard that works for your property - and then, making sure everyone both promotes and enforces it. At Disney, their standard is an acronym based on "S.E.R.V.I.C.E." that covers everything from Smiling to End with a Thank You. Luckily, we already had a terrific acronym created at Gila River that just needed additional emphasis. Ours is called "The G.I.L.A. Way" (G = Greet, I = Interact, L = Listen, A = Appreciate) which covers most of the service basics.

Having a service standard launch meeting with all available team members in attendance is a good idea, along with reinforcement signage, dedicated bulletin boards and even credit card-sized reminders for everyone to carry. Then train it, coach it, test it and reward it until your unwavering, *minimal* standard is established.

### Address “What’s In This For Me?”

We can train and coach and expect until we’re blue, but borderline team members without service in their DNA simply won’t deliver until they realize the personal benefits. In short, they must pick *their* reason. Sure, it’s great for the casino and great for the guests, but candidly addressing “What’s in this for me?” with your staff should be a priority.

In essence, we’re asking them to drop all of their personal concerns at the door and genuinely care for eight consecutive hours every shift. So, they should get the option to decide what justification works for them, such as: helping the community, promotion, personal satisfaction, bigger circle of friends, better tips, smiles & hugs, or, fill in the blank HERE. It’s as easy as choosing a tangible reason. And then, making sure that motivational “key” is *always* brought to work.

### Measure Twice, Cut Once

Now that everyone is seemingly on-board, how would the casino know for sure? Measurement, of course. And there are three basic ways to discover the good and the not-so-good in lieu of in-house comment cards (that usually don’t serve as an accurate gauge):

**Business Metrics** - Guest feedback measurement with detailed reporting tools takes away bias and guesswork, identifying issues in one simplified package. In addition, the interface usually allows immediate response to guests experiencing a problem.

**Secret Shoppers** - Nothing tells the story like someone secretly testing your specific criteria – and perhaps most importantly, recognizes excellence that can be shamelessly publicized and rewarded.

**Internal Audits** - Create a coaching opportunity by having management do periodic internal testing of staff. After the team member has been secretly observed and rated, the supervisor or manager has a relaxed 5-minute discussion with them in private - four minutes on the good stuff, one on future goals.

Consider making both the business metrics and secret shopper scores exceedingly public each month along with tying internal service audits to the annual review of team members.

### Catch Them Caring

Having a recognition system in place that generates, seeks out and then rewards positive guest comments is not only the right thing to do, but it’s also great for business. The good news is that effective solutions don’t have to be time-consuming or expensive, just sincere. Examples include:

- Making business cards for team members to hand out, pointing guests to a dedicated web page to convey

how great the experience was because of the service received.

- Starting an instant gratification campaign in the form of “Caught You Caring” dealer chips that are given out to team members going the extra mile.
- Constructing a “Star Performer” program with a nominal prize for each one or select monthly finalists. Then, the winners are rewarded in front of their peers at a quarterly or annual dinner, with genuine thanks and the attendance of the board, CEO and executive directors.

The possibilities are literally endless and the return on investment is well worth marketing guest service - wherever you are. It’s worked for us... and if you apply the examples above, I’m confident that they’ll work for you, too. ♣

*Evan Mills is the Corporate Guest Services Manager for Gila River Casinos. He can be reached by calling (520)796-7134 or email [evan.mills@wingilariver.com](mailto:evan.mills@wingilariver.com).*

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