



# CHECK-IN

*Focusing on issues important to all members of the Hospitality Industry*

## Check This Out

### ✓ **A new way to avoid baggage fees?**

**Hardly!** A 19-year-old boy band singer was told before boarding a recent EasyJet flight that he was carrying too much luggage and would have to pay an overage fee. But he thought he had a better idea, opting to wear 12 layers of clothes: six t-shirts, four jumpers, two jackets, three pairs of jeans, two pairs of jogging bottoms, and two hats. Once in flight, he began feeling sick and then passed out – the result of heat exhaustion from wearing all those clothes. Next time, guy, just pay up.

### ✓ **What a hoot! Hang out with the owls in this café.**

In Tokyo, you can book time at the popular Shop of Owls, have a drink and relax in the company of these beautiful birds. Detailed instructions are provided and the expectation is you will not make a scene if they poop on you since of course they are not toilet trained. Throughout Japan, there are many animal cafés (rabbits, goats and more) and here in the U.S., they are gaining in popularity. Online reservations for a cat café in New York are almost fully booked two months ahead.

### ✓ **Speaking of Japan...**

... did you know that the appropriately named Weird Hotel in the southwestern part of the country uses robots to do guest check-ins and checkouts as well as uses them as porters to take luggage to the rooms? The hotel also uses facial recognition technology instead of standard electronic room keys, by registering a digital image of the guests' faces during check-in. But they don't handle security or housekeeping duties. These jobs still require the human touch and ensure that no one makes off with the robots!

## Managing Your Property's "Voice" Reputation

Although it can be argued that many more people will read an online review or social media message, those who make the effort to call the hotel directly either already are "customers" or are "hot prospects" seeking to become one.

Perhaps the lack of focus on telephone hospitality represents the hotel industry's overall bias towards electronic distribution channels at the expense of neglecting traditional channels for guest communications and sales. Yet if you take time to notice, the phones are still ringing daily at hotel front desks, sales and reservations offices. It is true that the phone does not ring as often.

Those who used to call their family, friends or colleagues on their guest room phones now reach them directly on mobile devices. Vendors and suppliers now send emails versus calling, as do many meeting planners, and of course many guests do book online.

However, if you take time to listen in to real calls these days, you will find that those who are still calling represent the hottest prospects – they are potential guests who have tried to book online but got hung up in the system. Or they are prospects with special needs and requests. Or they are prospective guests who have read media reports that the best rates are to be had by calling directly. Or perhaps they are among those who have read the "poor" and "terrible" guest reviews that even the top-rated

hotels have a few of and who need some reassurance.

If the caller is already a guest, they might be calling for directions because their GPS got them lost, or because they left an important item in the room at departure. More often than not, the phone calls from confirmed or in-house guests are less routine and of a more urgent nature. During our sales and service workshops, we routinely place calls to local competitors of the hotels

we are training. We will also call in with hot leads for groups or catering functions. Many times we get transferred to a voicemail and it is hours before a call is returned, or worse yet, 15%-30% of the

time no one calls back. If we do get someone on the line, the norm seems to be to ask for basic specs and then to quickly quote meeting room costs, rates and terms like the voice at the end of a pharmaceutical commercial explaining potential side effects.

If the call is for room reservations, most ask only the basic questions, search their inventory and then offer room types and corresponding rates. Rarely does anyone engage the caller in a real conversation or use consultative selling techniques.

It is also surprising how many times we cannot understand what the person who answers the switchboard says; the name of the hotel and colleague seems rushed or indistinguishable. When asking basic



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questions such as directions, hours of operation, or fees for routine hotel services, it sometimes requires being put on hold as if the person answering had never heard these questions before.

Yet this is not always the case. About 20% of the time, no matter what the question or inquiry, the calls are fielded professionally by a warm and friendly personality who shows empathy and demonstrates a caring attitude. What a difference it makes. What a positive first impression can be made just by putting a human "face" on the brand with a proper greeting. It takes no extra time and little additional effort to exude hospitality versus to process calls as if you worked in a factory making widgets. Best of all, sales and service staff who put forth their best efforts when answering every call tend to bring out the best in their callers' personalities and end up speaking with a lot more friendly and fun people than those who process calls for a living.

Have you listened to what your

frontline first impression makers are saying? Try test calling your own hotel switchboard, reservations line, or sales office number.

Here are some training tips to ensuring positive first impressions:

- Use a mystery shopping service on a regular basis to test all types of call scenarios, including guest service requests, dining, recreation and of course sales and reservations inquiries.
- Conduct your own "call monitoring" by simply paying attention to what is being said whenever you are standing near someone who answers the phone. Be sure to coach them when performance does not meet standards and to praise them when it does.
- When you receive calls from colleagues, friends and regular vendors, ask them for feedback on how the phone call was handled.
- Have a formal list of standards for telephone hospitality, putting in

writing the expectations for how calls are to be answered, placed on hold, transferred, and ended correctly.

- Make it everyone's job to "own the request or question."
- Review and practice phone techniques at pre-shift meetings, monthly meetings, and informally when time allows. Just as the top sports superstars practice the essential "basics" during the pre-season each year, give everyone on your team an ongoing reminder of just how important the phone calls are.

Now more than ever in today's high-tech, low-touch world, the ringing phone line presents a rare opportunity to put a human face upon an otherwise intangible brand and is worthy of as much attention as the online reputation.

Source: *Doug Kennedy*

*Hospitalitynet.org, 06/14*

## Maintenance News

### Keep Your Property Safe From Fire

Virtually every place of business has the occasion to use flammable or combustible liquids, and hotels are no exception.

To some degree, you and your staff use a variety of cleaning solutions or maintenance items, like paint, thinner and fuel or oil, to keep your property in top operating condition. Use of these hazardous materials is necessary, but they can certainly present problems if not handled and stored properly.

A simple spark can create a fire – so it's best to safeguard your guests and your business with the use of safety storage cabinets.

Be sure to choose cabinets that are designed specifically to reduce the risk of fire. Look for equipment that complies with Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and National Fire Protection Agency (NFPA)

standards. Also, make sure you get the size you need for every area.

Here are a few areas around your property where safety cabinets should be used and size recommendations:

#### Housekeeping

Recommendation – a 12-gallon safety cabinet for cleaners and aerosols

#### Kitchen Banquet Area

Recommendation – either a 30-gallon or 45-gallon cabinet for Sterno®

#### Maintenance & Lawncare

Recommendation – a 45-gallon safety cabinet for...

- Spray Paint/Paint
- Paint Thinner
- WD-40
- Cleaners
- Pool Chemicals
- Gasoline

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**Julie Baker**  
HR Editor

### Let's Become An Army of Lions

Philip of Macedonia, the father of Alexander the Great, said, "An army of deer led by a lion is more to be feared than an army of lions led by a deer." That may be true, but Philip missed the bigger point: An army of lions led by a lion is to be feared most of all, for it is unstoppable.

What is more powerful than having strong, effective leadership at the top of your organization? Having an organization of lions where everyone leads.

At any Toyota plant, every employee on the line has the authority and responsibility to shut down the line at any time it is necessary. Quality control and problem solving aren't left to the titled managers. An employee who spots a problem is expected to lead by calling attention to it rather than allowing it to slip through and become an imperfection on a dealer's lot or an owner's driveway.

You may have heard the story about the best receptionist – a woman who served as the "front person" at the company where she worked. On her desk was a sign: RECEPTIONISTVILLE, POPULATION: 1. If she was asked what her title was, she'd respond, "Intergalactic Empress." She took herself lightly, but her job seriously. She was a leader for the company as its first point of contact.

A cable TV installer prided himself on the many value-added services he provided customers when he worked in their homes, including setting the clock to the correct time on their electronic

"home entertainment consultant."

A volunteer at a nonprofit, filling in by answering the phones, took a phone call from a disgruntled donor. The donor felt unappreciated. The volunteer was able

### What is the Difference Between a Manager and a Leader?

- Managers have employees.
- Managers react to change.
- Managers have good ideas.
- Managers communicate.
- Managers direct groups.
- Managers try to be heroes.
- Managers take credit.
- Managers are focused.
- Managers exercise power over people.
- Leaders win followers.
- Leaders create change.
- Leaders implement them.
- Leaders persuade.
- Leaders create teams.
- Leaders make heroes of everyone around them.
- Leaders take responsibility.
- Leaders create shared focus.
- Leaders develop power with people.

## LEADERSHIP



devices and showing them how to use features that confused them. He didn't consider himself an installer, but a

to communicate the gratitude of the organization for the donor's previous support, thereby regaining his loyalty. In the end, the volunteer's sincerity and belief in the work of the organization convinced the donor to increase his support.

Is your organization filled with lions? You can lead to make it so.

Source: *Mark Sanborn, MRA Institute of Management Journal, 10/14*

## We Love Hearing from You!

We received only one email this time in response to our request for craziest amenities, but it's a great one! **Sandy Ellis, General Manager at the Hampton Inn Oceanfront in Daytona Beach Shores, FL**, wrote to us about an unusual problem: "While not usually considered an amenity, this definitely falls in the 'forgot something' category.

"We had a wedding party staying

with us in June. Everything was wonderful for everyone until the bride started getting dressed. As she was donning her bridal underwear, she realized that she had misplaced one of the "inserts" to her padded bra. In tears, she sent her maid of honor to the desk to see if we could help. Since it was only an hour before the wedding, a trip to the store was impossible. Believe it or

not, we saved the day when a repeat guest overheard the conversation and gave her another padded bra. They happened to be very close in size and it fit! The wedding went off perfectly, and the bride was beautiful!"

We're hoping everyone will send us their craziest guest requests in our next issue – it's worth \$25.

## 2015 Fall/Winter Calendar

Find out what's new and what's happening in the industry by attending these upcoming trade shows or conferences:

### **International Spa Association (ISPA) Conference & Expo**

10/19 - 10/21; Las Vegas, NV; [attendispa.com](http://attendispa.com)

### **HFTP Annual Convention & Trade Show**

10/21 - 10/24; Bellevue, WA; [hftp.org](http://hftp.org)

### **BITAC® Purchasing & Design West 2015**

10/25 - 10/27; Rancho Palos Verdes, CA; [bitac.net](http://bitac.net)

### **2015 arvc Outdoor Hospitality Conference & Expo**

11/3 - 11/6; Daytona Beach, FL; [arvc.org](http://arvc.org)

### **HX: The Hotel Experience (formerly IHMRS)**

11/8 - 11/10; New York, NY; [ahla.com](http://ahla.com)

### **Green Festivals**

11/13 - 11/15; San Francisco, CA; [greenfestivals.org/sf](http://greenfestivals.org/sf)

12/11 - 12/15; Portland, OR; [greenfestivals.org/portland](http://greenfestivals.org/portland)

### **The Americas Lodging Investment Summit**

1/25/16 - 1/27/16; Los Angeles, CA; [aliconference.com](http://aliconference.com)

### **40th Annual Hotel, Motel and Restaurant Supply Show of the Southeast**

1/26/16 - 1/28/16; Myrtle Beach, SC; [hmrsss.com](http://hmrsss.com)

### Quick Quote

*The rewards of the journey far outweigh  
the risk of leaving the harbor.*

– Unknown

### ✓ Check Out

***We hope you've enjoyed this issue.***

Your feedback, suggestions, stories, and ideas make our newsletter interesting and useful. Please take a moment to send us your thoughts.

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Please note: Submitted photos and information are not returnable. Submissions may be edited.

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**Jim Leahy**

### ***Letter from the Chairman***

Dear Friends,

I spend a fair amount of time with successful people who have important jobs. They own or run companies or big divisions of them. Many are our suppliers or customers.

I spend even more time among hourly people who may not think of themselves as very successful. They go to work each day, work their eight hours and go home. Some work in the hotel industry.

In many ways, there's not much difference between them. Both groups work hard. They both want to be successful. Either may have a good education. Both are generally polite and thoughtful. They all may listen to some of the same music and enjoy the same TV shows. Most are strong and healthy. Most are honest, moral and people of principle. They're so alike!

A lot has been written over the years about what makes a person successful. In listening to people for years, I have found that successful people have the following characteristics:

- They are optimistic.
- They have a belief in a loving, caring higher power.
- They have an ability to hire, train and inspire others, and bring them along in the journey.
- They are willing to try new things.
- They have an interest in and a curiosity about the world around them.
- They take ownership and pride in all they do.
- They rarely are people of bitterness and rarely hold grudges.
- They try to pace life well.
- They love what they do.
- They don't seem to blame others a lot.
- They have a sense of humor and know life will work out just fine no matter what happens.
- They are good communicators and excellent listeners.
- They set goals and achieve them.

If you want to go beyond where you are in life, then become a person beyond the person you are. Look at the list above and make a personal plan to grow and change and become.

Love,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Jim'.

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