



# CHECK-IN

Focusing on issues important to all members of the Hospitality Industry

## Check This Out

- ✓ **How sweet it is!** Officials with the Chicago Marriott Downtown Magnificent Mile are creating a buzz about their **rooftop bees**, which are credited with producing honey that has made its way into an in-house draft wheat beer and also into many of the restaurant's dishes. The hotel has invested about \$2,500, including the cost of the Italian five-stripe honeybees, insulated hives, bee protective gear and honey extracting equipment. The hotel also sells the honey: a two-ounce bottle is \$5.
- ✓ **While the outlook for 2010 seems brighter, savvy hoteliers must keep their offers sharp, but interesting to attract additional business.** Host a kids' movie night at your pool, sell empty rooms at the price of whatever the outside temperature happens to be (the lower the better!), or offer a free massage during a weekend stay.

## Keeping customers happy is our top priority.



Our expert sales team is out on the road, busy taking care of you, our valued customers. We hope to have some more of their stories to share in our next issue!

## New tools emerge in the bedbug fight

Bedbug-sniffing dogs are one of the newer weapons in hoteliers' war against the pests, but good old-fashioned inspection by staff is the best way to keep them in check, according to the American Hotel & Lodging Association (AH&LA).

Other new technologies being tested and used to combat the growing problem include carbon dioxide, microwaves, heat, cold and certain fungal products, said Greg Baumann, VP of technical services for the National Pest Management Association (NPMA).

"A lot of bedbug research is being conducted today by universities, so we are learning a lot more about this pest than we knew before," Baumann said.

Meanwhile, the AH&LA and NPMA are increasing efforts to educate hotel staff about how to recognize and eradicate bedbugs. They also want to remove the stigma of bedbugs because all types of hotels can have them, and the problem has nothing to do with sanitation. Because bedbugs feed on human blood – not food or garbage – making sure guest rooms and other areas are clean doesn't alleviate the problem.

"Knowledge, and getting the information to your employees, is the most important thing," Baumann said. "They are the eyes and ears when the pest professional is not around."

Housekeepers and other employees should keep their eyes open for signs of bedbugs before calling a pest control professional.

Here are some trouble signs hotel staff must watch for:

- ◆ Look for dots of blood or smears on sheets, mattresses, upholstery and walls.
- ◆ Inspect often for smears on bed frames, mattresses, mattress covers, upholstery, drapes and walls. In some cases, the bugs can live in phone and electrical outlets. "They like warmth, so they have been found in the slots in a TV or clock," Baumann said.
- ◆ Other unusual areas to inspect include: pull-down shade backs, computers, offices, cracks in luggage racks, cracks and crevices in walls and floors, and inside box spring mattresses.
- ◆ Carefully inspect rooms that have been closed for awhile. "Bedbugs can wait for over a year, if the temperature is acceptable to them," Baumann said.

Hotel staff typically assumes, erroneously, they must throw out all materials that were affected by bedbugs in order to treat them.

"View any material that might be infested as damaged, not necessarily as something you have to throw out," Baumann said. "Some materials can be washed in very hot water and run through a hot dryer."

Hotels should work in partnership with pest control companies instead of having staff spraying insecticides, he recommended.

"Don't take matters into your own hands," Baumann said. "You may spread them, and bedbugs may be resistant to some products."

# Best Practices for Handling Online Hotel Reviews

Although the hospitality industry is still in the beginning stages of figuring out how to master the exciting potential of social media, it is clear that the role of user-generated reviews is exploding and that consumers are wielding more power. The pace of this change has certainly caught hotels off guard. A recent survey conducted by *Market Metrix* and *TripAdvisor* found that 85% of hotels have no guidelines for monitoring, responding to or acting on guest reviews. Perhaps this lack of direction explains why, according to *TripAdvisor*, only 4% of negative reviews are responded to.

It's critical for hotels to regain control and take the appropriate action. Consumers say when a company responds to a review, it puts the company in a favorable light (Compete Inc., 2007). Our own research shows that responding to customer issues can improve a guest's likelihood to recommend and return by 20% or more. This leads to word-of-mouth referrals, which can represent 40% or more of a hotel's customer mix. If hotels don't respond, the dynamic of negative feedback can build into a huge wave of consumer defection.

To assist hotels in developing their own approach to handling online reviews, we have assembled the following guidelines based on industry best practices:

**Monitor.** Hotels need to establish a process for tracking new reviews. This begins with assigning one person at your property to monitor online review sites and have accountability to follow up on all reviews. This person should:

- ◆ Sign up for e-mails, alerts and web feeds to know when new reviews or scores have changed.
- ◆ Monitor the top review sites frequently, depending on how often your hotel is reviewed.
- ◆ Make sure your hotel is listed on these sites and that your photos, videos and descriptions are up-to-date, accurate and complimentary.

**Respond.** Management must clearly establish the hotel's response policy. Ideally, hotels should respond to all reviews within 24 hours in a timely, personal and professional manner. This demonstrates a hotel's commitment to listening and acting on guest feedback. If a response is not possible within 24 hours, respond to all negative reviews first.

- ◆ If needed, forward negative comments to the appropriate person for assistance in responding and to let them know there is an issue in their department. Determine if and when the GM should be alerted.
- ◆ If a review is suspected to be fraudulent, immediately contact the review site to dispute it. If justified, the review will be removed.
- ◆ Next, if scores are available for each review, respond to reviews with scores lower than your hotel's average. In responding to guest reviews, always start by thanking the guest for writing a review. For positive reviews, reinforce hotel strengths and invite the guest to return. Forward positive comments to the appropriate person who can share the feedback with deserving employees. In responding to negative reviews, apologize for their experience, inform them what you will do to address the problem, invite the guest to contact hotel management for resolution and describe (or even post a picture) how the problem was resolved. Make sure to track which reviews have received a response.

**Analyze and improve.** User reviews expose the truth of a hotel's brand. Hotels are now challenged with maintaining high standards and meeting the expectations of customers who have done a significant amount of research before they travel. Guest reviews not only offer hotels a chance for service recovery, they

also can uncover opportunities for improvement, driving satisfaction and loyalty, and even reducing operating costs. Each review should be thoroughly evaluated. Ideally, results from all reviews should be stored in a database with a reporting package available for analysis. Analyze guest reviews to understand trends versus prior periods, identify performance gaps versus relevant competitors, uncover scoring differences among key customer groups, and provide an input for investment decisions. Review site feedback should be combined with your regular guest feedback program to get a full view.

Based on this analysis, action plans, preferably done at the department level, should be created to address issues, gaps and unfavorable trends. We would also recommend that you:

- ◆ Share issues, gaps and trends with appropriate managers.
- ◆ Set goals that are measurable.
- ◆ Consider tying employee compensation to appropriate guest feedback measures, as long as they are fair and unbiased.

In addition, display positive reviews on your site to show off positive experiences of other guests and to prevent travelers from searching for reviews on other sites. Encourage guests to write reviews – fewer reviews imply a less popular hotel. Encourage guests verbally at check out, on receipts and in communications or e-mails. More people than ever before are reading hotel reviews prior to booking. Hotels that embrace online reviews and take actions can increase their business. Online reviews can help you connect with your customers, find out what they really want and promote your hotel. This will lead to higher levels of service and confidence in your brand.

Source: Jonathan Barsky,  
*Hotel and Motel Management*,  
9.11.09



**Katie Snider**  
HR Editor

### Stress & Exercise: It's a Balance

Stress levels have been at an all-time high. Everywhere we turn we have been bombarded with headlines about the state of our economy, the loss of thousands of jobs nationwide, home foreclosures, skyrocketing energy and health care costs, dwindling retirement savings—the list goes on. While the economy is slowly improving, how we handle stress can have a significant effect on how it impacts our physical, mental, and emotional health.

Stress can be a good thing. Short episodes of stress provide mental stimulation and can enhance our immune response. Some stress can also help us operate at higher performance levels at our jobs and within our daily lives. However, chronic, long-term stress can be very damaging, on every level. If stress takes over, the result can be fatigue, depression, anxiety, anger, and other toxic consequences.

Participating in an exercise program that promotes cardiovascular fitness, strength, flexibility, and balance can enhance an overall sense of control and well-being. This sense of well-being can then impact how we respond to stressful events, as well as mitigate the effects of stress on our body's vital organs and immune system.

Balancing more active exercise – for cardiovascular health and physical release of stress – with more relaxing forms of exercise –

to better stop stress in its tracks – can offer a good balance. For example, creating an exercise plan that includes yoga and walking can offer the best of both worlds. Yoga has been recognized as a stress-reliever. The slow, rhythmical movements, combined with deep breathing, can help to relax minds and bodies. Yoga has been shown to decrease blood pressure and cortisol levels, the main hormone produced during stressful situations.



On the more active side, engaging in an aerobic form of exercise has been shown to help release tension while cooling anger or anxiety. Changing it up and mixing harder and easier training regimens while walking, running, cycling, or other forms

of exercise can increase the use of the heart and lungs, as well as the musculoskeletal system. Both relaxing and aerobic forms of exercise promote better sleep, which is critical in reducing the effect of stress on the body.

Don't forget to include good nutrition as part of any healthful strategy. During times of stress it is tempting to grab a sugary or fatty snack or consume lots of caffeine rather than eat a balanced, healthy meal. Our bodies need to be replenished with vitamins, calcium, and protein to function optimally and to better combat the physical effects of stress. When we start off physically healthier, we are mentally better able to respond to stressful situations.

It can definitely be a balancing act to understand and respond to stressful events without being consumed by them. Tip the scales back by including exercise in your

day. It's a lifelong habit you can develop to help you live a healthy, stress-controlled life.

For additional information and resources on stress and exercise, check out the following websites:

- ◆ The Mayo Clinic:  
<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/fitness/SM99999>
- ◆ The American Council on Exercise:  
<http://www.acefitness.org/>

Your local Wellness Council of America (WELCO) chapter also has resources for your workplace.

Source: *Cynthia Lohrey, Human Resource Specialist, HR Digest, MRA–The Management Association, Inc., April 2009*



*Regular exercise reduces stress and promotes good health and fitness – a win-win for you!*



## Send us your ideas – we'll send you \$25!

*What is the most interesting question you ask prospective employees during job interviews?*

*E-mail or fax us & include your full name, property name, and address.*

## Spring 2010 Calendar

Trade shows and conventions are a fantastic way to find out what's new and what's happening in the industry. Here are some events scheduled for the coming months.

### **Go Green Expo**

January 22 - 24; Los Angeles, CA; [www.gogreenexpo.com](http://www.gogreenexpo.com)

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

January 25 - 27; San Diego, CA; [www.alisconference.com](http://www.alisconference.com)

### **2010 Hospitality Law Conference**

February 3 - 5; Houston, TX; [www.hospitalitylawyer.com](http://www.hospitalitylawyer.com)

### **BITAC Food & Beverage 2010**

February 28 - March 2; Las Vegas, NV; [www.bitac.net](http://www.bitac.net)

### **CHART's 79th Semi-Annual Hospitality Training Conference**

March 6 - 9; San Francisco, CA; [www.chart.org](http://www.chart.org)

### **36th Annual Ocean City Hotel-Motel-Restaurant Trade Expo**

March 7 - 8; Ocean City, MD; [www.oceancitytradeexpo.com](http://www.oceancitytradeexpo.com)

### **Nightclub and Bar Convention and Trade Show**

March 8 - 10; Las Vegas, NV; [www.ncbshow.com](http://www.ncbshow.com)

### **International Restaurant Show**

March 7 - 10; Las Vegas, NV; [www.irestaurantshow.com](http://www.irestaurantshow.com)

### Quick Quotes

***He who would travel happily must travel light.***

— *Antoine de St. Exupery*

***I met a lot of people in Europe.***

***I even encountered myself.***

— *James Baldwin*

### **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 jot down your thoughts and send them to us.

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 **american**  
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**Jim Leahy**

### **Letter from the Chairman**

Dear Friends,

My last three newsletters have listed 20 ways of coping with life's difficulties and rising above them. Each of us is born with a unique set of capabilities to help overcome adversity. This is my final list of techniques we can use to become the noble persons we were created to become.

21) Be true to yourself. Respect your good name. Go into the world as a person of love, of patience, of respect and of kindness. Practice loving-kindness every day.

22) Be grateful for the gift of your job. Make the most of it. Give it your best effort. Value it, not just for the money and the lifestyle it provides you, but also for the skills it teaches you, the experience it gives you, and the people that you meet because of it. Value it for the person that you're becoming because of it. See it as a chance to learn, to love, and to serve others.

23) Look after your health. We each get one body, one set of teeth, one pair of eyes, a heart and a set of lungs. Care for them. Get adequate sleep.

24) Turn off the television. It can fill our lives with idle distractions. Replace it with meaningful activities and conversation. Be fully alive to each moment!

25) Set goals in your life, not just for what you'll do, but for what you'll become. And aim high!

26) When someone lashes out at you in anger, realize that their anger is THEIRS. They own it! You don't have to take on their anger, their bad day. Don't let others choose your feelings for you. Don't let others "make you angry" or "make you hurt." Our emotion can be our choice, choose happiness.

27) Don't be a perfectionist. Do your best, but don't get down on yourself when life and events don't turn out as you planned. Be flexible. Life has its own schedule. Perfectionists are tense, never satisfied with themselves, never quite good enough. Sometimes life just happens. Celebrate it!

28) As I look out on the world, I can see hope, opportunity, and welcome. Or I can choose to see threat, rejection, and scarcity. Neither is completely "correct." Life is full of opportunity and threat. But I respond to my own view of it and discover that my own response is what makes it true. Let's look out there and find a world of abundance, opportunity, hope, and love!

Who we are today is the result of choices we've made throughout our lives. Now choose to be the person you'll be for the future.

Love,

*Jim*

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