

When the Band Crashed the Wedding: A Case in Hotel Service Recovery

Introduction/Summary

This case study presents a scenario of Steve, a hotel manager for the Spring Grove Hotel, which has multiple parties booked, each with events on property for Saturday evening. As the manager on duty, Steve has been tasked with ensuring everything goes smoothly for the Kirkpatrick wedding, South High School Marching Band, and other hotel guests. The case study aims to generate discussions about how hotels manage multiple large events as part of daily business, focusing on specific occurrences of problems and service failures and service recovery opportunities that could be made.

Learning Outcomes and Targeted Audience

The case study presents a hotel operation scenario and is focused on specific service failures that have occurred thereby promoting examination and discussion of the potential service recovery efforts implemented. The case study aims to present the issues leading to the service failures and to allow for evaluation of any initial recovery efforts. Upon completion, the students will be able to identify the failures and recovery efforts that have occurred and establish other recovery efforts that should have been implemented (during the case), as well as plan for future recovery efforts or strategies, which may need to be made moving forward. The case study may be utilized in classes focusing on operations or event management, customer service, or guest recovery, with all levels of undergraduate hospitality students and possibly by graduate students focusing in lodging operations.

By the end of this session, students should be able to:

- Define key aspects of service failure and the need for service recovery, which can occur in hotel operations.
- Identify specific events that led to the individual service failure situations.
- Evaluate service failure and service recovery from both a management and customer perspective.
- Discuss potential outcomes with service recovery for the case study stakeholders.
- Establish operational plans to ensure the situations presented can be addressed to limit potential negative future impact.

Using the Case Study for Your Class

Prior to Use

Students should have a basic understanding of hospitality management and guest service. They should be prepared to discuss the following foundation topics:

Customer Satisfaction

Service Failure

Guest Service

Service Recovery

Customer Engagement

Word-of-Mouth

Recovery through Social Media

Prior to Class

Prior to class, students will be asked to read the presented case study, any class reading material, and additional materials on service failure and service recovery. For senior-level, advanced/honors, or graduate-level students, additional reading material is provided on the foundation topics.

Questions Related to the Case Study

- Explain how Steve might have been better prepared for his role as assistant manager?
- List the service failures that occurred throughout the case study.
- How would preparation or experience have helped Steve handle the situations that occurred Saturday night? Provide at least two specific examples.
- Which group do you believe is more important to the Spring Grove Hotel, the wedding reception or the marching band? Why?
- What planning decisions could have been made prior to Saturday evening that may have helped eliminate the service failures that occurred?
- What service recovery efforts could be made to appease both groups? In the era of social networking, consider how the hotel could be impacted and how managers might address this.
- Consider the other Saturday evening hotel guests, not in either group, and create one additional service failure and an action plan to address it.

Service Failures and Recovery Opportunities

As with any customer service based industry, hospitality operations are not completely free of failures occurring with the service and experience provided to customers. If any issue occurs where an operation fails to meet the customer's expectations, a service failure has occurred (Swanson & Hsu, 2009). When serving customers, it is inevitable that from time to time problems will occur; an occasional service failure is one of the most certain occurrences in the hospitality industry.

To mitigate issues and prevent issues from getting out of control, when service failures occur, service providers such as hotels must have

in place recovery strategies to help reduce customer dissatisfaction and complaints (Chang & Wang, 2012). Service recovery, which is created or implemented by managers or employees, should immediately follow in an attempt to resolve the failure, amend any negative feelings from the customer, and create attempts to retain the customer (Cranage & Mattila, 2005; Swanson & Hsu, 2009). Thus, all service recovery strategies involve some type of actions by businesses in response to a service failure (Gronroos, 2000).

Silber, Israeli, Bustin, and Zvi (2009), in a study examining restaurant customers, found that specific conversations and corrections from managers with the customers for whom the service failure had occurred goes further than providing monetary compensation. Often it may be critical for an establishment's success for the members of management and the employees to understand how service failures occur and what they should or should not do to attempt to correct (recover) the situation. The customer in turn evaluates the actions taken in terms of appropriateness and fairness and makes a judgment on whether the service recovery actions were satisfactory (Kim, Wang, & Mattila, 2010).

Specific service failures and recovery attempts that are found in the case study have been included (see Table 1). This information can

be utilized to review the occurrences of failures and recovery in the case study with students or it may be used to concentrate on only one of the foundation topics (e.g. service recovery or service failure). Additionally, other operational issues may be reviewed to expand the discussion beyond the subject of service failure and recovery to operational management in lodging operations.

Class Instruction

Plan I (55 to 75 minutes) or Class Session I

Begin the class with an open discussion on service failures the students have experienced, as a customer and/or as an employee, and the recovery efforts that occurred (5-10 minutes). A short video clip could be shown and discussed briefly on a service failure and recovery situation (5-10 minutes).

Divide the students into small groups (3-4 per group) and ask them to identify examples of specific service failures in hotel operations and explain how guest service failures occur (10 minutes). Next, have the groups discuss service recovery looking at the purpose, potential impact on operations, and key concepts for being successful (10 minutes).

Let each group present their ideas, or have each group present

Table 1

Failures, Recovery, and other Operational Issues Found in the Case Study

Service failures:	
	Missing security guards for band floors in hotel
	Band students wandering halls causing disruptions for hotel guests
	Hotel guests bothered by students wandering hallways
	Father of the bride upset with management about students being in hotel
	Early guest slips and falls; possibly caused by maintenance staff error
	Delayed food for both groups due to issues in the kitchen
	Poor service at breakfast for band group has been reported
	Little attention is paid to the band group during scheduled pool and pizza party so they are running out of food and drinks
	Band students mixing with wedding guests gathers attention of guests and some hotel staff
	Student drummer knocks over a table while leaving banquet room
Some recovery:	
	Hotel staff and GM possibly speaking with father of the bride
	Discussions with band director about security guards missing and wandering/ noisy students
	Helping aunt of the bride (slip and fall); providing a comfortable chair for reception
	Hallway congestion between students and bridal party on arrival to events handled by staff
	Steve (MOD) speaks to band director regarding late pizzas (30+ minutes late)
Other possible operational issues:	
	Two years of poor financial results for hotel
	Recent management changes
	Quick promotions for Steve (MOD) in short career
	Steve's (MOD) lack of specific (banquets and food service) experience
	Wedding guests arriving very early (in addition to accident)
	Bridal party running very late causing delays for all banquet staff
	Issues between the MOD, banquet manager and chef
	Staffing and scheduling issues

one component and have the remaining groups add information (15-20 minutes).

Have each group identify the specific problems and service failures that occurred and recovery efforts presented in the case study; this can be established by creating a list or timeline of the events (10-15 minutes).

Plan II (50 to 60 minutes) or Class Session II

Divide the students into small groups (2-3 minutes); if conjoining sessions, students can remain in groups already formed or switch groups to provide more interaction. Next, ask each group to debrief the case study by explaining the following topics (10 minutes):

- Summarize the case study
- Provide background on the Spring Grove Hotel and Steve (assistant manager, MOD)
- Identify guest expectations for both events: the Kirkpatrick wedding and South High School Marching Band

Assign one or two of the following questions to each group and ask them to prepare an answer (10 minutes):

- Explain how Steve might have been better prepared for his role as assistant manager?
- List the problems and service failures that occurred throughout the case study. (remove if using Plan I & Plan II)
- How would preparation or experience have helped Steve handle the situations that occurred Saturday night? Provide at least two specific examples.
- Which group do you believe is more important to the Spring Grove Hotel, the wedding reception or the marching band? Why?
- What planning decisions could have been made prior to Saturday evening that may have helped eliminate the service failures that occurred?
- What service recovery efforts could be made to appease both groups? In the era of social networking, consider how the hotel could be impacted and how managers might address this.
- Consider the other Saturday evening hotel guests, not in either group, and create one additional service failure and an action plan to address it.

Let each group present their assigned question and answers to the class and allow time for discussion (15-20 minutes).

Summarize the case study and ask students what was learned from the presented topics within the case study (10-15 minutes).

Possible Follow-up Assessment

Have each student interview a hotel manager about some examples of service failures and service recovery efforts at his/her operation. Be sure to have the students ask the managers what they would do differently if they could redo the situation now. Students

can be assigned to write this up as a small paper or presentation (formally or informally) for class.

Additional Reading Material

- Fu, Y., & Mount, D. (2007). Hotel guests cumulative satisfaction updating process in the context of service failure and service recovery. *International Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Administration*, 8, 77-98. doi:10.1300/J149v08n01_05.
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- Swanson, S. R., & Hsu, M. K. (2009). Critical incidents in tourism: Failure, recovery, customer switching, and word-of-mouth behaviors. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 26(2), 180-194. doi:10.1080/10548400902864800