

Quality Service Starts with a Reservation: Setting and applying standards

Abstract

Quality service may differ between a quick service restaurant and a fine dining establishment, but the assessment of service should be matched against style, brand and intent of the business. Is the service provided at a hospitality business aligned with the goals and objectives of the business? Quality has a relationship with price and value, and a business can frame its service structure with that relationship. Good service is efficient, friendly and directly correlated to the style of the restaurant. This case study assesses the definition of good service, and how to describe quality service. The case focuses on an upscale independent restaurant with the business dilemma of how to best engage employees with service quality standards and delivery.

KEY WORDS: service, quality, customer satisfaction, hospitality

Summary of the Case

Service quality has been a hospitality issue for many years and will continue to be a hospitality business concern going forward. The service industries in general, and in particular the hospitality industry, continues to grow and is an increasingly important part of our economy. Service has also become a differentiating factor in lodging and restaurant selection by guests. Many see the hospitality industry from a guest perspective. The outside view sees businesses that appear straight forward, guests come in and order and you, as a business, provide them the service they need and want. The issue is that each hospitality business has its own brand of service, both personal service from employees and the structured professional service offered by each business and or company in a more regimented environment. The literature review highlights SERVQUAL dimensions and levels as well as other service management aspects. Finally, the case describes a service business dilemma and asks the reader to make recommendations for correcting the identified service issues.

Class Goals

The goal of this case is to stress the importance of service and service quality.

- Students will be able to define quality service.
- Students will be able to recommend service improvements
- Students will be able to compare, and contrast service methods and tools applied in different service settings.
- Students will be able to assess appropriate service levels at diverse hospitality employment environments.

Teaching Framework and Sequence of Discussion Questions

Business Dilemma outcome: It is recommended that students/ readers follow through on their role as consultant. First, they should identify the actual problem, (from their perspective); and then, after consideration, recommend a strategic direction and be able to justify their recommendations. Note: whether with groups or individuals, it is likely that different problems will be identified. Identification of the problem could be accomplished using a combination of case facts and, if appropriate, further research. Finally, students should develop a list of tactics to improve service quality and ultimately increase sales.

Teaching Objectives

- Students/ readers should be able to outline a service standard and program.
- Students should be able to generate a list of service factors that are important to a business's service and operational goals.
- Students should be able to discuss the relationship of quality service to financial sustainability.
- Students should be able to identify service tools available for operations.
- Students should be able to recommend service tactics for personal and professional strategies.
- Student can utilize Figure 1, Service Specifications, below to frame their discussions and service quality recommendations.

Framework for Classroom Use

This case could be used in a basic service management course and or to augment the service sector in a college of business curriculum. It could also be used to define service and quality in upper level food and beverage and or lodging courses that continually focus on service and its importance to profit. At its most basic level the case could be used to introduce first- or second-year students to service sector dimensions. Class discussion can also be framed at least in part, using the Service Profit Chain (Heskett et al. 2008). This model focuses on product, setting, image, the delivery system and customer perceptions and expectations. The focus of this model is that service has a price-value relationship and therefore there is an intention to return which can be interpreted as customer satisfaction.

Students can examine service encounters at hospitality operations and ask; What is the status of service in a business? What are the current and future service objectives? Do competitors offer quality service? What are the guests service needs? What price will guests pay for service and quality? Finally, students can be asked to evaluate the service of an operation? (Adapted from Rey & Weiland, 1985).

Figure 1

Service Specifications

Business name: Any

1. **PRODUCT NAME:** Service, accommodation, food service, accounting, financial services
2. **PRODUCT TO BE USED FOR:** ensuring customer satisfaction and maintaining revenues.
3. **PRODUCT GENERAL DESCRIPTION:** High quality service: knowledge of products, friendly, pleasant client or guest interaction, good communication.
4. **DETAILED DESCRIPTION:**
 - **GEOGRAPHIC ORIGIN:** Good service can be delivered anywhere and by any business.
 - **TYPE:** High quality. Service so good that people comment on it.
 - **GRADE:** PRIME
 - **PRODUCT SIZE:** Optimal amounts of services determined by set service quality standards, responsible and flexible.
 - **PORTION SIZE:** Allocated by guest interaction and complexity of transaction.
 - **YIELD 100%,** No excuses for inadequate service.
 - **BRAND NAME:** Establish your company or business's service brand.
5. **PRODUCT TEST PROCEDURES:** The quality of services rendered will be evaluated based on planning efforts and the resources available, markets identified, and standards set. Service will also be judged based on what we say service is in our mission, goals and objectives. Observation will be key to the service data collection process as well as customer comment cards.
6. **PROCESSING:** Managers, planners, employees and all decision-makers should work collectively to develop service standards to serve a diverse market.
7. **SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS AND REQUIREMENTS:** Service should be developed keeping in mind that service is a sustainable asset.
8. **COST RANGE:** Service has upfront costs and then has a minimal cost to deliver, the cost of NOT providing good service needs to be forecasted. Upfront costs include training, providing all necessary support for service to be delivered.

(O'Halloran & Deale, 2001).

In more advanced courses several exercises could be used to apply the theory of delivery quality service to business operations.

1. *Observe a service interaction:* Students could be assigned to visit a restaurant, retail operation at a mall and or a hotel to observe the interaction. They should document their observations and be prepared to share their observations with the class. Documentation could be detailed as: who, what, where, when, how and why? Then details could be included that could include timing, personal communication/interaction, customer and employee responsiveness etc.
2. *Menu Exercise:* Share a menu with students (groups or individual) and ask them to detail the level of service that would be expected based on their assessment of the menu. Students can use the Service Specification included as a framework for this exercise.
3. *Layout exercise:* Pass out a restaurant layout and design (groups or individuals); this can be tied to a menu or discuss with the class the parameters of the restaurant that should be used. That is: type, style, level of service indicated, day, meal period etc. The objective will be to staff the restaurant; how many employees, host, servers, bussers, bartenders etc.
4. *Review of Trip Advisor or other social media reviews:* Identify reviews from a social media outlet (Trip Advisor or equivalent) and ask students to plan the business response to the review, if necessary. (www.tripadvisor.com). Business reviews in general can also be found online via a number of sites such as: Amazon Customer Reviews, Angie's List, Choice, Trustpilot, Test Freaks, Which?, Consumer Reports, TripAdvisor, Yelp, Google My Business, Yahoo! Local Listings, G2 Crowd, Trust Radius, Salesforce AppExchange, Better Business Bureau, Glassdoor, Facebook Ratings and Reviews, Twitter and your own website (Kolowich, 2017).
5. *Project: Service Plan:* For a project, students could be asked to

develop a service plan for a property and or service operation. Students could identify a hospitality and or service operation, observe and assess it and then offer recommendations. The additional readings below offer a variety of resources to assist in this project and can also provide framework for student efforts to organize their plan.

Conclusion

The issue of service quality has been discussed and debated for any years. The point may be that service standards have changed over time and that service businesses need to adapt. For example, in private clubs, the formality of the dining room, i.e. dress codes, table service etc. has been softened to meet the needs of the membership and in restaurants and hotels service should be offered to match consumer demand. This case provides a vehicle for the discussion and analysis of service systems. The addition of technology to a service system will continue to guide the future of service and its expectations. However, guests want to be offered and provided good service experiences.

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