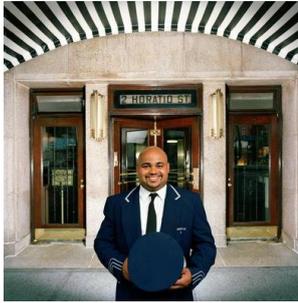


A BRAND DEVALUED STRUGGLES TO REGAIN ITS PRESTIGE



We continue to bemoan the obvious — the decline of Service and the devaluation of Product. We are what we say we are. Our Brand is verified by our Consumer, based upon how we delivered on the expectation(s). Their Experience is impacted by what they feel, how all their senses interacted, and how their perceptions turned into reality - the validation process.

The Retail landscape has changed forever, and we have tried to adapt. Doing more with less. Our Guest/Visitor/Customer sees all this, yet even with adjusted prices, the value, perceived and real, has declined. Intense competition has theoretically moved our product forward, most notably thread count, flat screen TVs, Spa massages, technology galore, actress clothing lines, and celebrity chefs. Our Corporate Offices continually hammer us to cut costs - a corner here, a slash there - yet remain true to our mission. No Bean Counter has improved the level of performance - efficiency, yes; excellence, no.

Bad news travels quickly, as we confront complexities daily. The old "Word of Mouth" has exponentially advanced to various platforms on the Internet, and Social Media has replaced the old Rating Systems we and our Consumers depended upon (Even those are changing - Mobil Travel Guide to Forbes).

All our Stakeholders clamor for our attention: owners want a greater return, management wants expenses reduced, vendors want timely payment, and our poor staff want some security and stability. With all these pressures roiling, we still have a business to run.

Ultimately, if you cannot establish, raise and inspire service standards of excellence, your Brand will continue to be devalued. Mired in mediocrity and fright, our Retail Industry has lost focus — exceeding the expectations of our Guests/Customers, as measured by their satisfaction. That is the bottom line — our Consumer, his hopes and our delivery. This situation is not corrected by discounts, clever promotions, or throwing marketing dollars down that "black hole". Here, please take the sleeves of my vest.

We probably have not placed much attention on our facilities. Preventive maintenance has been postponed; fresh paint, maybe next year; new furniture and renovation, pushed further out. Our product has undergone similar transformation, deals galore, smaller portions, amenities reduced or down graded, the list goes on. So, what is left - Service! This is your cutting edge differentiation, your future - building that enthusiastic relationship with your Customer. That smile, courtesy shown, care demonstrated and attention focused is the new currency. That is how you not only retain your current fans but also recruit new ones.

We need to rethink what makes that memorable experience, and we need to validate the Experience. Talk to your Guests/Customers, bring them into the equation, make them feel special; they want you to succeed. Invest in your people; they are your Ambassadors and carry your message. Keep an eye on the competition.

Task your Associations to better represent your interests. Manage costs, but do not strangle what makes you special. What you do, do well. Addiction to prior year numbers will divert your energies. Above all, emphasize service. That is the true differentiator in our business! It is very difficult to resurrect a reputation, once diminished! Corporations do not have a face, but you do - the face of Service and personal attention to needs. You lose your touch, you lose your name.

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