

*Organizations in the hospitality industry are faced with streamlining budgets and workforces. Yet, customers' needs or demands for excellent service have certainly not decreased. How does a business maintain the same outstanding customer service standards with fewer staff members and tighter financial resources?*

## How to Do More with Less—Without Sacrificing Superior Customer Service

Customer service is without question the cornerstone of the hospitality industry. Yet, the industry is not immune to the turbulent economy. Many businesses have been asked to control or cut costs in their customer service organizations. This leaves many folks wondering how to sustain service excellence, while meeting cost-cutting objectives.

### **Avoid De-Valuing the Importance of Customer Service**

Ironically, in a recessionary economy, customer service is perhaps more important than ever in retaining loyal customers. With more pricing competition, customers are seeking greater value for the price. This means many previously loyal customers may entertain the idea going elsewhere, particularly if they begin to receive less than superior customer service.

### **Become High-Touch with Customers**

Now is the time to step up communication with your customers. It has never been so critical. Reinforce with your existing staff the importance of answering your customers' calls and emails on a timely basis, or asking at every opportunity how the service level has been. Consider implementing a service guarantee.

### **Consider a Customer Satisfaction Survey**

Surveys have traditionally been seen as an expensive and cumbersome initiative. However, with technology advancements and the proliferation of online marketing, email databases, etc., conducting a customer satisfaction survey is quite achievable and cost-effective. Consider putting a customer service poll up on your company website. Include a link to a survey in any ongoing marketing or promotional materials to clients.

### **Examine your Current Staff**

If your staffing resources have been trimmed, rethink your current staff. What talents are not being fully utilized? Consider having informational interviews with staff to learn more about their interests and goals. You will probably learn things about the people you work with that you didn't know before. Think of new ways to develop and mentor your existing staff to maximize everyone's potential. This will benefit both your staff and the business.

### **Become High-Touch with Your Staff**

The economic climate has most people worried about their futures. This can easily contaminate a workplace with fear and anxiety, creating a toxic environment that will inevitably contaminate customer service. Keep an open communication line with your staff about the business, and maintain positive relationships. These relationships can boost morale, which in turn boosts great customer service. If your staff trusts you and feels positive about their work, great customer service will naturally follow.

### **Don't ignore the importance of acknowledgement.**

Invest in an incentive program for outstanding performers. The reward doesn't have to be fancy, something as simple as a dinner certificate or movie tickets could create positive competition and motivation. Regular and sincere acknowledgement of service achievements is generally underestimated, but for many the feeling of being respected and acknowledged is a major component of job satisfaction.