THE CONCEPT OF HOSPITALITY AND ITS NATIONAL AND CULTURAL SPECIFICITY

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Abstract

Essentially, hospitality is the reception of visitors, guests, or strangers. More specifically, it refers to the provision of hosting services and describes a positive relationship between the host, who is acting with goodwill, and the guest, who is most commonly seeking food, shelter, safety, and/or entertainment. To create a comprehensive hospitality definition, it is first important to explore what hospitality means as a concept. The word 'hospitality' itself has emerged from the Latin word 'hospes', which means 'visitor', 'guest', or 'stranger', and this is a good starting point when creating a working hospitality definition. Hospitality is about extending a welcome to a visitor and providing them with some form of comfort. A good way to think of the objective of hospitality is to view it as the provision of a 'home away from home' for people to enjoy. [Adler, N. J. and Graham, J. L. (1989).]

Hospitality goes beyond being nice.

So often people think of hospitality as simply smiling and giving friendly service. That is certainly important and by all means, smile and be friendly. But remember that customers want authentic service coupled with high quality and ease of use.

Keywords: hospitality, smiling, nice, guest, visitor.

INTRODUCTION

Are multiculturalism, multinational and globalization disheartening words? Or are they enriching words? Is the world fast becoming a global village? Are we losing our cultural values, or enriching them? What is the role of diversity in the contemporary world of tourism and hospitality? What is the significance of sensitivity in cross- cultural encounters and how do we maximize benefits from such encounters?

Perhaps answers may vary based on our individual experiences. Culture can be the source of cooperation, cohesion, and progress, instead of conflict, disintegration and failure (Harris 2004). What is important for society is to learn to use diversity to the advantage of all human beings, specifically in the tourism industry where diversity has been growing for several decades and continues as the contemporary trend. [Barker, S. and Hartel C. E. J. (2004)]

Focus of effective learning is in a family setting in a home environment. For example Japanese learn at home how to provide service and look after the visiting guest. Perhaps

their quality concept of service starts at home. No wonder the Japanese management practices led to the initiation of the "zero defects" system. The fact that most developed economies are fast becoming a service economy is now well established. Consider the example of the USA, it is noted that 77 percent of its gross national product (GNP) and 80 percent of its workforce comes from the service sector (Sizoo et. al 2005). Similarly other Asad Mohsin 305 industrialized nations of the Western Europe, Canada and Japan show this trend (Malhotra et al 2005). Globalization means that it may be important from a commercial and social perspective to understand how we should deal with people from diverse backgrounds. If we aim to develop a society of knowledge–based skills, which values learning and service to others, we need to be aware of cultural sensitivities and avoid potentially embarrassing situations which may cause both commercial and social harm. This paper aims to highlight the significance of sensitivity in cross- cultural encounters and how to maximize benefits from such encounters. [Gilbert, D. and Terrata, M. (2001).]

In recent years services such as education, hotels, fast food, banks and investment agencies, have become increasingly global businesses. International trade in the service sector in 1999 was noted to have shown a growth rate of 175 percent and today makes up one-fifth of all world trade (Stauss and Mang 1999). Such notable growth in a global context necessitates that service companies have to conduct their business with operators and customers of different cultures. Working with people from our own culture can be a challenge at times; let alone working and dealing with people from different cultures (Wang and Matilla, 2010). If we consider culture as a set of norms, rules and customs, then people from different cultures must also have differences in their norms and customs. This leads to different expectations from different cultures. If service managers are unaware of core cultural expectations of customers it will result in a gap in performance of service. One could consider two options – Because customers are different to us we cannot satisfy them, so just ignore them, or, the other option could be to learn about their core cultural values and see what best can be done for them. It is also observed that customers in a foreign land or in different cultural settings are prepared to settle for less which eases the process of pleasing them. Though little research has been done on the impact of culture on services in tourism and hotels but as the significance becomes more apparent, research is also growing in the area. Lessons could be learned from other service industries for example research tells us that international travellers expected to be least satisfied with airline in-flight service are the Japanese, as indicated by customer surveys (Zeithaml and Bitner 1996).

Evidence emerges from studies such as Harris (2004) that service encounters between providers and customers are influenced by the following:

• Sense of self and space – what validates one''s sense of self within a particular group? What constitutes adequate space between individuals such as distance or closeness?

• Communication and language – consider verbal and non-verbal exchange, body language and gestures etc.

• Dress and appearance – typical or distinctive outward garments, dress requirements for various events eg business or religious etc.

• Food and feeding habits – selection, presentation, diet or religious needs, use of cutlery or chopsticks or hands.

• Time and time consciousness – sense of time exact or relative, precise or casual.

• Relationship – how are individual or organizational relationships determined (eg age, gender, status, wealth, power)? Family arrangements, use of titles etc.

• Values and norms – customs, and practices. [Geddie, M. W., DeFranco, A. L. and Geddie, M. F. (2005).]

Conclusion

The study highlights that values, beliefs and behaviour that tourism industry employers seek and train and what the tourists expects are taught best at a young age. Families and/or social groups set the benchmark for future behaviour and assist in tourism and hospitality service employees perceiving what could be the need of people when away from home. Such a mind-set impacts quality of service, innovation and desire to serve the tourists. Further, the study highlights the importance of relational thinking in practice. This relational perspective usually embraces considerations and behaviour and how far have we gone in training the tourism workforce in cross-cultural management skills? It is suggested that future research in tourism explores potential benefits from training and development to address cross-cultural sensitivities and help provide a delightful experience for all tourists.

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