

James Berkeley's Profitable Growth Notes:

Some Instant Value For Hotel Executives

As part of my desire to see outstanding hotels and brands profitably grow, the ordinary dramatically up their game and the lousy to be run out of town, here is some free consulting advice from one of the sharpest consultants in the world. Listen up senior brand executives and managers responsible for operations. I readily pay top dollar for the best rooms and attend meetings around the world in the company of some of the most discerning travellers. My expectation is that I leave with a decent experience and I am treated with the same courtesies accorded to guests paying £200 per night.

- Your doormen are the “public window” into your hotel. Their physical attributes, skills and most importantly, behaviour are highly influential on the impression left with the guest. While tips are the reward for the results of their work, they should never be dependent on them for doing a great job. Reward and recognise them properly.
- “Over there” and “Around the corner to the right” do not mean “let me take you to the room or the business centre.”
- Don’t leave me hanging around waiting to be seated in the restaurant or worse treat me like a serf at his master’s table “I don’t see your name down here on our reservations list”. Find a way to get me a table, and provide my guests drinks
- I reasonably expect to be greeted by a warm smile, not an over-exposed cleavage or a model doing her best Cara Delevingne impression as she drifts by. I am your customer, make it a fun not a painful experience.
- Your people’s personal hygiene is as important as the clothes they wear and the manners they use. Provide them with the facilities and the cosmetics to look after themselves, close to their interface with the customer.
- Don’t give me high tech in the bedroom that has LED lights blinking at 4AM like some form of water torture. Sleep in your own rooms.
- Equally in-room technology is only fabulous when it provides me, the customer, with a wonderful emotional experience. If I have to spend 5 minutes trying to work out how to adjust the window blinds, the mood lighting, find the local TV news channel or charge my smart phone, you are not in my good books.
- I really don’t care to walk into a room with my name flashing on the TV screen or some local radio station playing muzak. This is not “home” and you are taking me even further away from it. If you want my personal attention, have the General Manager handwrite a personal greeting with your contact details and provide me something of immediate value that I might reasonably want. If you cannot work what that is based on my past preferences or your gentle welcome, I am sorry you are simply dumb.
- If you cannot arm your housekeeping with the knowledge that I don’t wish to be disturbed when I am in the room, you simply haven’t thought through the internal communication process correctly. Privacy is my privilege, don’t discriminately take it away from me.

- Equally room service has two aspects: the speed and quality of the delivery AND the collection. Don't let me tiptoe down corridors that resemble the morning after the night before at a student party.
- If you cannot afford to charge normal prices in a mini-bar, get rid of it. You are either treating me as an idiot or you have little interest in my future custom.
- If you don't think the provision of "free" wifi is on a par with water, lighting and a pleasant in-room aroma, you are stuck in the last century. It is part of the standard package and every bit as essential to the guest experience.
- A reasonable grasp of the English language is now a minimum employment standard for ALL staff in any hotel that has any pretext to cater for international guests.
- 24/7 any call to your property, internal or external, should be answered in 5 rings. You are understaffed if you cannot consistently achieve that level of response.
- Response times to calls, voicemail or email messages to the Reservations, Sales and Corporate Office must at a minimum be answered within 4 hours, in the finest, closer to 2 hours within their normal working day. Messages left outside of those hours should be returned first thing the next day.
- Directors of Sales and Marketing, General Managers and others must never hide behind their assistant's response, "Sir I am afraid, he is in a meeting", or worse, "I am not at liberty to give you his or her personal contact information." Yes, you are, just your direct report doesn't wish to make me his or her priority.
- Train your assistants and others to accurately triage the level of need expressed by the customer and determine the most emotionally satisfying response for the customer, not you.
- Over-familiarity is not a fast-track to a more intimate relationship. You don't know me, and I don't know you. Afford me some respect, I am "Mr" and will remain that until such time that I let you know I wished to be called something else, "Lord Berkeley".
- Your hotels have some of the finest minds using meeting venues for some of the most powerful learning experiences. Particularly on topics with a high impact on the hotel's prosperity, the digital consumer, the customer experience, technological change, and leveraging powerful local and global business relationships. Only twice, and that was a hospitality investment event have I seen the hotel management ask to listen in or indeed participate. Only once, have I seen a General Manager ask me to spend a few minutes helping his own people dramatically improve their own effectiveness. If you don't ask, you don't get.
- I am constantly amazed how rarely the General Manager or any of the senior hotel management, stop to ask during my stay where I might need future help after leaving the hotel, where I am travelling to or seek my advice on how the hotel might be more responsive to my needs and other customers. I have had one General Manager in the past 24 years take it upon himself to ask, set up a personal introduction to a colleague in another property or someone else I am particularly interested in meeting. I have had 250 post-stay surveys, mostly online from Customer Services that I have zero interest in responding to. This is a personal relationship, not a corporate relationship.
- Whenever, I have to demand the hotel staff's direct report to elicit a common sense response, 9 times out of 10 it is because their direct report has not given the subordinate the authority or held them accountable for applying common sense.

- If you insist that your people are your greatest asset, make the back-of-house an environment that they are proud to work and live in. If you don't think the front-of-house impression that the customer sees is not formed by the back-of-house environment and respect accorded to your employees, fire the Hotel Owner, VP Operations and the General Manager.

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