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Hospitality Tips for Employees Serving the Traveling Public

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Hospitality Tips for Employees Serving the Traveling Public
Tourism benefits all of South Dakota. Studies have shown how tourism increases state and local income through increased sales and tax collections. However, the people who receive the primary benefits from tourism are those who provide the services needed by the traveling public.

Increasing the number of visitor days by tourists can mean increased profits for these businesses, and increased employment, wages and tips for the employees of the businesses.

How can you, the provider of services, increase your income and the income to the state from tourism? One way is to understand the tourist, their needs, what they expect when they travel in this state and their attitudes toward the services you provide.

Much can be learned about travelers attitudes toward the services provided in South Dakota from responses to a visitor's opinion survey conducted in 1977 by the Governor's office. From a total of 621 responses, 60.3 percent said their visit to South Dakota was better than they expected, while 36.2 percent said it was about what they expected. In rating their reception by South Dakotan's, only 0.3 percent said their reception was unfriendly while the remaining 99.7 percent referred to their reception as pleasant, friendly or outgoing.

While very few travelers said that services received from places of business in South Dakota were poor, about 46 percent of all respondents said that service was about average. (Table 1)
Table 1. Out-of-State Visitors Rating of Service in South Dakota

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Very good</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Number of responses</th>
<th>Number don't know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Service stations</td>
<td>37.2%</td>
<td>61.5%</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>625</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restaurants</td>
<td>42.3%</td>
<td>54.9%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>557</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visitors Information Centers</td>
<td>74.6%</td>
<td>23.3%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>628</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motels/Hotels</td>
<td>48.1%</td>
<td>49.1%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>575</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campground</td>
<td>55.7%</td>
<td>41.7%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>631</td>
<td>365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shops &amp; Stores</td>
<td>51.8%</td>
<td>48.2%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>726</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public attractions</td>
<td>53.3%</td>
<td>46.9%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>848</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: South Dakota Governor's Visitors Survey, 1977

Only 2 percent of the visitors said they would not recommend a South Dakota vacation to their friends, and 6.4 percent probably would not return to South Dakota at some later time.

Survey results indicate that South Dakotan's are doing a good job of providing services to the traveling public. However, there are still many opportunities for improvement, if South Dakota businesses and employees are going to enjoy the maximum economic benefits from the still growing hospitality-recreation-tourism industry.
People working in the service areas of the hospitality-recreation-tourism industry have a responsible job. They have to work at being a professional, and it takes time and training to become a truly professional business employee who takes the good and the bad in stride. This is the type of employee that the managers of restaurants, motels, hotels, campgrounds, service stations and recreation amusement businesses need and want.

Buying gas, meals at a restaurant or checking into overnight lodging are times when people can relax and think while they wait for service. It is during this period that many travelers wonder what there is of interest to do and see in your city and surrounding area. Their most immediate source of information is you, the desk clerk, the station attendant or waitress. That is why you should be well-informed about attractions, events and activities in your city and surrounding area. You can use literature and area brochures that are available from your local tourist promotion association or chamber of commerce to familiarize yourself with things you may not know about the area. Knowing how to direct travelers to places of interest is very important.

Be clear in giving directions, don't use a lot of unnecessary words and phrases. This can only add confusion to a sometimes already confused traveler.

When giving information on directions or things to do and see, be honest with people. If you don't know the answer to the traveler's question, offer to ask your employer or direct your guest to another source of information. Remember that giving misinformation doesn't contribute to a favorable first impression. In fact, it is worse than not giving any information at all. Also remember that information is better received when given with a smile.

Greeting and Serving the Visitor

It's one thing to have information, but it's another thing to give it willingly and accurately to the visitor. Your success as a professional service employee can be measured by how you approach visitors, how you greet them, and how well you help them enjoy their visit in the area.
With the increased adoption of automation technology in the hospitality-recreation-tourism industry, many people tend to overlook the most important element in serving visitors, the individual. While part of your job may include the operation of machines and the products of it, the real key to successful service is the individual performing the service. That is you, and it depends on how well you answer the visitor's questions and how well you do your job for him.

The starting point then is the visitor; you might begin by asking the following questions: What do they want? What are they like? How can you do a good job of serving the visitor unless you know and understand them, their needs, wants, desires, and peculiarities?

Here are some of the visitor's important wants:

Immediate recognition. You must not forget that the service business means 'service to others.' People want and expect service, so you must not let a customer wait more than a moment to be recognized. It's often impossible to serve the customer immediately, but this is no excuse for not recognizing him. A friendly nod, or 'I'll be with you in a moment, sir' is all that is needed.

Cooperative Service. The customer wants and deserves more than just the bare essentials available from your services. If you take the attitude 'that's so-and-so's job, not mine' you are doing the guest a disservice. When he seeks direction or information you should be able to help or direct him to someone who can.

Competent service. The visitor expects certain standards from you. They expect you to understand the responsibilities of your job and to answer basic questions about the products or services your business is selling.

Here are some steps that others have found helpful in accomplishing these things:

Smile. Every smile of yours should bring two in return -- good investment. Learn to serve with a smile, sell with a smile. And when you have learned
to disagree with a smile, you have reached the height of human understanding and cooperation.

Listen. How can you know what a visitor wants when your mouth is where your ears should be? So often we hear the complaint from tourists, 'I couldn't get through to that man. All I wanted to know was where to buy a paper and he tried to sell me the whole town.' Learn to listen like a child - not for the words but for the meaning. Some visitors have accents (different from yours) or speech impediments. Learn to interpret quickly and courteously.

Be understanding. Whenever you see the need for help, offer it. Have your mind on your customer. What are his needs and desires? If a traveler begins a long list of complaints about the last place of business he was at, listen attentively. After giving him the best service you can, ask if he was satisfied.

Be sincere. Be sure you mean 'thank you' and 'come again' before you say them.

Self Improvement

You can't improve the quality of your performance without continually working on a self-improvement program. Take advantage of honest opportunities to suggest changes in the business or services if you can see where and how they can be improved. While some changes may be very small the results may mean more efficient service and added convenience for you and your customers. If management has confidence in your ability and if your ideas are good, they will appreciate your suggestions.

Learn to be dependable and accept responsibility. There are certain rules and guidelines your manager expects you to follow and you need to comply with them. Use common sense and observe for yourself the basic details of performing your job. This will help your employer to have confidence in you, even in an emergency.

You need to work as if the success of the business depends entirely on you, even though you may not have any ownership in the business. This type of attitude will help you improve your work. As you improve, so will the business, and both you and the business stand to benefit.
Evaluate yourself in the following areas regularly:

1. How do you get along with your guests and fellow workers?
2. Do you enjoy your job?
3. Do you have a good attitude toward your supervisor?
4. Do you like working with people?
5. Do you treat every visitor with patience, courtesy, and respect?

Helpful Hints for Service Employees Working with the Traveling Public

Motel or Hotel Employees. How the Hotel or Motel Employee Can Effectively Deal With the Tourist Customer.

Recognition of visitors is not difficult when they are seeking housing accommodations.

What are some of the visitors special problems in seeking lodging accommodations?

1. They may be trying to duplicate previous pleasant experiences in lodging accommodations, or they may have had unpleasant experiences and be trying to avoid repetition.

2. They may need adequate accommodations for a family, two couples or pets.

3. They may have the problem of adjusting to different price levels of accommodations in different areas.

4. They may be particularly sensitive to interference with their rest, indifference to requests for service, unnecessary delays in making accommodations available or in checking out.
5. They may not adjust easily to different beds, ventilation or temperatures.

6. They may need information about the community.

How can the motel and hotel employee help the visitor seeking lodging accommodations?

1. The employee can provide information about the community and adjoining areas. (A display of information leaflets in the office is often helpful.) If a sufficient supply is available, a sample pamphlet in each room is helpful.

2. The employee needs to understand the problems of tourists and provide service and accommodations which meet their needs.

3. If accommodations are not available to meet the requirements of the visitor (family needs, pets, etc.), the attendant may refer them to motels, houses or rooming houses with required accommodations. (Referrals may be made by telephone.)

4. If asked, the hotel or motel employee should be able to explain to the visitor why certain charges for service are justified.

5. The employee will try to offer constructive solutions to the accommodation problems of visitors.

6. The employee will be sensitive to visitors' complaints and try to correct errors, if possible.

Of what particular value is this customer?

1. The customer is the reason for the existence of the hotel or motel.

2. A pleasant experience may be enough encouragement for them to return, or to refer your establishment to their friends. 'One day longer' means more direct income to hotels and motels than any other service.
Because of the customers' length of stay, the hotel and motel has the best opportunity to create favorable impressions. Hotels and motels are key facilities that influence tourists to stay longer in the community. Lack of attention by employees of hotels and motels might be the number one reason why tourists go quickly on their way.

These principles in the motel/hotel section also can apply to campgrounds.

Managers, Assistant Managers and Those in Executive Capacity

Know your customers and their needs. It is essential for all hotel and motel people to make friends. Old fashioned hospitality never fails to leave a guest with a cordial feeling toward the hotel and motel. Nothing leaves a more lasting favorable impression on the guest than to be given an "extra" greeting by a hotel executive.

Restaurant Employees. Dealing Effectively With the Customer

What are your diners' special needs in your community?

1. They are often in a hurry because they have other commitments, perhaps miles away.

2. They may have had several unsatisfactory experiences in "eating out" and are hoping that this will be an improved experience.

3. They may want their eating experiences to be as interesting as their other travel experiences.

4. Some people have a sensitive appetite. They have to make adjustments to new food, a change in water, a different type of service, variations in climate or irregularity of meals. Some may not travel well, and therefore can't eat their usual meals. These things cause them to be more susceptible to digestive upsets; often blaming their upset on the food they have eaten rather than to the recent changes in routine.
5. Listen attentively to the diners food problems and make suggestions appropriate to their needs.

6. Some may have special dietary problems such as salt free foods, etc.

How might you, the restaurant employee, handle these problems of the diner?

1. Give prompt, courteous service that help the diners to relax and enjoy their meal and their surroundings.

2. Suggest additional services the restaurant has to offer -- telephones, lounges, special attractions.

3. Suggest the tourist take information folders about the community. (These folders can be obtained from the Chamber of Commerce and be attractively displayed at the cashier's stand.)

4. Make the tourists' eating experience something to remember and talk to their friends about by suggesting the specialties of the house and new or unusual dishes.

5. When the visitors inquire about special foods not served by your restaurant, refer them to a restaurant that specializes in these dishes.

Of what particular value is this customer?

1. They are often willing to spend more for their meals than the local residents because they feel this is a special occasion and want to do it in style.

2. They will make definite recommendations about restaurants to their friends that travel.

3. They will return to restaurants of their choice whenever they are in that community. Most people do not like to experiment with restaurants; they want to find good food and good service and will return to it.
Service Station Employee. Dealing Effectively With Tourist Customers

What are the tourists' special problems when seeking service and information?

1. They may feel unsure of themselves and not be able to adequately describe what information they really need.

2. Tourists often are not aware of community attractions and may speed on to the next community. Frequently, when they talk with their friends at home, they discover, to their disappointment, they have passed some of the things they should have seen.

3. They may have incomplete directions and need help to find their way.

4. They may have been misdirected and are unhappy about having to retrace their travel route.

5. They may need information about road hazards, detours and weather.

How can service station and transportation personnel help the tourist with his problems?

1. Ask if the tourist needs maps or information.

2. Suggest the tourist see the community's current leading attractions (name them).


4. Know basic factual information about your community (population of town, scenic attractions, eating places, etc.) and willingly provide information, upon request.

5. Direct tourist to Chamber of Commerce or other information source for information on what to see in your community.

6. Volunteer information about condition of highways that the tourist proposes to take.
Of what particular value is this customer to service stations?

1. Since the tourists' time is usually limited, they want you to look after all their car needs -- a new fan belt, a new tire, if necessary, and a full tank of gas.

2. When they receive "plus" service, they are further convinced that they are doing business with the right oil company and often encourage their friends to deal with this company.

Service station attendants usually find themselves besieged with tourists during the summer. Since tourists ask about the same questions and seem to have the same problems, station attendants need to guard against acting bored and giving disinterested, matter-of-fact answers. Attendants who maintain the attitude that people are interested will find they can learn a lot about people and places by giving good service and accurate information to tourists.

How Does the Employee Benefit?

As an employee working at a motel, hotel, restaurant or gas station you might ask, "Why should I work so hard just to please the customer?"

There are a number of possible benefits that employees can enjoy by doing more than just an average job. Some of the more obvious rewards are:

1. In those businesses where tips are paid, the employee providing quality service usually receives the larger tip.

2. Your attitude towards your work and quality of service provided will have a direct effect on your future raises and promotions.

3. If your employment is seasonal and you want to be rehired next year at the same business or have your employer provide a letter of reference for you, a job well done in past years will be to your credit.
There is a feeling of satisfaction by knowing that you have done a good job.

For each individual there may be other personal reasons for wanting to do a good job, so you may want to add some reasons of your own to the list.

Most people respond to the kind of treatment they are given. If you believe that your customers are bad tempered, unreasonable or overbearing, perhaps you should examine your own attitudes. Did you greet them cheerfully? Are you giving prompt service or at least reassuring them you are doing the best you can?

Tourists take home with them many attitudes that influence their image of South Dakota such as our farms and ranches, open spaces, our lakes and our hills. Let's be sure they also take home an image of hospitality and friendly people.
Footnotes


b/ Acknowledgement is made to the Mississippi Cooperative Extension Service, Mississippi State University, for permission to reproduce much of the contents in this section of the publication.