

**Guess who wrote this article? He did not want me to tell you  
– you guess. He was CEO of a major hotel group.**

## **THE COLD HARD FACTS OF HOTEL BUSINESS – SERVED RAW**

*Welcome to a world of cretins, controversy, and crappy behaviours – with just enough humor to stop  
you tearing your hair out*



This is not a usual PR-related or performance-focused article but a ‘controversial’ way of highlighting the cold hard facts of working in the hotel industry.

Like any business in the world, hospitality is far from a squeaky-clean operation. In fact, in this line of work, we face unusual and controversial situations almost every day. Weirdoes and wackos of all descriptions pile copious amounts of crap on us from morning till night, and yet we must still wade through it all with a smile. In a world that often stinks, humor is, and always will be, our biggest ally.

### **A hotel's true purpose**

Hotels are machines to make money. Profit (for hotels/corporations) simply takes precedence before people – employees and guests. Sad? Yes. But do remember that money controls the world. And it will always be like this.

Also remember that so-called financial sharks never fall in love with a hotel’s assets or its brand; they simply buy or develop a property specifically to resell it at a profit at a later date. They’re in it for the numbers, not employees or guests. They couldn’t care less about them.

### **Elusive Hospitality**

From the perspective of an employee who has contact with guests, hospitality is: “I will help you, and you will help me. It's all in the details according to what you need done, whom you ask, how you ask, and how much you tip. You want to be treated with care and respect? Shake my hand and put some money in it. Very good. Thank you. That's what we call a hospitality business transaction. Now, what do you need? I’m very happy to help you...”

## **Definition of Service**

Those who do not have will always be faced to serve those who do – it's a simple fact of life. Problem is, some customers (i.e. the rude and ignorant kind) regard their server as someone who is beneath them, and treat them with little respect.

Has the service industry done itself a disservice by continuing to let customers manipulate hotel employees?

Regardless of what has been stated in the past, the customer is NOT always right. We all know this. That's why service is not about being upfront and honest. Instead, service is about minimizing negativity and creating an illusion of perfection.

Here's how it is done: assess, smile, lie, look directly into the eyes, barter, manipulate, convince, lie again, smile again – and in most cases it will work.

## **The employee's prayer**

"Please, dear god. Please give me the strength to not slap the unbearable, unreasonable nagging guests whose bitchiness knows no bounds."

Every day, hotel employees must face complete and utter arseholes whose only pleasure in life it seems is to shit on those beneath them.

Why does this happen? Why do normally well-balanced people leave their manners and morals at the door of a hotel and become total fiends upon check in?

It's as though they believe payment for a room gives them free reign to do whatever they please – including treating hotel employees like something unpleasant they have stepped in.

How many of these mean people have we encountered? They do so much damage to the pride and confidence of hotel employees that in most cases it is better to throw these guests out of the hotel, put them on the blacklist, share the info with other hotels, and never accept them again.

## **Prejudice and discrimination**

A rule of thumb to be remembered by all: "A person of culture should make every effort to hide his frustration or dislike from those who've had nothing to do with its origins."

We are all humans with different likes, dislikes, nationalities, religions, characteristics, shapes, sizes etc. but no one is better than anyone else; it's as simple as that.

Respect for all is a basic requirement – especially in the hotel business, which is a "people business." This applies to both hotel guests and staff. This is non-negotiable.

## **Hospitality as a career**

Once a hotel whore, always a hotel whore.

No doubt about it, the hotel industry will consume you almost entirely. You will have very little time for yourself and family, and no time at all to socialize. In fact, outside of work, you'll be too exhausted to do almost anything – "You made me a whore, and then you beat me for whorishness!"

After many years of this rigmarole, you may think of yourself as too washed up and useless to do anything else. In some cases, you may think you just get paid to be abused by guests.

But this is the goddamn hotel business. You either strap it on hard and go at it full speed, exploring every possible way to succeed, or, if you can't handle it – go fishing.

For those that can handle it, this can be a rewarding career which, amongst other perks, gives you a fantastic opportunity to travel the world, if that's what you like to do.

### **Front Desk (The frontline battleground)**

Guests will say and do almost anything to get an upgrade upon arrival. But their words and actions rarely work. In hotels, it's a case of money talks and bullshit walks. Threatening a front desk agent will get you nowhere – apart from possibly the worst room in the hotel (most likely with your credit card cancelled).

Perhaps the worst side of guests is seen upon check-out. We all know nobody likes to part with money, but accommodation and services rendered have to be paid for. It's as simple as that. There's really no need to slap the top of the counter and shout when the bill is higher than expected. This is not the fault of the agent. And please don't embarrass yourself by asking to see proof of everything that you signed for during your stay. It's all there on the bill – and you signed for it!

The most disputed charge in any bill is always the mini bar. In most cases, guests get away with such disputes because a hotel will not accuse them of lying (at least not in public). In these situations, a one-to-one conversation between the manager and the guest can have positive as well as negative results for both parties.

It just so happens that, among the most stolen items in any hotel, mini bar goods always rank among the highest. The maids, the bellmen, the repairmen, the supervisors, the children of the guests, the joiners and others – all surreptitiously help themselves to items from the mini bar.

And the chancers don't end there – among the worst are the guests that intentionally report cash missing from their rooms, and then rudely badger the receptionist with the expectation that the hotel will simply give them the money. However, as soon as the hotel offers to call the police to help sort things out, all is forgotten and the would-be victims disappear forever from the hotel. Cheap bastards.

### **The concierge (The Machiavellian)**

He is absolutely the master of all tricks and has the special ability to calm any situation, bring out the humor, and make people relax; he is simply incredible. A good concierge is usually worth much more than what he gets paid, but, of course, what he takes home is way beyond his official salary – and in most cases he deserves it.

He knows how to get things done at the right time, at the right place, for the right guest, and, most important, for the right tip...

Concierges at top/deluxe hotels don't panic and are not stressed people; they are in control of their own destiny. Nothing ever really seems to bother them and they know that sooner or later, hotel guests will need their assistance.

There is a saying that "a good concierge can sell snow to the Eskimos." Can you imagine what a good concierge could sell to a first-time visitor to a city? They have an answer for every request – no matter how weird – and have a distinct knack for being able to tell an annoying guest to "get lost" without offending them. That's talent.

## **Bellmen, bellhops, and porters** (The source of spicy information)

All over the world, bellmen are very serious about their tips. They are masters at relieving people of small cash, and they are amazingly adept at identifying guests who are generous, or tight, when it comes to tipping.

They know exactly which clients to suck up to – and in their world the Arabs, Russians, and Americans always receive faster and better attention than the British, French, and Italians. Towards the bottom of the pecking order are the Japanese and Koreans, who are not used to tipping, and right at the bottom are the tour groups. Why? Money talks. It's as simple as that.

In general, the bellmen are the most informed people in the hotel. With direct access to several parts of the hotel, they know all of the gossip – of the love affairs between employees, of the guests who invite employees to their rooms (especially the young and good-looking ones), of the affairs among the guests, the mood of the boss on any particular day, the suppliers who try to push contraband items, the sneaky employees who try to take advantage of the hotel services, and even the size of your shoes...

Want to know what's happening in a hotel? Simply ask the bellmen.

## **Housekeepers demand the utmost respect**

Every door a housekeeper unlocks leads him or her into the world of the unknown. Hotel rooms are home of the good, the bad and the incredibly ugly, and when someone misbehaves, they generally leave a huge mess.

There is nothing easy about dealing with other people's filth; getting down on your hands and knees to spray, scour, polish and wipe away dirt. There is nothing easy about scrubbing a toilet bowl on a Sunday morning while your family waits at home for a long- overdue get together. And there is definitely nothing easy about being sexually harassed by a disturbed guest.

Strangely, it's generally the so-called important guests who tend to leave their rooms in the most disgusting states: all dirty sheets, spilt drinks, empty pizza boxes, used syringes, bloody towels tucked behind furniture, used condoms sagging from the bin or floating in the toilet bowl, broken sex toys, used tampons in the bathtub. Some even go so far as to wipe their arses on the curtains or duvet covers. Why, I will never know.

There are also the instances of vomit on the carpet, piss on the couch and floor, children who shit the bed, children who draw all over the wallpaper. Do you want more?

How many times have coffee makers in rooms been used for boiling a guest's panties? What do you actually say to a guest who does this and then attempts to dry their panties on top of a lamp – a massive fire hazard – staining the lamp in the process? How do you suitably clean the coffee maker? Most likely, you'll have to throw it away.

And what do you say to a guest who mistakes the in-room safe for a microwave, and then calls the front desk to complain that "it's not working." Obviously, they're an imbecile of the highest order – but you can't say this!

Then you have the rich guests from specific regions who normally take the most expensive suites, or the entire floor, and sleep till the afternoon and order dinner at 2am. This is all fine and well, of course, unless you're unlucky enough to encounter the same rich guy who decided to slaughter and butcher a lamb in his bathroom, and then cook the animal on a disposable barbecue in his suite. There was blood everywhere – much to the shock of the chambermaids who had to clean the room the following day. God knows how he managed to smuggle a live lamb into his room.

The chambermaids really do deserve sympathy and appreciation for the work they do as many times they are faced with revolting situations. They are pivotal to the smooth operation of any hotel, but these unlucky people very seldom get promoted. Why is this? And why does the housekeeping team – one of the largest, and arguably one of the most important, departments in any hotel – continue to receive very little recognition?

As a side note, bed bug infestations are on the increase and are a real concern for hotels. But this is definitely not the fault of the chambermaids. This is on the heads of irresponsible managers who are too stingy to pay for regular fumigation. You should do this at least once a month, you idiots!

### **Fancy eateries in hotels**

Have you ever faced a moody and half-awake chef cooking 5kg of bacon for breakfast at 5.30am? You may want to stay away from him. If he doesn't harm you, the smoke from the bacon will. The poor chef has to somehow keep the bacon warm and crispy till the end of breakfast – and this is no easy task.

For your own safety, I also strongly advise that you never try to argue with a temperamental and pissed-off Executive Chef in a buzzing kitchen. Executive Chefs are top professionals. They are extremely creative, disciplined, precise and dominant. However, their pursuit of perfection can sometimes see them behave like maniacs. Go against what they say and, well, you can expect flying plates and, if you're really unlucky, maybe even flying knives.

If you've just annoyed the Executive Chef and someone shouts, "Duck!", take their advice; they won't be talking about the food. My suggestion: Never yell at an Executive Chef. It doesn't matter if you're the General Manager or the Chairman of the Board. And don't be fooled by images of the Executive Chef smiling and holding a glass of wine – he/she is simply promoting the hotel.

As for the stylish Maître D's (monochrome penguins?) who speak four-to-five languages, have worked in many fine hotels worldwide, and have vast experience dealing with guests and employees in all kinds of situations – they are very much the 'prima donnas' of hotels, and it's always amazing to watch how they operate.

Maître D's just love to show off and can always be found kissing the arses of filthy rich clients in the hope of receiving big tips (you should never dare cheat a Maître D' of his/her tips).

Maître D's are amazingly adept at understanding people and also in handling difficult situations. Gossipy yet discreet, they are first-class manipulators and will not hesitate to take revenge. Piss them off, and they can do serious damage.

### **Hotel waiters schmooze their way to tips**

"Good evening sir, I am your waiter this evening and will take good care of you and will fulfill all of your food desires. Vegan, gluten free, no salt, no sugar – the restaurant is delighted to comply with all your wishes. I am more than happy to run 29+ times between your table and the kitchen because my job is to make you, my guest, happy. Also, you'll be happy to know I am extremely good at showing how important you are in front of all the other guests dining here.

"The special tonight is duck a l'orange with old-fashioned ratatouille (from last week actually). With this very fine dish, a bottle of our '97 Barbera will go perfectly. In case this is over the top for you, we also have a cheap bottle of plonk from the Ural Mountains. I can serve it in the most expensive and tall glasses that we have, which is bound to impress your lady friend. I think that a Russian wine will suit her well, because based on my long experience of serving and judging people, your guest may have difficulty distinguishing a red wine from a rose wine. Fine with me...

"You know, and I know, that your partner just let her napkin fall on the floor on purpose; she just wants you to admire her legs and her mini (almost-not-there) skirt. Don't worry, I will pick up the napkin as we wouldn't want her ample breasts to pop out of her top as she bends over. Of course, I will take my time bringing you a new napkin so you have plenty of time to admire her legs.

"Ah. Here's the new napkin. The leg show is over for now, I'm afraid. But we do have some wonderful desserts, and our largest will delight your partner. I will even throw in two liqueurs on the house. I am very accommodating and will go out of my way to please you.

"Now that I have pleased you, let's get down to serious business. I can definitely help you decide on the amount of tip that you should leave. Twenty per cent of the total bill is just fine, especially as you don't want me to tell you in front of your guest that your credit card has been declined. Nor do you want to hear from the valet that you now have a punctured tire – due to nails from the construction site next door, of course.

"Please remember that we waiters are underpaid to deal with people like you. In case you would like to increase the tip to 25%, I will shake your hand with utmost respect and will escort both of you to your car – which will mightily impress your lady friend, of course..."

### **Service with a smile**

- Does a hotel really care if a guest decides to mix cheap soda water with a 1961 Chateau Margaux? While this is a clear insult to the sommeliers, this is what the guest wants and this is what they are paying for. So, no – the hotel doesn't care.
- Why are pepper mills in restaurants so big? Simple: to prevent sticky-fingered customers from dropping them into their bags and taking them home. They also provide a much-needed mental escape for waiters who can imagine using the pepper

mills to club their most annoying customers. "You say your steak was overcooked and you refuse to pay, even though you ate most of it?" Whack! Whack! Whack! "Take that!"

- One question on the minds of chefs and waiters around the world is: "Who was the first snooty bitch to start putting sliced cucumber into a glass of water?" "And why?"
- Do you know what waiters will do to you if you sit at a restaurant table without being seated by the hostess? You really don't want to know. It's not good for your health, nor for your prestige. Simply wait to be seated.

### **Dealing with the oldest profession in the world**

The so-called ladies of the night come in all kinds of shapes, sizes, ages, nationalities, revealing dresses – and all have a price tag. They all have the same objectives: Get in fast, get out even faster (unless you can stay and take advantage), and make cash.

Prostitution and hotels are like pancakes and syrup; you can't have one without the other. Some amazing unofficial statistics show that five out of ten men who travel alone and stay in business hotels end-up asking for the so called company during their trip (at least one night out of a three night stay). Three out of ten business women, meanwhile, will also search for company.

While men tend to brag with friends about their indiscretions and how gorgeous their joiners are, women tend to be much more discrete and conduct their escapades privately. As a result, solo female travellers have a much better reputation than solo male travellers – but this can be misleading.

Do hotels care about the indiscretions and morality of their guests? This is a good question that largely remains unanswered.

What we do know is that prostitutes are among the nicest people to front office agents and to security staff (sometimes even leaving a tip). And while hotels will certainly never actively condone nor promote prostitution, we must accept that we are faced with it every single day and night, whether we like it or not.

Guests are invited in a very polite way to register their joiners for the evening/night, but it is difficult for any hotel to ensure that these joiners leave the hotel the following morning. In fact, a good number of them will stay in the room and take advantage of the room service, of the hairdressing, champagne and canapes, event tickets from the concierge etc. and will charge all costs to the room. When the hardworking guest returns to the hotel after a busy day of meetings to be hit by a huge bill – they will normally hit the roof. But it is entirely their fault.

In cases where belongings or cash are missing from the room – well, if the guest didn't ask their joiner to leave before they left for work, they only have themselves to blame. One thing is for sure: they definitely won't want to report the case to the police...

The oldest (and still the best) trick a hotel can employ to get a joiner to leave their property fast is to tell her, or him, that the wife or husband of the person that she/he had a "quickie" with is about to arrive at the hotel. Believe me, no one wants to go through this drama.

## **Indecent proposals**

What's the difference between a prostitute and a married female guest who propositions a young good-looking employee at a hotel, promising him a handsome tip in return?

Sex between staff and guests is strictly forbidden, but rules are often broken. Predatory, sex-hungry guests are common in hotels – women in particular – and, when drunk, they will usually invite staff to their rooms. Some staff might take up the offer – after all, there's no better tipper than a pissed tipper – but most will turn the offer down. When they do, they will usually suffer a barrage of loud insults. And maybe even a slap.

Orgies and group sex parties in communal hot tubs are often caught on hotel CCTV cameras, as are late night skinny dipping sessions in the pools. Of course, these videos will always remain confidential – unless officially requested by the authorities at the request of an enraged spouse.

People really have no shame.

## **Bad behaviour and perverts everywhere**

Many guests seem to forget they are staying in a hotel and start treating the place like their own, often with no respect for the property.

Some people are so bloody rude and disruptive; some are so drunk they forget their room numbers; and some are so pissed they even forget which hotel they are staying at in the first place, often demanding to be let into a room even though they are staying on the other side of town.

Large banquets attract some of the biggest idiots, with drunk guests throwing up all over the place, pissing in plant pots, passing out in restrooms, and stumbling around with no idea how to get home. The most disturbing part? They always blame the hotel.

The poor night staff, at city hotels in particular, have to face the worst kind of behavior: pissed people, rich junkies, drug-induced psychosis, naked revelers, tramps, mad women who undress in the middle of the hotel lobby, and so on. Perverts everywhere.

The weirdoes don't only come out at night though. Take the recent case at a luxury all- villa beach resort where a 'peeping Tom' with a small but sophisticated drone was caught filming a female guest, who was sunbathing au naturel, in what she thought was the privacy of her villa. On the second day, when the peeping Tom sent his drone on another pervy flight, an irate guest who had a gun shot the drone out of the sky and kept it.

You can imagine the arguments. Weird guests at their very best; one with a drone, one with a shotgun. And what should management do? Report them both to the police and kick them out of the resort after charging for the remainder of their stay – plus a hefty fine for the disturbance?

## **Weird and wacky requests**

Hotels receive many weird and wacky requests from their guests, particularly during the night. In some cases, even the most experienced concierges have difficulty providing what is asked for. (Of course, everything comes with a respective charge to the guest).

Take the case of the young couple who, while having dinner in the hotel dining room, decided to get married and requested to have a ceremony in their room, before midnight. Or the widow who requested to go to the hotel rooftop to scatter her dead husband's ashes. Or the customer who asked for a portable air pump to be taken to his room so he could inflate his life-size sex doll (this kind of request is becoming more frequent).

Black satin sheets are now in high demand – I wonder why? – as well as flavored, multicolored condoms. Last minute requests for massage service at 3am are also not unusual. So many weird people out there.

During one particular night, a registered guest called the front desk six times to request that he and his important guests have haggis for breakfast. He would not take no for an answer. Well, the last flight from Scotland departed before his first request, and the local chefs had no idea how to make haggis. Eggs and bacon will have to do, my dear guest.

## **Code of ethics**

Q. Is allowing a registered guest to entertain a prostitute in his hotel room a breach of ethics or morals?

A. As long as the guest complies with the local regulations, he/she can do whatever they wish. What they get up to their rooms is their own business and of course at their own risk.

Branded hotels in particular have a strict and clear code of ethics addressing customers, employees, suppliers, owners, community and sustainability. The reputation and integrity of the hotel and brand is imperative, and all employees are expected to comply with the policy.

But with easy access to booze and bedrooms combined with late night work, it can be very tempting for stressed hotel staff to end-up in one of the hotel beds with one of their colleagues or guests, and the thought of being fired sometimes comes second to instincts.

Guests can sometimes be tricky and request strange things, such as asking the front desk to write a higher amount on their bill than what they actually paid for. Some also ask for different dates to be written on their bill (most likely as they were staying with their lover and don't want their spouse to know). Some customers even offer bribes along with these requests. Talk about a broken moral compass – and in no way should a hotel comply.

As for scams between suppliers and hotel personnel such as purchasing, the kitchen staff, the beverage staff and so on – in some cases it gets so bad that no one's quite sure who is scamming whom. Hotels go through many expensive products each day, and the temptation to take advantage is high. People involved can get quite crafty when it comes to bookkeeping. Some even source black market items.

Sooner or later, these scams are discovered and the offending employees will be fired with a police record, while the suppliers end up in jail.

In short, it's not worth it.

If a supplier wants to donate something in appreciation of the business received, the best way is to contribute to the hotel's annual staff party – all above board and definitely not lining someone's pockets...

### **Employees' facilities**

Guests can be disgusting, but employees sometimes face worse situations in their own facilities – think dirty, messy, and smelly lockers, toilets, and shower rooms with broken tiles and flickering, cheap lighting.

Why is it that the employees' canteen is usually located in the basement with no view? And why are many hotels stingy when it comes to providing good food for their staff? Personally, I have no respect whatsoever for hotels that hire outside caterers to feed their employees. This is totally unacceptable. Hotels sell rooms and food and if they cannot prepare proper meals for their own staff, there is something totally wrong with the management team. Those leaders have missed the boat by a long shot.

And don't be so cheap as to let employees wear old and shabby uniforms. Employees are proud people and they are not happy wearing tatty uniforms that have been used by a dozen other staff before them. Do you, Mr General Manager, know who makes great and successful hotels? Definitely not misers like you...

### **Wishy-washy leadership?**

We all know that not all leaders are created equal, but why is the hotel industry faced with so many wishy-washy leaders?

It appears that the industry can't seem to recognize good leaders from bad ones.

Hotels are extremely complicated, labour intensive machines operating 24/7, 365 days per year, to cater to the personal needs of guests (sleep-food-recreation). Dealing with tricky customers and with unreasonable owners is not as simple as it looks. Hotels and Corporate Organizations are not places for "sissies," but for solid and experienced leaders.

Unfortunately the industry is faced with four different types of leaders:

- Effective/charismatic and visionary leaders (the winners) who have a clear DOWNWARD DELEGATION of authority that includes well-defined responsibilities, targets and results from each of its managers, subordinates, and units. They are the most successful leaders and the ones who progress fastest. Unfortunately, they are the minority.

- Democratic/sympathetic leaders (average/boring individuals) who DELEGATE SIDEWAYS. Their limited belief in their own abilities sees them overly concerned with making mistakes. While sideways delegation sometimes fosters good team work, overall processes move far too slowly, wasting precious time.
- Indecisive leaders (worthless losers) who DELEGATE UPWARDS. This kind of leader has zero confidence, a complete lack of required skills, and is totally self-serving. They only excel at pushing responsibility upwards, which is counterproductive and dangerous for the future of the organization. Regrettably, these are the majority.
- And, under a totally different category of leaders, there are situations where “the blind lead the blind” and those leaders tend to behave like headless chickens. Definitely those are the worst of all.

It is because of weak and indecisive leaders that the industry finds itself in the situation it does today – in a less competitive position in a hospitality landscape flooded with disrupters. The sheer ineptitude and wooly leadership of those at the top ultimately left the doors open for the disrupters to flourish. These leaders failed to look ahead. And we all paid the price.

Most of the present leaders are more comfortable responding to situations as and when they happen, but in many cases this already far too late. It’s time to wake-up – or take permanent leave.

Do you believe you are already an effective leader? Think again. In this industry you never stop learning, and you must wring every bit of knowledge you can from the experiences you have from now until the day you look in the mirror and discover you’re old, fat, and retired.

The industry badly needs more experienced, smart, energetic, dedicated, innovative and effective leaders because success in this industry is fast becoming harder to achieve. Headless chickens just won’t cut it. What type of leader are you? And what it takes to unlock the door to your inner attic?

### **Financial misinterpretation**

Budgets are necessary evils, but how relevant are they? With Boards usually setting unrealistic targets, and crafty Hotel GMs using every trick in the book to come up with excuses why those targets cannot be achieved, the middle ground is a poisonous swamp of missed opportunities and confusion.

And why do executives and owners waste so much time reviewing the P&L (Profit and Loss) reports? This is an exercise in futility and a real waste of time. P&L is the past; you cannot change it. Much better is to focus on “forecasting” with a scope of at least three- to-four months, which is far more productive as you can actually do something about it.

Unfortunately, effective forecasting is beyond the comprehension of most people, and therefore it often goes overlooked. A crying shame.