



# Retail Adventures in the Real World™

By RICH KIZER & GEORGANNE BENDER

## You're the Inn Keeper – Are You In?

**W**e spend a lot of time on the road; it's one of the best things about being a speaker. We get to visit lots of cool places and meet new people who very often become old friends. That's our favorite perk. But there's a downside to all of that traveling, and that downside would be, well, traveling.

Travel ain't always glamorous. And those of you who do it a lot more than likely have a few horror stories. We do.

June and July were just one big hotel blur as we traveled to seven cities in 10 days, spent time traveling with family, then took off on another multiple city, multiple hotel jaunt. Three things happened at three different Five Star hotels that made us question who's minding the store, or more to the point, where were the Inn Keepers?

We love being pampered, but the fact is, even in the finest establishments, reputations still rest on the shoulders of the people who work there.

### CASE NO. 1

#### BRING YOUR OWN UMBRELLA

At the end of a wonderful conference in otherwise sunny Florida, a bellman left our luggage outside in what looked like a monsoon. Our bags weren't just damp; they were drenched inside and out. One bag, a mother's Day gift from Georganne's

kids, had been left to sit in four inches of standing water and was completely ruined. To make matters worse, we discovered this at 6 p.m., while waiting for a cab to take us to the airport for an 8 a.m. seminar the next day.

We asked to see the manager, who sort of apologized while explaining to us that, while rare, it does occasionally rain in Florida, and besides being Florida, the property had only outside corridors, and well, things like this sometimes happen.

We explained that we expected our luggage returned in the same condition it was in when we gave it to them, and added that we didn't care that we were in Florida where it occasionally rains. We live in Illinois where it also has a tendency to rain, but the people who build hotels there are smart enough to build properties that give guests and their luggage protection.

The manager asked what we'd like him to do.

Ordinarily this is a good question to ask because it throws the ball in the customer's court, and offers them options. In this case, it just threw us. Georganne was wrestling with what she was going to wear for the next day's presentation. She responded, "I don't know. What do you think you should do?" The manager handed Georganne the customer service telephone number. At least it was toll-free.

### CASE NO. 2

#### COFFEE IN A CUP IS PREFERABLE

We were at a fancy Las Vegas resort for Bill's (Georganne's father) 80th birthday. There were 18 of us from across the country – a good-sized block of rooms and suites.

One morning, all 18 were sitting around the pool when a ¾-full cup of coffee came flying through the air and hit Bill's friend, Dorothy, smack on the head, spilling its contents all over her freshly coiffed hair, ruining her white silk top and shorts.

Georganne yelled at the pool attendant who threw it, "You just hit someone on the head with a cup of coffee!" To which the attendant responded, "You shouldn't be sitting so close to the trash can." Wrong thing to say.

When asked to apologize and to get Dorothy a towel, the attendant said she didn't have to, and repeated that we were too close to the trash can, then refused to get the manager. When she was finally "persuaded" to summon the manager, Georganne walked in on the conversation just as the attendant explained how she carefully leaned over to gently place the coffee cup in the trash can. Once again, wrong thing to say. Once again, she was asked to apologize, and once again, she refused.

The pool manager apologized, asked what he could do, and promised to tell

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the general manager. We followed up on this one. The pool manager did leave a note at the front desk for the manager, and he sent a basket of fruit to Dorothy's room. But we were there four more days with no word from the general manager.

## CASE NO. 3

### IT'S BEST TO SHARE A ROOM WITH SOMEONE YOU KNOW

We arrived at the celebrated Palm Desert, California, resort at 2 a.m. after a long day, and we had to be at a sound check in 4½ hours. The meeting planner knew we were arriving late, so she had already checked us in. All we had to do was pick up our room keys. Rich headed to his room, and Georganne and the bellman headed to hers.

Georganne opened the door and was greeted by a pile of dirty towels and wire hangers dangling from a doorknob. When they heard someone moving around inside the room, they headed back to the lobby.

The person in that room had supposedly checked out earlier, and since the hotel was completely sold out, they offered to ask him to leave so they could freshen the room. Georganne told them this was not acceptable; they were going to have to find her another room.

The desk clerk offered to drive Georganne to their closest sister property, but she refused, and threatened to sleep in the lobby.

The manager personally went to Georganne's assigned room and returned with an armload of hangers and dirty towels. He said the beds were clean and that the person who checked out must have just used the room to freshen up before leaving. The bellman reiterated that he personally heard someone in the room, but the manager insisted the room had been unoccupied all day.

It turned out a wedding guest kept a key and felt free to use the room as long as it was empty. When Georganne walked in the room at 3 a.m., a full hour after checking in, she called the desk to tell them the toilet and shower had been used, the complimentary toiletries were half empty, the mini-bar was missing a few \$10 Snickers bars, and the deadbolt on the door was AWOL.

The desk clerk who had just spent an hour of quality time with Georganne had to ask again who he was speaking with. Georganne asked to have the hotel's general manager give her a call, and when he didn't, we paid a visit to his office the next day and gave him the rundown. He was appalled that he hadn't had the opportunity to contact us first.

## SOLUTIONS

Several things should have happened in all three instances, but did not.

**1.** The employee first aware of the problem should have immediately apologized for the inconvenience and should have called the manager-on-duty without being asked.

**2.** The manager-on-duty should have immediately apologized, and then worked with the customer to fix the problem.

**3.** The manager-on-duty, realizing that fixing the problem is not enough, should have worked to "fix the customer" by offering something extra to soothe hurt feelings, and to begin rebuilding the damaged relationship with the customer.

**4.** The manager-on-duty should have informed the general manager, in detail, as soon as humanly possible, about what happened.

**5.** The general manager should have personally contacted the customer to ensure things were handled to the customer's satisfaction.

## WHAT ABOUT YOU?

We're in a relationship economy where each and every customer encounter becomes an important moment of truth. What happens in that moment of truth determines if the customer will come back and see you again, and also determines what they will tell their friends about your business.

Never forget that when customers care enough to complain, it is imperative they be greeted with thanks, and the knowledge that the service provider will make every effort to fix whatever went wrong.

Is it possible customer needs are being ignored in your store? Could a request to speak with you personally go unanswered? The honest answer is a definite yes.

So here's our pro-active "It will never happen in my store" recommendation:

- **Schedule a staff meeting and review your store's customer service standards.** Make sure that everyone knows exactly how you expect him or her to handle all customer problems and complaints. And make sure that everyone knows that you must be informed of each situation. (E-mail us for a copy of our Super Service Response template that will help you keep track of customer needs.)

- **Read each of the above incidents, then ask your team how they would have handled the situation.** Brainstorm all options. You might even want to add some retail examples of your own, and ask for your team's solutions. Explain that everyone's goal is excellent customer service, but when you stumble, your goal is to fix the problem and appease the customer.

Customers have plenty of choices to buy the things you sell, and obviously, the best place to buy them is from you.

Make sure customers know you are on their side. Be an Inn Keeper who is always in, doing your very best for your customers and your business. ♦