

Are Your Internal Customers Also Being Served?

While every hospitality operation focuses on serving its customers, how good of a job does it do at serving its internal customers? If you look closely at the organization of your enterprise, you'll see that you have two different types of departments in your organization – operating departments that directly serve the customers, such as front office, food and beverage, activities, tennis, fitness, spa and locker rooms, and support departments that serve the customers indirectly by serving the operating departments. Included in this group are accounting, personnel, facilities maintenance, and administration.

So how well does the latter group serve their internal customers – the operating departments? My guess is not as well as they could or should!

Here are some suggestions to get them to focus on their internal customers:

- Call a meeting of the support department heads and explain the concept of internal customers and how their support of the operating departments enhances the overall enterprise performance.
- Require the support department heads to draw up a list of things they can do to better support the operators. My main requirement would be informal weekly visits and meetings with operating department heads to determine their needs and issues with a strong emphasis on “how can I help you and your department.”
- Have support department heads draw up a list of their frustrations with operating departments, such as slow response to accounting and personnel requirements, sloppy or missing paperwork, poorly coded invoices, late inventories, lack of timely hiring documentation, constant emergency or last minute repair requests, etc. Then have them design outreach programs such as training and periodic assistance visits to improve their responsiveness to administrative requirements. The benefit to this is twofold – it improves cooperation and teamwork at the same time it eliminates the ongoing frustrations of support department heads.
- Conduct an annual survey of operating department heads to measure their satisfaction with the support and assistance they receive from support departments. Make the results part of the support department heads' performance reviews.
- Conduct periodic meetings/brainstorming sessions with support department heads to gauge the success of their efforts to improve communications, training, and support to operating departments. Identify bottlenecks and problems and work with both operating and support department heads to resolve issues as necessary.

Bottom line: For the operation to function efficiently all department heads must understand not only their jobs, but how their actions and performance impact other parts of the business. Recognizing and addressing the needs of internal customers is just as important as caring for the enterprise's customers/guests/members.

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