

Touch Point Tactics

In war the generals plan the strategy, unit commanders establish plans to shape the battle, and front line leaders set and direct the tactics to wage the fight. In our business the owner(s) and General Manager set the direction and standards of the operation, but it's the department heads and front line supervisors who figure out how best to implement at the point of contact with customer/guests/members.

The term "touch point" refers to those critical moments and events that shape and define a customer's impression of service and service delivery. Also called "moments of truth," touch points are defined as "a critical or decisive event on which much depends; a crucial action." But no matter what they are called, if a hospitality operation is to be a service leader, it must consistently get the touch points right and it's up to the enterprise's junior leaders to plan, train, and direct front line employees to flawlessly execute each of these service opportunities.

Most hospitality departments have a limited number of touch points, probably a dozen or so. The food and beverage department has considerably more due to the intensive interaction with diners during food service. Regardless of number, it's up to department heads to identify and establish standards for each touch point – even to go so far as scripting and rehearsing employees' touch point roles.

So what are the steps in planning touch point tactics? Here's a basic list for department heads:

- Identify customer needs and expectations.
- Carefully review departmental interfaces with customers and identify all touch points.
- Prioritize touch points based on service impact and impression.
- Spell out in detail the optimum manner for employees to execute each touch point.
- Script, train, and rehearse employees to consistently execute touch points.
- Revise and refine touch point execution based on feedback from employees.

Points of caution:

- Train employees to avoid robot-like, lockstep execution. Employees must be comfortable enough in their roles to improvise according to the dictates of the moment and situation. Everything they do must be comfortable and personal – that's why it's so important to empower your staff.
- Managers must encourage and act upon feedback from employees. The people who have direct service contact with customers are in the best position to determine what works and what doesn't.

Bottom Line: As with managing any other critical aspect of the operation, touch point tactics must be well-developed and executed to achieve the desired effects.

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