

RESORT EXPERT SAYS:

## Service counts!

by Lawrence A. Olivia

Is the golf resort expected to operate its facility as though it were a resort hotel? How much service is expected, and how do I achieve my objective?

Whether you own, operate, or manage a golf resort or hotel resort, your objective is to satisfy the wants and needs of the consumers of your goods and services and to have them return as repeat customers. After all, regardless of what you sell — homes, cars, hotel rooms, or 18 holes of golf — most customers return to purchase again because the quality of the product and the service offered satisfied a need.

It is my intention, in this first discussion with golf resort operators, to have you start looking within your operation and to work with your existing human and financial resources to find and obtain the type and quality of service you desire. Further, I would like to help you realize that you are not alone as an industry and that the problems you face on a day-to-day basis are the same as any other resort operation. And finally, after you have exhausted your own human potential and that of your staff, you may want to seek the advice and counsel of a consultant.

### Take care of course and customers

Let me go back to the beginning and directly answer the question, "Are you to be compared to a resort hotel?" That depends on whether you perceive yourself as a resort facility. If you are happy with offering nine or 18 holes of golf and the "19th hole" and a locker room are your extent of service, then whatever you do in that limited area, do it well.

Turfgrass is not my area of expertise, but it would appear to me you should have the best maintained and serviced golf course that will make your customers want to return for more. All your staff, or what we call in

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the resort industry the "guest contact employees," should be trained to make the customer feel wanted. In addition to offering a well-maintained golf course, you will soon earn the enviable reputation of being an operator who cares about the person who keeps the cash register ringing.

That 19th hole (the bar) could become the most profitable square footage of real estate you own if it is serviced properly by your employees and make the golfer feel welcome. The drinks must be cold and the food, if served, attractively merchandised. The service must be friendly, courteous, and developed to give "staying power" to your guest.

Keep your restrooms, showers, and locker rooms clean and well-maintained. Cleaning supplies, insecticides, paint, and trained, courteous attendants are your most valuable resources. When the golfer leaves this area, it is the last impression that he will have about your place.

Remember the woman golfer. Do you offer equal service to her? Most women today are not concerned about

the frivolous chauvinism of 20 years ago. They want to be treated equally with men and to receive the same type of service. As an operator of a public or a private place, you must sense the needs of your customers and train your staff to offer the services required.

The more amenities you offer your customers, the more closely you will resemble or become like a full-service resort. As the operation gets larger, it is necessary to delegate job responsibilities to others. At this point, don't get overwhelmed with size. If you are already a large operation, don't despair, you can improve your service by using the resources around you. If you plan to expand, offering more services and facilities, you can obtain and train an excellent staff of personnel prior to opening.

### A checklist for success

Whether you already offer the services of a resort or are planning to expand, there are many common concerns and activities that apply to both. To name a few:

1. How much of a return do you ex-

pect for your human and financial investment? If you resent the hours and the people, sell out now and invest in some 8 or 9 percent corporate bonds. (There is no risk, effort, or fun.)

2. What is it that your customers want when they come to your golf club? Ask your guests — and employees. (They are your eyes and ears.)

3. Find out what the competition is offering. If there is none, you have a great opportunity, since any improvement is better than what is now being doing. If you have competition, don't do what they are doing, for two reasons — it only cuts up the pie a little smaller and, most important, what works in one club might not work for your operation.

4. Come up with some new ideas or concepts. People want excitement and a pleasurable experience. The more you challenge them to an exciting experience, the more they will visit your facility.

5. Don't resent change. But prepare yourself and your employees for what is to take place and what the results will be. If Mary and Joe have worked in your bar for 15 years inhaling stale cigar smoke talking about all those pars that could have been birdies, these people would resent the "swinging singles" you might want to attract to your operation.

6. When you set course on something new or different, determine its cost, how long it will take to train your staff, what is the objective you hope to achieve, and how long it will take you to get there. The worst mistake you can make is to continue on a program that died in its first month, but your ego is so hurt you have to give it "a few more weeks." Try something else. But remember financial and human resource developments have limits. Know your customers or potential customers well before you venture into anything new or speculative.

7. Nothing is as successful as success itself. If you have something working for you, don't change the concept — try to improve the way it is done and attempt to make it more profitable. From my perspective I welcome the person who is successful, because I like to challenge him. I

have seen few successful people who, when shown how much better their service would be if they made adjustments or how they could save \$5,000, \$10,000, or \$20,000 a year with some operational modifications, did not welcome the change. The customer doesn't necessarily have to notice the difference, but the employees' tasks become easier or the IRS notices the difference in the profit on your tax returns.

The list could continue to grow depending on the type and quantity of service you wish to offer. Just keep in mind the sum is equal to the total of its parts. Break down each area of operation. Study its function and relationship to the customer and how the final product appears to the guest. Each area of operation must be a profit center or contribute to the profitability of a larger area. (Laundry and house-keeping relate to room sales. The gift shop or pro shop is its own profit center.) Decide, as I previously outlined to you, your course of action and set your sails. You may not always find success in every decision that is made, but you can be sure your chances of failure will greatly diminish.

At this point, something must be stated about the quality of service people expect today. It is true that service is not what it was in 1890 or in 1920. But let's remember that we are not the same nation we were at that time. There are still a few "class properties" that attempt to emulate this period, and they do a pretty good job at it too. For most of you this is not economically feasible, however, since "class service" takes people-to-people relationships, 1 to 1½ employees per guest. What we can do is to train our employees to realize that we may have the finest facility in the area, but unless our customers are treated with dignity and respect, they will not return.

If we can relate this basic understanding to our employees, show how it affects our business volume (whether they will have a job or not, or they can be proud of the place in which they work), and work with them to achieve these objectives, I am certain we will have return and content customers. Service is not servility or a stigma, it is just damn good business

sense. It is the most inexpensive resource we can develop in employees if they understand its value. But it won't just happen — you must work at it every day of the week.

I briefly talked about guests wanting an experience. In many hotels and restaurants today, people are vacationing and dining out for the "experience," not just a room to sleep in or a restaurant to fill the basic need of hunger. The person who is willing to spend that extra dollar will do so without a moment of hesitation if they know what they obtain is one-of-a-kind or a few-times-in-a-lifetime experience. Now that may be a little far-fetched for a golf facility, but I can assure you that if you offer excellent facilities to play golf, day care services for families with small children at reasonable rates (just make your costs), a pleasant clean environment, fresh and appealing food and beverages, and a concept of service that will long be remembered, you too can join the hospitality and food-service industry in offering a one-of-a-kind experience for your guests.

#### Management counts

When I started this article, I may have misled you by the title since it has a dual meaning or at least implies one. Service counts in the establishment of a reputation for a resort; however, it is the owner or manager that really counts in the long run. An operation must and should reflect your attitude and a great deal of what you value. Without your directions, determination, and desire to be a professional, little or any of what I have proposed will "just happen." A long time ago, S. Earl Thompson from Penn State University gave a talk on "The U in Success." He made it very clear that only "you" can make it happen. Not much has changed since I first heard that talk. What I have learned since that time is that not only does service count, you count more than anything else in your operation. After success, counting takes on another meaning too. You will count the profits attributable to your efforts — financial and professional. Make the effort — it will be the most rewarding experience you can give your customers, your employees, and yourself. □