



Happy Employees Make For Happy Customers

by Andrew Klebanow

Leaders of many Indian casinos have long recognized the importance of providing outstanding customer service to their guests. They recognized that casino gaming is comprised of a unique suite of products and services and those products and services make up what is referred to as gaming entertainment. Gaming entertainment incorporates slot machines, table games, quality food products and lodging delivered in a fun, energetic and entertaining atmosphere. The linchpin of those products and services are the employees who deliver them to guests. They are the ones who provide the service that makes the gaming entertainment experience memorable. The ultimate measures of success are happy customers who come back on a regular basis.

Making customers happy is not a simple procedure. It involves a complex process of getting the right products to satisfy their needs coupled with caring employees. This requires assembling the appropriate mix of gaming products, restaurants and other amenities and placing them in an attractive environment. Then it requires happy, upbeat employees to deliver great service. The hardest part of the equation is getting employees with the right disposition and keeping them happy so they in turn can make the casino's customers happy. The ongoing question for all casino operators is how do you keep your employees happy?

Keeping employees happy so that they continue to provide great customer service is no easy feat. First and foremost, it takes a commitment from senior leadership. This commitment is then manifested throughout the property so that employees know intuitively that management cares about them. Management's commitment to the well-being of its employees is best manifested through the following ongoing initiatives.

A Great Employee Dining Room

No area of the casino-hotel is more important in demonstrating that casino leadership cares about its employees than the employee dining room (EDR). The EDR is where employees go not only to eat but to relax during their breaks or unwind after their shifts. Also, for many employees the meal they eat in the EDR may be the primary (and sometimes only) meal of the day. It is here that casino leadership has the best opportunity to make their employees happy and to show that they truly care about their well being by providing a clean, well maintained EDR that offers complimentary or deeply discounted quality meals to its employees.

Conversely, a poorly maintained EDR can have an opposite effect. Recently, one casino in Laughlin, Nevada saw an opportunity to reduce expenses by cutting back on the number of food items in their EDR and also eliminated all hot food after 10 p.m. Eliminating hot meals had an immediate negative impact on a large number of employees and was soon

followed by a drop in morale as measured in ongoing employee satisfaction surveys. What casino leadership failed to appreciate was that the vast majority of their swing shift and graveyard employees ate their meals between the hours of 10 p.m. and 2 a.m. Subsequent customer service initiatives fell on deaf ears because employees knew they were nothing more than an expense that management had to control.

The best casino EDRs are run like any other restaurant on property with a manager or chef overseeing the operation and who is accountable to satisfy the needs of his/her customers. In addition, many casinos require that all employees and managers take their meals in the EDR. This creates an *esprit de corps* and also makes managers aware of problems in the EDR as soon as they arise.

Employee Locker Rooms

A clean, secure and well-maintained locker room is another area where casino operators can have a positive impact on employee attitudes and make their employees happy. This requires both a capital commitment and an ongoing obligation to maintain the locker and shower areas so that they are clean and comfortable.

One casino in Northern California placed its employee lockers in a breezeway outside of the building. The lockers were open to the elements, exposing employees to cold weather in the winter. Further, there was no appropriate place for employees to change into their uniforms or to shower after work. While a waiter or slot club representative may not need a place to shower and clean up after work, the same is not true for line cooks, engineers and landscapers who get dirty while doing their daily tasks.

Employees need a place to store their personal items, change in and out of their uniforms and get ready for work in a clean and comfortable environment. Having to store a purse and backpack in a dented 12" x 12" locker in a hallway and change into one's uniform in an employee toilet is not a good way to start the day.

Convenient and Safe Parking

Providing a safe and secure place to park is important not only to customers but to employees also. Employees need to know that they can park their cars in a well-lit and secure area and that there is adequate surveillance and security. However, not all casinos take this approach. One casino that recently opened in Oklahoma did not budget for an employee parking lot. While customers were able to park in front of the building in a well-lit surface lot, the casino operator provided a dirt and gravel lot in the rear of the building for employees. This area was susceptible to mud and puddles when it rained and posed a significant hazard when it snowed. Employees often arrived at their work stations with mud covered shoes or socks soaked in icy water. They were not happy.

Give Employees the Tools to Succeed

Employees want to do a good job yet too often casino operators scrimp on providing them with the tools they need to succeed. Providing employees with obsolete computers or old software (such as Windows 98) is one such example. It hinders employees from promptly accessing data and slows down transaction time. When a slot club representative has a line of customers waiting for service and is forced to work with a computer that has inadequate processing speed, customers get angry and employees get frustrated. If two-way radios do not provide clear, reliable reception, slot technicians and engineers cannot respond promptly to problems and concerns.

Each year departmental managers submit requests to upgrade obsolete equipment. Often, those purchases are postponed or denied in order to improve operating margins. The long-term effect though is employee frustration and diminished customer service.

Reward Employees for Good Customer Service

Even the most caring and committed employees appreciate periodic rewards for their efforts. Many gaming companies now institute bonus programs that are based on customer satisfaction surveys and other measures of customer service. These rewards do not have to be great but

they make a difference, particularly for employees who do not have a job where they earn gratuities.

One casino recently instituted a year long outstanding service reward program. At this casino, when management noticed an employee exhibiting stellar service to customers or going above and beyond the normal scope of work, the employee was handed a card redeemable for \$25 at the casino cage. This could happen any day to any employee who was observed "doing the right thing." This is one example of how this casino reinforced stellar customer service as part of the service culture of the organization.

Management Matters

The best way to ensure that the employees who service the casino's customers are doing the best job possible is to make sure that the managers are accountable for maintaining service standards. Management's accountability is to provide the tools, resources and working environment needed for all employees to be able to meet or exceed service expectations. When management does its job, then employees come to work happy. And happy employees make for happy customers. ♣

Andrew Klebanow is Principal of Gaming Market Advisors. He can be reached by calling (702) 547-2225 or email andrew@gamingmarketadvisors.com



The Institute of Internal Auditors (IIA)
10th ANNUAL GAMING CONFERENCE
APRIL 14 - 16, 2008 / CAESARS PALACE / LAS VEGAS, NV, USA

The IIA's Gaming Conference continues to set the standard for auditors, compliance officers, regulators, and other professionals in the gaming industry. Hear about industry best practices from recognized leaders, including Director of Audits and Finance for the National Indian Gaming Commission Joe Smith; Theresa Kain on Assessing Risk in Indian Gaming; and a panel discussion featuring National, State, and Tribal regulators. A post-conference roundtable will cover Current Issues in Indian Gaming. New for the first time in 2008 are facilitated "coffee talk" sessions that encourage maximum interaction on critical issues.

 **TRAINING**
Never Stop Learning

For details, visit www.theiia.org/Gaming08 or call +1-407-937-1111.

07/00