



Are Employees Being Trained to Talk Like Robots?

Often, to keep a five-star rating or become a five-star property, employees are being trained so that they are beginning to sound more like robots, rather than genuinely sincere individuals.

Required verbiage

“How may I assist you?” “Is there anything else I may do to further assist you?”

This greeting and closing salutation was required and the guest’s last name was to be used three times in the same conversation when I worked at The Greenbrier. I tried to say and do such, but it just didn’t seem nor sound natural.

For years it was common practice to ask, “May I help you?” Then one day the word “assist” was substituted and the word “help” was deemed inappropriate, as if negative while “assist” was positive.

Instead of asking how I might “further assist” you, I tried to sound normal by simply asking: “Is there anything else I may do for you?” “Do you need anything?” “Are you all set?” “Everything good?” Perhaps somewhat slangish but it’s what makes employees from different areas of our country unique.

Born and raised in Chicago’s south side, I tried very hard to pronounce my words when working at da Greenbrier (oops, ...The Greenbrier) and say, “these, them and those” rather than “dese, dem and dose.” Hardly a day went by when a guest would politely say, “You’re not from around here, are you?” My main concern was that I might be talking to the secret shopper and would be marked off for not using the required verbiage.

TRUE STORIES

Some true stories stand out while working as a spa locker room attendant at The Greenbrier.

Mr. Hewitt has been coming to The Greenbrier Spa for years. He always requests Stephanie as his massage therapist. While Mr. Hewitt is in the relaxation room anticipating his appointment, Stephanie comes in, greets him with a big smile, arms outstretched and excitedly says, “Mr. Hewitt!”

He sees Stephanie, gets up from the lounge chair boldly proclaiming, “Stephanie!” and they share a friendly hug.

It should be really easy to understand why so many guests will return to the same destination year after year when guest/employee relationships develop such as that between Mr. Hewitt and Stephanie.

Jacky had 35 year’s experience as a massage therapist. He’s respected with some well-known clientele. After Jacky finishes the service, he walks the guest back to me. Now Jacky is supposed to say, “Is there anything else I may do to further assist you?” Instead, he sincerely says, “Now, if you need anything else, just holler.”

Definitely not the required closing salutation, but as down-home as one can be. In my opinion, better than sounding like a robot and another reason why guests requested Jacky.

MEMORABLE MOMENT

The most impressed I’ve ever been with an employee/guest relationship is the day West Virginia Governor Gaston Caperton came into the golf locker room. All four of us attendants were working that day.

Don, the head man (retired after 52 years), had some standard “one-liners” that made everyone laugh. When asked why he stayed so long at The Greenbrier, Don would say, “Couldn’t make enough money to get out of town.”

When U.S. Congressman Nick Rahall asked Don how he was doing, he’d reply: “Haven’t been in jail yet this year.” One day when West Virginia Governor Gaston Caperton came to play golf, he greeted Carl, James and me by our first names. However, when he spoke to Don, the governor respectfully said, “Hello, Mr. Crump.” Don politely answered back, “Hello, Governor.”

Real service-oriented individuals already have this intrinsic value instilled in their DNA and from upbringing. Caring for others remains a virtue that cannot be forced, but service standards and methods can be taught.

It’s not so much the words we say, as it is the meaning of what we say. **BR**