

Delight Your Members With Five Star Service

by Barbara Sanfilippo

Club members are often the most demanding type of customers one can serve and typically have higher expectations. Consistently meeting or exceeding their expectations requires operational excellence, committed staff and a passionate leader. If you are serious about kicking your service culture into high gear, implement the following five steps and you will delight your members and your staff. While your club reputation may initially attract a member, excellent member service ensures you will delight and retain them.

1. Share Your Mission and Passion For Service

According to Russell Ackoff, a professor of marketing at the Wharton School, "A mission statement should play the same role in a company that the Holy Grail did in the Crusades." If you asked any one of your employees, could they quickly recite your mission or vision? When was the last time it was discussed at a staff meeting? Develop a mission statement with input from your managers and employees. Be sure to include reference to your members and staff. Discuss and review it periodically and ask, "Are we living our mission and putting it into action?" What obstacles are preventing us from living up to our mission? It's up to you as the club manager to share your passion for serving the members and set high expectations.

2. Determine Member Expectations and Set Service Standards

Do you know what your members expect when visiting your club? What is their perception of your service? The best way to find out is to ask them. Create a one-page expectations survey and ask your members to complete it in writing or by phone. Note: This is not a service survey, but rather a vehicle to determine what's important to them. Some questions you might ask include:

*On a scale of 1-5, how satisfied are you with your department?

*On a scale of 1-5, how satisfied are you with the courtesy of the staff?

*What does good member service mean to you?

*To meet or exceed your expectations, what do we have to do?

Once you have determined member expectations, review the results with your staff. Now you are in an excellent position to create written service standards for each department with staff input. Service standards are important to create a consistent service experience for your members resulting in operational excellence. Standards must be measurable, verifiable or observable. For example, all members will be acknowledged within 10 seconds of entering the dining room. Each golf cart will have a fresh score card, pencil, towel and water before it goes back on the course.

3. Measure and Reward Service Performance Against Expectations

Once your standards are in place, begin measuring service periodically. For example, conduct quarterly member feedback weeks. Ask each department (tennis, golf, restaurant, etc.) to ask members five brief questions with a 1-5 rating or fill in a brief survey to be entered in a drawing for a prize. In addition, rate internal service quarterly by having each department rate their internal customer or those departments serving them. Now, average the scores and create a member satisfaction index (MSI) for each department. For example, tennis received an MSI of 23.5 and the dining room 19.5. Reward your staff and high scoring departments when they deliver superior service. On-the-spot rewards such as lottery and movie tickets or fancy chocolates can be inexpensive and appreciated. Catered parties or dinners out for high scoring departments are effective team awards. Back of the house staff can also earn rewards by scoring high on an "Internal Service Department Survey".

4. Instill A Sense Of Accountability For Service

Make sure your staff has clear performance appraisals that include service responsibilities. Add specific service goals in all staff performance appraisals. For example:

*Wait staff/servers will achieve the following service scores:

23-25 points Excellent

20-22 points Good

*Pro shop will achieve the following service scores:

23-25 points Excellent

20-22 points Good

5. Put Your People First

Karl Albrecht said, "The way your employees feel is the way your customers are going to feel." How do your employees feel? Happy employees who are treated with respect are more likely to treat your members with respect and help you succeed. Host a staff appreciation day or special luncheon to thank your people for their hard work. Communicate and ask for ideas on improving your club. Conduct periodical climate surveys to determine how your staff feels about your culture. Whether you have 3, 33 or 333 employees, the powerful five-step process outlined above is guaranteed to improve your member satisfaction, staff morale and positively impact your club's image and reputation. For best results, do it slowly, do it right and get your staff involved on service improvement teams.

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