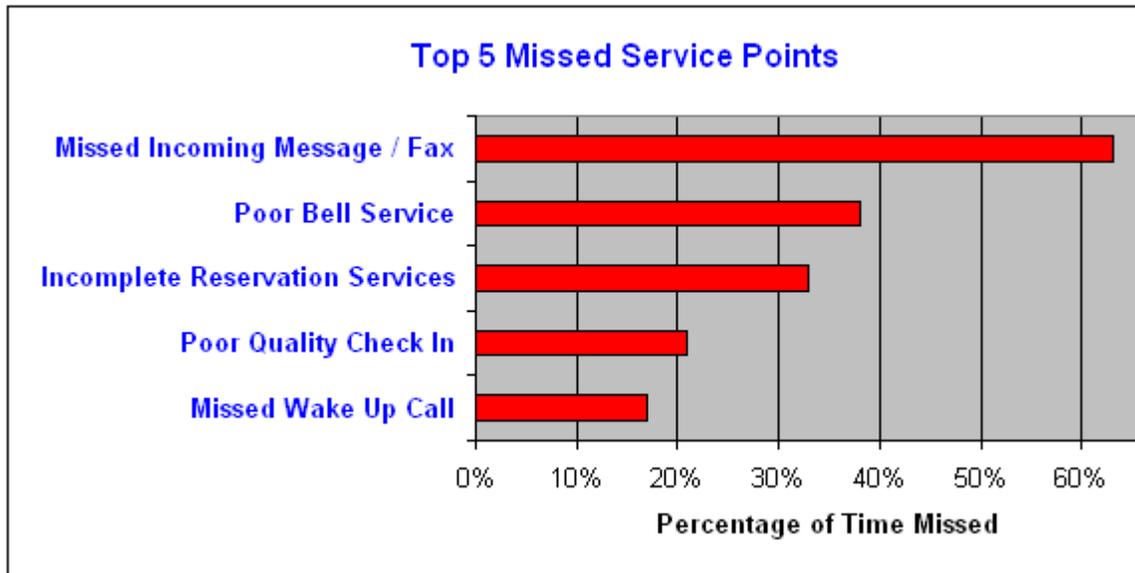


The Top 5 Missed Service Points for Luxury Hotels

by Derek Wood, May 2007

This month we look at the Top 5 Missed Service Points for luxury hotels. Whether guests are paying \$200 or \$850 a night, whether the property is part of a high end chain, or an independent boutique, these five service points are consistently missed. Let's jump in and take a look.

Ensuring consistent service for your guests is a game of details. So many services, so many service points, so many guests. Overall, successful properties get these right more often than not – allowing them to maintain their reputations for high quality service. But results from a recent review of almost 1,000 anonymous inspections of high end hotels and resorts found a startling number of “standard services” were routinely missed. Not just by a few, but by virtually all.



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Let's look at each of these areas and see what makes them so seemingly hard.

Missed Incoming Messages / Fax

In this day and age, where cell phones, PDAs and laptop computers abound, hotels have forgotten about the most basic service the front desk or operator can perform – taking a simple message and delivering it to a guest. And while faxes are not nearly as common as in the past, anyone working the front desk back office can attest to the fact that faxes are not dead and gone yet. So, why should this seemingly trivial service suffer so greatly? Simple procedures, when consistently followed, can remedy this problem. But...most properties either don't have clearly outlined procedures for both taking messages, and

regularly checking the fax machine. Or, often the procedures exist, but management does not oversee them, and staff simply get sloppy, or simply over busy. It's easy to do at a busy front desk. And occasionally, your business center may be outsourced, further adding to this problem.

Poor Bell Service

For luxury properties, things like Bell Service (and Valet for that matter) are the little extras that guests expect, and that should stand out and shine all the time. If guests didn't want to be pampered, they'd stay at a roadside motel. So, what is the source of this misstep? Most commonly it is simply inadequate training. Proper, outstanding Bell services necessitates following a list of important service points, and following that list with every guest, every time. So, be sure this list is prepared and that Bell staff are trained in delivering it. Practice with new staff. Have more experienced staff shadow new Bell staff and provide feedback. Eventually, this top notch service becomes second nature and you have this problem licked.

Incomplete Reservation Services

Reservation staff has the challenge to both ensure they collect and provide all the required information to enable guests to make a reservation, while at the same time, trying to promote and market the property. Sort of a mix between an accountant's mind for details and a **marketer's** salesmanship. And the single reason for this service being less than perfect is a basic lack of training (or on occasion, a lack of written reservation procedures and scripts). Reservation agents should be trained like sales staff. Practice calls must be recorded and studied, and regular "call trainings" provided. And of course, regular recording of live customer calls that they can study themselves for self assessment and learning. Its not "just reservations." It's the front door to your property. Make it shine each and every time.

Poor Quality Check In

We were surprised that this service made the Top 5 this year, but it consistently did. Check in staff typically missed important details or service points, but...most alarmingly, the most egregious problem typically encountered was simply poor attitude by Front Desk staff. There is no better way to upset a guest, than to botch their check in experience. Often they have arrived from long travels, have "finally arrived" at their new home, and they are greeted by Mr/Mrs Grump. And check in staff doesn't have to be downright rude; simple indifference is as egregious to a high paying guest. Again, training is important to ensure check in procedures are followed. But perhaps the most effective solution to poor attitude is for all staff to take it upon themselves to note to other staff when they feel their attitude is less that stellar. After all, everyone's paycheck relies on the many happy returns of your guests. So make it "a family matter" when any staff member is down in the mouth. Use humor or lightness to remind them to smile, both inside and out.

Missed Wakeup Call

Among all high end properties, this miss was the last of the Top 5. However, among business hotels alone, it rated much higher. And this is startling, since business people stay at your hotel to have one less thing to worry about. A luxurious room, fine meals, and a relaxing atmosphere. All of this as a counterpoint to their otherwise very busy, hectic and stressful work day. So how do they feel when they awake at 7:30am to find their 6:30am wakeup call never came (or came late) and their first meeting starts in 15 minutes? No shower, no breakfast and racing out the door? And they know this is a simple service to get right especially when automation is on your side. So, what are the common causes for this snafu? Firstly, staff should always repeat the time of the wakeup call to the guest for verification, and at the same time review the entry in your system or on your call list. Next, be sure that your clocks are set to the actual time. Use the official time from the US Government's atomic clock in Boulder, Colorado, easily found on the web. Lastly, if you perform manual wakeup calls (a nice touch), ensure you have adequate staff to provide timely calls. And, in the event you miss a wakeup call or it is late and you know about it, be sure to apologize to the guest rather than attempt to gloss over it. Lastly, if you use an automated system, have a backup plan that allows you to manually deliver calls any morning, anytime, in case your system fails.

Consistent, high quality service is a hard to deliver. Even the best miss things on occasion. So, prepare, train your staff, and regularly measure and inspect their performance to ensure guests get the best your team has to offer.

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