

# THE ROLE OF THE GUEST EXPERIENCE IN DELIVERING FACILITIES MANAGEMENT EXCELLENCE



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service • anticipation • fulfilment

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# Executive summary



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First impressions of your organisation are almost impossible to change, so it's important that they're positive. A visitor's first contact with an organisation is usually through a member of the facilities team: a receptionist, a security guard, a telephonist or the concierge. And they will meet several members of the team, such as housekeepers and catering staff, throughout their experience with an organisation. The facilities management team is therefore the gatekeeper of the client's brand and can either reinforce the client's values or undermine them.

This white paper explores the importance of the guest experience to businesses, and how more organisations are turning to the hotel sector to implement five-star hotel-style experiences in their corporate offices to achieve competitive advantage. From concierges in reception areas, 24/7 room service-style hospitality and a can-do attitude, the five star hotel experience can be witnessed in many of the UK's corporate buildings.

It explores what guests want from a corporate experience: a global, local and personalised approach and looks at how the FM team can deliver a bespoke feel to their FM service delivery.

The key to providing the ultimate guest experience is to look at where facilities staff interact with visitors and building occupants. By understanding what happens at each of these touch points, the facilities management team can improve the efficiency and effectiveness of its operations. The document examines how the FM professional can improve the experience at each touchpoint to improve the overall experience.

Of course providing a five-star guest experience in your organisation doesn't happen overnight. It requires different parts of the FM team, whether they work in-house, or for different service providers, to work as a blended team delivering a seamless experience. This requires a different approach to people management and training enabling each membership of the FM team to take ownership of the guest experience, something we call transformation training. People must also be appropriately rewarded for continually going the extra mile to deliver exceptional customer service.



# 01. The guest experience

On a wet, blustery morning, a taxi draws up in front of a high-spec office building in London. While the occupant pays the driver from the safety of the cab, the building's smartly-dressed security guard appears by the side of the cab, with a large open umbrella. As the guest steps out of the cab, the guard addresses him by name, welcomes him to the building and ensures he reaches the front door without getting wet.

Once inside, the receptionist looks him in the eye, smiles and again welcomes the guest by name. She explains that his host is waiting for him on the fourth floor, enquires about his favourite style of coffee and then escorts him to the lift where she presses the correct lift button, explaining that he will be met at the fourth floor by another receptionist who will take him to the correct room.

Along the way, the visitor notices the immaculate carpets and furniture, the unmarked paint work, the soft lighting and the attention to detail in the floral displays. The smell of good coffee percolates the air.

When the guest arrives at the fourth floor, he is again welcomed, by name, at the lift, shown the location of the washrooms, and taken to the correct room for his meeting. There the host serves the coffee he ordered downstairs and introduces him to the other meeting participants. A seamless guest experience.

Before the visitor has even arrived at the meeting room, he has a positive impression of the organisation. He is relaxed, in an open frame of mind and ready to do business. Conversely, if the visitor is left languishing outside in the rain, ignored by the receptionist and arrives at the meeting late (and wet) his impression will be less than favourable, and that could easily affect the outcome of the meeting – and the organisation's bottom line.

Although each business sector faces different market challenges, the strength of the client's brand and culture is a common factor in meeting those challenges, winning new business and retaining existing clients. The facilities management team is the gatekeeper of the client's brand and can either reinforce the client's values or undermine them. First impressions of your organisation can be difficult, if not impossible, to change, so it's important that they're positive.

As a result, more and more organisations are turning to the hotel and hospitality sector to gain an insight into how guests should be treated. But this is nothing new. Back in 2009, academics Andrew Smith and Michael Pitt wrote<sup>1</sup> about the benefits that FM could reap from looking at the hospitality industry in terms of customer centric FM. But the idea now seems to be more readily-accepted. A poll carried out in 2013 by FM World magazine<sup>2</sup> revealed that four out of five FMs believe that hotel-style service has a role to play in the workplace, and believe that describing building users as 'guests' is appropriate and even helpful.

The approach adopted by the world's best hotels is increasingly being embraced in some of the world's major corporate brands as a way to achieve competitive advantage. From concierges in reception areas, 24/7 room service-style hospitality and a can-do attitude, the five star hotel experience can be witnessed in many of the UK's corporate buildings.

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.ljmu.ac.uk/BLT/BUE\\_Docs/07AndrewSmith.pdf](https://www.ljmu.ac.uk/BLT/BUE_Docs/07AndrewSmith.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.fm-world.co.uk/news/fm-industry-news/think-tank-be-our-guest/>

### So what makes a great guest experience?

Research from InterContinental Hotels Group<sup>3</sup> reveals that hotel guests are looking for a global, local and personalised experience. They want a trusted global brand for assurance of quality, consistency, safety and innovation; they want that brand to have a good cultural fit with its local environment in terms of local tastes and customs, and they want to have a personal experience, to be treated as an individual and for the brand to recognise them and their needs.

Translated to the corporate world, the business visitor might want to do business with a recognised and trusted global brand, but when they walk through the doors of the London HQ, they want to know that they're in the UK. Through the design, layout and furnishing of the facility, to the behaviour of staff, the reading material on offer, and the hospitality provisions, they want a genuine local influence and culture. Not a faceless, culture-free corporate experience.

And most of all, they want a personal approach. While it is de rigeur for five star hotels to welcome returning guests by name, that is only slowing catching on in the corporate world. A great guest experience is not just about meeting your guests' physical needs but also responding to and anticipating their emotional needs. Achieving that sets an organisation apart from its competitors because it is emotions that make memories.

Visitors expect a reception area to be clean, attractive and well-designed. They anticipate that there will be comfortable seating, a range of reading material, perhaps a live news stream and attractive flower arrangements. What they don't (always) expect is to be called by their name as they walk in the door by a receptionist who smiles and looks them in the eye; for their favourite newspaper to be handed to them as they check-in; to be taken to their preferred meeting room – the one where they commented on the stunning view last time – or to be presented with a meal which conforms to their specific dietary needs. It is those types of experiences that creates memories, makes the guest feel valued and ensures the visitor leaves with a positive impression of the organisation.

The key to providing a great guest experience is understanding what your clients and customers want from your organisation, and then going beyond that. This can be achieved in two ways.

Start by researching your customers: what are their expectations when it comes to your organisation? What do they value in their interaction with your organisation? What does a great visitor experience look like from their perspective? What could the organisation do better to personalise the current approach and better engage guests. Where else do they go (whether for business or leisure) that they would recommend to others, and why?

By understanding what good looks like to them, you can deliver, and exceed, what they want. And it's straightforward to discover this information. It can be done formally, through customer feedback, market research and visitor segmentation exercises, or simply by talking to your guest during one of the many typical interactions during a guest experience – see touch points below. Customer feedback doesn't have to mean a formal survey, a tick-box exercise. Many guests prefer a more personal, informal approach through a conversation at a convenient moment.

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<sup>3</sup><http://www.ihgplc.com/index.asp?pageid=938>

## 02. Guest touchpoints

The key to providing the ultimate guest experience is to look at where facilities staff interact with visitors and building occupants. By understanding what happens at each of these touch points, the facilities management team can improve the efficiency and effectiveness of its operations.

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It is the continual pursuit of excellence, through examining each touch point on a regular basis that will ultimately deliver consistent, exceptional service.

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A touch point is any point at which a guest can form a view of the client organisation either good or bad. Typical touch points in a corporate office include:

- Calling or emailing an organisation
- Arriving outside the building
- Arriving at the reception desk, being greeted and checked in
- Using the lifts/ stairs or other common areas
- Taken to/ directed to the meeting room
- Arriving in the conference room and setting up for the meeting
- Using the washroom facilities
- Having lunch in the company restaurant or fine dining facilities
- Ordering the replenishment of meeting room refreshments
- Asking for documents to be copied/ printed or requiring additional stationery or equipment
- Leaving the building

In order to understand how guests experience each touch point, it's important for organisations to take a step back, and see the organisation from the guest's perspective.

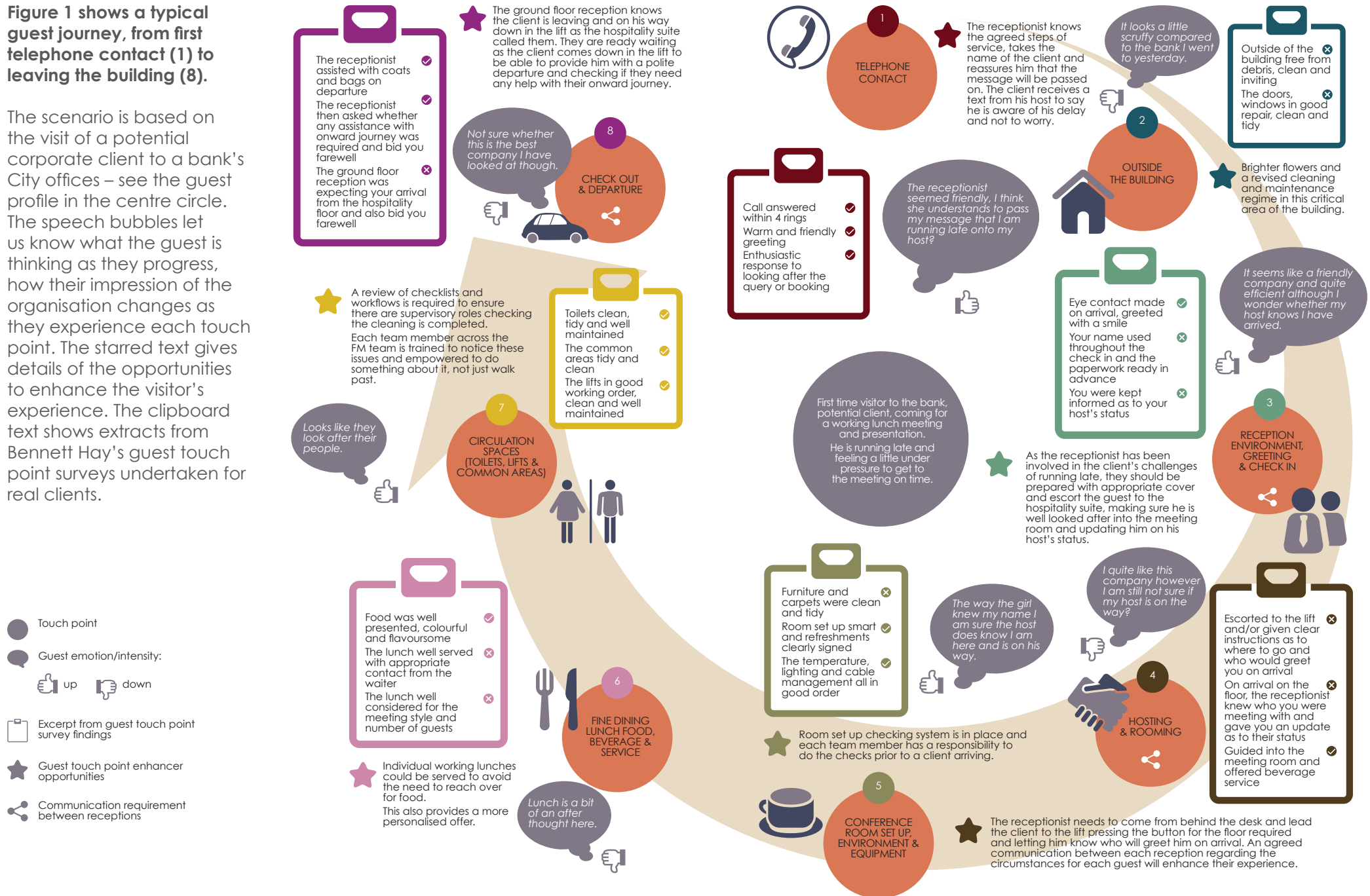
A survey of the guest touch points helps organisations to capture how guests currently perceive their FM service throughout their building and indeed how they compare to top London hotels and their business peers.

This can either be done internally or as a mystery shopper-style exercise. What does it feel like to walk into your building for the first time? How do people treat visitors when they don't know them, and aren't expecting them? Mystery shoppers can offer valuable insights into the guest experience, often suggesting new ideas or approaches. A fresh pair of eyes on your facility can work wonders. It is also good for checking on staff performance.

Results from the survey or exercise should be reviewed, and used as an opportunity to brainstorm with the team how each touch point can be improved or enhanced. The people on the ground providing the service usually have brilliant ideas about how it can be improved at often low cost. It is easy to be critical of service and of course, as professionals, FMs may notice more faults than some of their guests who are preoccupied with the business they are focused on. However it is the continual pursuit of excellence, through examining each touch point on a regular basis that will ultimately deliver consistent, exceptional service.

**Figure 1 shows a typical guest journey, from first telephone contact (1) to leaving the building (8).**

The scenario is based on the visit of a potential corporate client to a bank's City offices – see the guest profile in the centre circle. The speech bubbles let us know what the guest is thinking as they progress, how their impression of the organisation changes as they experience each touch point. The starred text gives details of the opportunities to enhance the visitor's experience. The clipboard text shows extracts from Bennett Hay's guest touch point surveys undertaken for real clients.



### Shaping the service style

A great guest experience starts with the client and the FM team working together to create the organisation's unique service style. How do you want your guests to be welcomed when they arrive at the building? How do you want them to be treated when they get to the reception area, and at every step of the various touch points in your facility? By working out a service style for that organisation, the various FM roles and responsibilities can then be assessed. Do you have the right skillsets in your current team? Do people need additional training to enable them to respond to the new requirements? Do people's hours of work need to be changed? What is working, and not working, in the current provision?

Over the past few years, we have seen a move from input to output specifications. Input specs are prescriptive, and tell the FM service provider exactly what input is required to achieve a specific result. For example, an organisation procuring a cleaning service, would specify to the contractor the number of times the building should be cleaned, the number of people deployed each time, working a set number of hours, the equipment operated and possibly even the method of cleaning to be used. Under an output spec the organisation would describe the service to be delivered, rather than the resources required for each task. In the cleaning example, an output specification might simply specify that the facility should be kept free at all times from build up of water marks, dirt and dust.

An output specification approach to service delivery allows the service provider to deliver an innovative approach to the service. According to research from Sheffield Hallam University and Interserve, access to innovation is the second most important reason, after cost, for choosing a service provider, and 90 per cent said it was very important or important that suppliers brought new ideas to the table.

In terms of delivering the ultimate guest experience, an output specification allows individuals and service providers to offer a bespoke, personalised approach to each visitor and building occupant, unencumbered by a more prescriptive approach to delivery. It enables facilities professionals to treat each guest as an individual and each circumstance as unique.



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## 03. People management

It's a cliché that facilities management is a people business but when those people are the first point of contact for visitors or responsible for preparing and serving food, then their attitude and behaviour is critical to the perception of an organisation. A bored receptionist, a lackadaisical concierge, or a grumpy housekeeper can completely change a visitor's experience of an organisation for the worse, ultimately affecting that company's commercial success.

Recent research<sup>4</sup> from the Equality and Human Rights Commission revealed that most cleaning and housekeeping staff feel undervalued and are not treated with dignity and respect. People who feel that way are unlikely to provide a positive perception of the organisation to guests and building occupants. This indicates how far the FM sector has to go to deliver the ultimate guest experience. It needs to start with the basics and treat all of its workforce with dignity and respect.

A recent article from a catering consultancy<sup>5</sup> argued that to achieve great customer service, organisations need to put their customers second. The number one priority should be engaging employees. The author argued that only 40 per cent of UK employees are engaged and that the customers who come into contact with the 60 per cent of employees who are disengaged, will not experience the customer service the organisation wants to deliver.

Asking employees to deliver exceptional customer service is often requiring them to go above and beyond the call of duty. Money is clearly a great motivator for people, but a recent employee engagement study<sup>6</sup> revealed that 70 per cent of workers don't need monetary reward to feel engaged and motivated. It found that employees are more motivated by recognition and virtual rewards compared to financial incentives. A well-defined training programme, for example, reassures employees that the company is serious about personal development.

An equity share ownership programme can also be used to reward colleagues who have achieved the highest level on their performance review, and have also performed above what was expected of them. Last year, for example, Bennett Hay issued shares to six employees, including a general manager, head butler, chef manager, hospitality assistant and a receptionist. The company issues shares every September and buys them back on an agreed multiple based on the company's success.

Making employees feel that they matter – through reward programme, team days, social events etc – is as important as financial reward. Every quarter Bennett Hay has an Ideas forums bringing together its teams to develop its services and bring innovation across the business. People are more engaged when they are involved in driving the business forward.

Good performance management is the key. A performance review process must be designed to identify colleagues delivering excellent service. Good service is a given but excellent service should always be recognised – and rewarded. The focus should be on encouraging individualism and celebrating differences to incentivise great service and also great ideas.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/commission-finds-firms-are-failing-protect-key-rights-cleaning-workers>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.i-fm.net/news/the-customer-comes-second>

<sup>6</sup> <http://badgeville.com/announcements/study-on-employee-engagement-finds-70-of-workers-don't-need-monetary-rewards-to-feel>

### Blending on-site teams

There are often several different service providers working for one organisation, in addition to directly-employed facilities people. According to the latest research from Sheffield Hallam University and Interserve<sup>7</sup> 24 per cent of facilities services are delivered in-house, 24 per cent are outsourced to single service providers; 21 per cent have an integrated service model, 14 per cent use a bundled approach, 10 per cent have a total facilities management model and an additional 7 per cent opt for TFM with property services. This means that you might have one organisation providing reception staff, another security officers, a third cleaning operatives and another the catering team.

In addition, an existing team often keeps changing employers through an endless cycle of Tupe transfers, speedy mobilisation and new operational management. Existing team members can become deeply pessimistic about the prospects for improvement as they experience constant change, but perceive little career progression. This unspoken mistrust can sustain counterproductive patterns of individual and team behaviours. Successful facilities management depends on teamwork. Getting a disparate set of providers working together to deliver a seamless guest experience can be the difference between just good enough and truly excellent service.

Creating a truly integrated team, to deliver a range of services and add significant value to a contract, remains an aspiration rather than a reality for most FM providers. To achieve this, requires a very clear understanding of each and every role.

A guest touch point survey helps each member of the team, in whatever organisation they are employed, understand the guest experience and appreciate all the touch points with the FM team and the part each of them plays in impacting service excellence.

They must all understand that although they may be employed by different organisations, the building occupant or visitor perceives them as being one team: the facilities team. In most organisations, it is the client's brand that is visible, rather than that of any service providers. This provides an opportunity for the combined FM team to create a bespoke service ethos that represents the client's brand and culture. By sharing this with everyone in the extended team, the one-team approach can become a reality. In addition, compiling a set of 10 facts or service standards that every colleague must know and be able to respond to if a guest should ask them also cuts across all areas of FM to reduce the typical divisions that often exist between, say, reception and cleaning or mailroom.



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<sup>7</sup> Interserve, Sheffield Hallam and i-FM facilities management research 2013: Time for Change in Facilities Management  
<http://www.interserve.com/docs/default-source/Document-List/services/facilities-management/time-for-change-in-facilities-management.pdf>

## 04. The role of training in providing a seamless guest experience

Of course, five star service doesn't happen overnight and all facilities teams will need training to understand exactly what they need to do to deliver the ultimate guest experience. And while some of that training will be skills training – improving people's specific skills in areas such as security, cleaning, catering and post-room, much of needs to be about attitudes and behaviours. It requires a different approach to training.

Truly transformative training takes lessons from the hotel industry. Bennett Hay's own transformation academy includes insight from the training approaches of businesses with similar values that have consistently achieved superior levels of guest service including Ritz-Carlton, Apple and Firmdale boutique hotels. Each of these businesses offers particular insights: from Ritz-Carlton, there are lessons on how to select, train and inspire colleagues; Apple demonstrates the importance of attracting people who are passionate about the company's products and training team members to get on with each other and enjoy working together; and Firmdale captures detailed information about its guests in order to provide a highly- personalised service.

Each of these businesses have some common features. They work hard to help their teams understand their profile and those of their guests or customers. They then make absolutely sure that their teams know their product and service inside out and that they truly believe in how good it is, through personal experience. They also provide a very clear 'journey' for the guest, covering all the touch points where they will come into contact with the service, product or team. Apple is a good case study – anyone who has bought an Apple product will appreciate how much thought goes into the customer 'experience', from the retail store, to the elegance of their website to the sleek simplicity of the packaging.

Finally they are trained and retrained on each competency required for each job role. Most importantly, there is a clear path for each colleague – the intention is for the staff to share the same goal; they are respected and rewarded for their individual contribution.

Training in the FM sector should therefore be a mixture of skills, behavior and attitudinal.

Skills training ensures that every colleague knows what they are doing. They must have the right skills for all aspects of their job. They should know what is expected of them and the impact they have on delivering excellent service.

Behavioural training is about working on attitude and behaviour, particularly an appreciation that simply "good enough" service is not enough. Every colleague must know what excellence is and feels motivated to strive for it each day. "Dropping the ball" is a common problem in FM, where several people may be involved in dealing with a request or providing a service. Each colleague must be equipped to take ownership of every guest request and follow through to completion.

Training must be both on and off the job. Off-the-job training includes behavioural elements such as personality profiling and working with teams so that they understand each other's strengths. Practical skills training for baristas, chefs and front of house colleagues, receptionists and mailroom/reprographic operators is essential. Meanwhile on-the-job training is a mixture of different elements: managers working alongside their teams coaching them, or professional coaches working in the operational environment to put the training into action and to measure the success of the transformation.

## 05. Recommendations and top tips

- **Start by walking a mile in your guests' shoes.**  
What does it feel like to enter your building? How are you greeted by the receptionist, and by each member of the facilities team around the facility? What is the guest experience like? Examine each guest touch point and explore how you can create the perfect experience for the guest.
- **Take lessons from the five-star hotel experience.**  
Visit top hotels and see first-hand how they treat their guests and start to introduce aspects of that experience into your facility.
- **Recruit the best people for your organisation.**  
Receptionists are often poorly-paid and yet they are the first person your guests meet. Examine your reward and recognition packages and ensure they are competitive and attract and retain the best people. Consider unusual rewards such as equity share ownership programme which are typically not extended to FM staff.
- **Train your people.**  
Train your people to understand the concept of ownership within the FM team so that no balls are ever dropped between different team members or functions. Work to create a one-team approach through both training and day-to-day behaviour, so that people who work in-house or for different service providers feel part of the same team.
- **Provide consistent service to your guests.**  
Regular visitors anticipate that they will receive the same service each time and find comfort in that certainty.
- **Deliver a service which is relevant to the local environment.**  
The guest experience delivered by a global corporation will be different in each location depending on local culture and customs. Take inspiration from local people and surroundings when shaping the service style.
- **Create a personalised approach to the guest experience.**  
Ensure your guests are welcomed by name, that their drink, food, newspaper and meeting room preferences are remembered and the service is delivered with genuine, personal relevance.
- **Use the guest experience to surprise and delight your guests.**  
Create the right impression of your organisation.
- **Ensure you have the best technology.**  
Ensure you have the best visitor management system in place to capture guest profiles/history. This will help deliver a far more anticipative and personalised service experience.



## Further reading

Heppell, M *Five Star Service: How to Deliver Exceptional Customer Service*

InterContinental Hotels Group 2014 *Trends Report Creating Moments of Trust' – the key to building successful brand relationships in the Kinship Economy*  
<http://www.ihgplc.com/index.asp?pageid=938>

Lennox-Martin, A *The British institute of Facilities Management Good Practice Guide to Customer Care*  
<http://www.bifm.org.uk/bifm/knowledge/resources/goodpracticeguides#customer>

Michelli, J *The New Gold Standard: 5 Leadership Principles for Creating a Legendary Customer Experience Courtesy of the Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company*

Pijls, R *Capturing the Guest Experience in Hotels. Phase One: Theoretical Background and Development of the Guest Experience Scan*  
presented at EuroChrie 2011 conference  
[http://www.researchgate.net/publication/236295984\\_CAPTURING\\_THE\\_GUEST\\_EXPERIENCE\\_IN\\_HOTELS.\\_PHASE\\_ONE\\_THEORETICAL\\_BACKGROUND\\_AND\\_DEVELOPMENT\\_OF\\_THE\\_GUEST\\_EXPERIENCE\\_SCAN](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/236295984_CAPTURING_THE_GUEST_EXPERIENCE_IN_HOTELS._PHASE_ONE_THEORETICAL_BACKGROUND_AND_DEVELOPMENT_OF_THE_GUEST_EXPERIENCE_SCAN)

Samsung *The Future of the Guest Experience*  
[http://www.samsung.com/hu/business-images/resource/white-paper/2014/02/A503Samsung\\_hospitalitypages131023.29c-0-0.pdf](http://www.samsung.com/hu/business-images/resource/white-paper/2014/02/A503Samsung_hospitalitypages131023.29c-0-0.pdf)