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## MODULE\_4 CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE IN TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

### Lesson\_3\_ *CUSTOMER SERVICE*

#### CONTENT OVERVIEW

Customer service could be defined as the interactions and assistance between a business and the customers. That comes, when they purchase products or services. Customer service plays a key role in tourism and hospitality business's success.

When someone makes somebody feel comfortable, that person is being *hospitable*, providing a warm, friendly, good environment. The basis for the word hospitable is the Latin *hospes*, which refers to welcoming a guest, a word that evolved into meaning "to entertain." To concluded, "making your guests feel at home, even though you wish they were." In other words, entertaining them.

Employers in hospitality, leisure and tourism will also be looking for 'soft' skills, including: Communication, teamwork, flexibility, commitment to the industry, commercial awareness and enthusiasm. It has published in several sources, that good service comes down to knowing the product you are selling. It comes as well from professional and technical skills, communication skills, knowing the customer, the ability to work in a customer-oriented way and problem-solving skills.

SERVQUAL has been widely applied in service based organisations, among them hospitality industry; eg. hotels, restaurantants and cafés.

#### 1. The SERVQUAL technique

While specific customer service jobs require different skills, building an overall customer-oriented organization is necessary. In that case it may better meet customer expectations. One way to ensure quality service may be to encourage tourism and hospitality professionals to adapt and benefit from industry certifications. Businesses can also choose to use tools to determine customer satisfactions levels, such as the SERVQUAL technique. This technique compares customer perceptions of quality against customer expectations (Morrison, 2010).

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Under the SERVQUAL model, the five dimensions of service could be named:

**Reliability:** Where the quality and level of service is consistent

**Assurance:** Knowledge and courtesy of staff and their ability to convey trust and confidence

**Tangibles:** The organization's physical facilities, equipment, and appearance of staff

**Empathy:** The degree of caring, individualized attention that the organization's staff provide to its customers

**Responsiveness:** The willingness of staff to help customers and provide prompt service

## 2. Attributes and practical experiences from SERVQUAL model to hospitality industry

**Reliability** is defined as the probability that a product, system, or service will perform its intended function. It should do it adequately for a specified period of time, or will operate in a defined environment without failure. Reliability in tourism and hospitality industry shows on service providers supportive and dependable service behaviour. It shows as well on implementing service when promised, dependably and accurately on hotels and restaurants.

Customer service operations are designed always to keep customers satisfied. **Assurance** means developing operational controls to ensure that the results match the desired outcomes on service providing. In hospitality industry it shows as knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence. They could show their competence, courtesy, credibility and security. On service operations eg. hotel reception work, that means trustworthy behaviour, politeness to guests. It needs soft communication with guests, kind and cordial tone and advising undecided guests with practical things.

**Tangibles'** are defined as aspects of a service that can be 'felt' without actually purchasing the service. Tangibles are the 'visible' aspects of the service and they could improve external customer satisfaction. The tangible aspect of the service is one of the rare things, to be known and evaluated by the clients before the service itself. The terms 'tangibility' or 'physical quality' usually refers to elements of services, such as the appearance for service staff, equipment used eg. in the bar, advertising material and other physical characteristics used for introducing services.

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Tangibility in hotel business refers as well to the appearance of hotel general facilities and restaurant facilities. On recent studies tangibles could be introduced as tangible service quality elements in all hospitality facilities (eg. staff's helpfulness, personal attention or accuracy of service). It could be specified on different departments eg. the hotel's furnishings, restaurants and café interior, cleanliness and comfort of rooms, size of rooms, beds and bathrooms.

**Empathy** is the capacity to understand or feel what another person is experiencing. It is the capacity to place oneself in another's position. Tourism is a sector in which people are both service provider and service users and the relationships among them is very significant. It is necessary for service providers to understand service users, especially when it comes to situations evaluating complains and demands correctly. Caring and individualized attention is extremely important. Practical examples for empathy on tourism and hospitality are eg. clients' individual treatment and attention, anticipation of guests' needs, conscientious, respect to guests and their closest individual needs.

Even though the organization tries to deliver consistent service, to avoid service failure at all time, is unfortunately totally possible. Service failure could happen based on technical, system or personal faulty inside organization during service providing on restaurants. Sometimes faulty could be uncontrollable caused by the factors eg. weather or disaster, especially places with outdoor facilities and services. The key for the **responsiveness** is the employee behaviour when dealing with mistakes with clients. Practically it is service providers skills and willingness to help customers and provide prompt service. Those situations and actions, when responsiveness is needed are being helpful even while busy, Then it could be useful to inform about possible service delays, checking guest satisfaction in right moment. What is needed as well is prompt service and solving complaints to avoid clients spreading bad messages, which could have compensated on the spot.

## Conclusions

It is important to recognize, that customer service plays a key role in a business's success. All businesses can benefit from positive customer service, but it's particularly important for hospitality businesses in hotels and restaurants. SERVQUAL has been widely used in service based organisations. The SERVQUAL model's, five dimensions of service are: Reliability, assurance, tangible, empathy and responsiveness.

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