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## The Power of Common Sense

Posted on September 9, 2010

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Fifteen years ago when I just started my professional career with zero experience in the hotel industry, I had lunch with a veteran hotelier that was working for the group I had joined. I never forgot what he told me: *“Fabrice, the hotel industry is very complex and takes on board numerous factors that you will need to mastermind, but at the end of the day, it is all about common sense”*. It was a very wise advise that I always remembered.

Ever since I have always tried as much as I could to use my common sense rather than following blindly the predefined industry rules but challenged them at every step of the journey. It is not about challenging for the sake of it as most of the rules are valid and necessary, but more to make sure we have always considered all options.

### The Peninsula model

I am a big fan of the *Peninsula Hotels* brand. Not really because it is ultra luxury, or one of the best at what they do, but because they systematically think about new possible options for the comfort of their guests, always pushing boundaries, setting very high goals for themselves AND constantly challenging their own rules.

Recently, I was informed about a new brand standard being implemented across their hotels. All their minibar will be placed at 1.40 meters high (4.6 feet) as opposed to being at floor level. This new standard has three objectives:

- 1/ Increase guests comfort so that they can access the minibar without going on their knees or hurt their back .
- 2/ Increase minibar consumption through easier and faster access.
- 3/ Easier and faster for the housekeeping staff to do the re-fill.

We may all shout *“great idea, why I didn't think about it before??”*. Because we are tempted to be norm instead of following our common sense and see the obvious. A minibar at 1.40 meter high doesn't require extensive R&D or scientific analysis. Common sense.

**Common sense is not so common” – Voltaire.**

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There are many rules in the hotel industry that we take for granted or that are just set in stone and, let's admit it, keep us in a state of status quo. Unless we use our common sense to step back, re-think the guest experience at every step of its journey and innovate, we take the risk to deceive our customers. Customers, in any industry, are thrilled by innovation.

If you have witnessed break through innovationq, be it big or small, driven by common sense, please feel free to comment and share with everyone here.

Fabrice Burtin – September 2010

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Simon

September 10, 2010

Great post – and great thinking about the mini bar! All those times I have had to get onto the floor to reach into it, or even see it's contents, I never once thought "why is it down that low". It's important for hotels to keep ahead of the game and actually challenge their own best practices – otherwise they will quickly fall behind.

Reply



Fabrice Burtin

September 21, 2010

Thanks Simon – "Best practices"... That reminds me something <https://fabriceburtin.com/2010/08/26/we-should-not-get-stuck-with-best-practices/> Best practices are a good reference but that's all it must be – a reference, not rules set in stone.

Reply



Frederic Etienbled

September 17, 2010

Great article. While coming from a different industry (retail), the Power of Common Sense reminds me some complementary fundamentals that I believe might also apply to the hospitality industry. Top of my mind comes "Authenticity". Every one can have his or her own understanding about Authenticity, as it is far from being rocket science. And I will always remember what my Retail Mentor was keeping preaching to his Teams when explaining why Authenticity was a strategic fundamental for a store:

- We cannot manipulate customers
- Authenticity means freedom of choice
- Authenticity means easy choice
- Authenticity means honesty (don't hide mistakes) and clarity of the communication (prices, products origins, out of stock,...)
- Authenticity means understanding the "moments" of the location: products, events
- Authenticity means simplicity

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Fabrice Burtin

September 21, 2010

Thanks Frederic for sharing your experience from another industry. There are actually a lot of similarities between the hotel industry and the retail industry. Reading your comment just confirms it.

Reply



Are Morch

September 21, 2010

Great article here Fabrice :)

I am also a big fan of the common sense principle. The only drawback I have experienced sometimes is that I meet many within the Hotel Industry with common sense, but they miss out by following it up with common action.

So my formula now is to follow up common sense with common action. To many hotels lives in reaction mode which is followed up by cutting down on employees – limited their services etc.

Since we are in 'recession' many hotels use this an excuse to live in 'reaction'. So for many they are already in 'depression' mode. They feel fatigue, lack of energy, lack of creativity, lack on innovation, lack of opportunity... basically lack of common sense.

This is not the first time we face an economic turmoil, and probably want be the last one either. But if we read history a little bit and look through periods where we faced similar situation then we will see that where some industries to cam out ahead of the game. They chose to focus on the opportunities these challenges provided. They kept their work force, they kept their energy, they was creative, they was innovative, they was proactive.. they turned common sense into common action.

Like you say to many chose to follow the norm. And in this process they lose quality employees, and lose a lot of trust among their customers. Because they don't have what it takes to deliver the value that meets their customers wants and needs.

I admit it can be easy to fall into following the norm during times like this. But we have to be willing to take risk. It is not easy, if that was the case then everyone would taken the necessary actions.

We see some of this effect from Four Seasons in Dublin that now will be sold. They have followed a cost-cutting plan. I guess they must have moved away from Isadora Sharps philosophy. I'm aware of that is a bit more complex picture. But some of the reasons that is given is things like the recession, lack of US customers spending money etc. These are clear signs of that living in reaction mode can hit even the best.

And it most definitive indicates that the Hotel Industry faces come big challenges. So we need more then ever to focus on putting common sense into common action.

Cheers.. Are

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