



Let's Be Frank Is Your Service Valuable?

"The customer experience is the next competitive battleground."

-Jerry Gregoire

Pale in Portland

I was flying cross country to a conference in Portland, Oregon. You know that feeling you get when you first notice the flu coming on? About one hour into the flight I felt like I was going to be sick... very sick!

I remained in the lavatory for a very long time. I asked the flight attendant if she minded me staying in there for the remainder of the flight. She smiled and agreed. I felt like a zombie and didn't want to infect the other passengers.

After landing, I somehow picked up my luggage and took a commuter train to the Hilton in downtown Portland. I painfully made it to the front desk where a friendly gentleman greeted me with a smile.

"Welcome to the Portland Hilton," he said. "You look like you have been traveling quite a bit today." I stared at him with ashen eyes and replied, "No, I am miserably sick. I think I have the flu or some bug. I will sign anything you want and fill out any form... later. I just need to get to my room to collapse in now."

He introduced himself as "Frank" and asked my name. "Mr. Mathis, that bellman over there will be glad to take you and your luggage to the room where you can relax. I will be glad to check you in now for your convenience and comfort."

A few grueling minutes later I was in my room and in bed. I took out my cell phone and called home. "I am sick and coming back home in the morning." I needed something to eat and was about to call room service.

But suddenly there was a knock at my door...

I was greeted by a young lady in a Hilton uniform with the name “Erin” on her lapel and a room service tray in her hands.

“Mr. Mathis, I understand we aren’t feeling well today.” I thought, “No kidding!” She continued, “Frank at the front desk told us you are ill, so he requested this meal for you. There is a hot bowl of vegetable soup, crackers, a soda, and some mints to settle your stomach.” I just stared at her in amazement.

Then she said like a mother would say, “Now Mr. Mathis, you eat all of this soup, or you won’t get well soon, okay?” “Okay,” I said. Then she handed me a get well card that Frank, the front desk and kitchen staff had signed. She told me to call Frank if I needed anything else and left. Have you ever felt embarrassed and emotional when someone was showing compassion and concern for you? That was me.

So I began to slowly eat the hot soup. It took me an hour to eat the whole meal. Erin was right... I began to feel better. Finally I took a warm shower and went downstairs to thank Frank. But his shift had ended for the weekend. My scheduled check-out was Monday morning, so I knew I wouldn’t see him again.

I stayed for the entire convention and had a great time, feeling much better. When I arrived home, one of my first missions was to call the Hilton home office to tell them how impressed I was with Frank’s and the staff’s service to me.

The gentleman at the customer service help desk was amazed at my story. He immediately called the Hilton in Portland to relay the story. Within an hour he called to say that Frank’s manager had called in the staff and publically thanked Frank and everyone who signed that card for their excellent customer service. He said, “That is what we strive for at Hilton, and Frank proved that we are being successful.”

Valuable Service

Frank showed what customer service should be all about. He exemplified three characteristics that everyone should practice to make their organization’s service valuable.

1. **Valuable service is proactive, not policy driven.** Frank got me to my room immediately instead of quoting a policy to me about how many documents I had to sign to get into my room. He didn’t argue with me.

Your people should practice actively listening to customers instead of quoting the policy manual. They should be proactive in discovering needs and meeting them. They should fear poor service more than what their management will do if they don’t abide by company policy. Do your people take action to satisfy customers or are they waiting for your permission to make you look good?

2. **Valuable service is personal.** It should meet the needs of your top customers. They are the ones who bring in the most business. Interview them and ask what you can do to

please them more. Why not? They bring in the most income and influence many others to follow them.

Most companies ask every customer what they want. That's okay, but it takes too much time and you wind up with too many opinions from people who won't return to your business. But your most influential customers already like you, frequent your business and will be more eager to be your primary advocates.

Your business is more than just service to them. To reverse a line from *The Godfather*, "It's not business, it's personal." How can you serve your most valuable customers to make them primary advocates for your business?

3. **Valuable service is "remark-able."** It should motivate people to remark about how wonderful it is. Frank's efforts and concern were so amazing that I couldn't forget it when I got home. The first thing I wanted to do was tell people about it.

Twitter, Yelp and Trip Advisor have thousands of people every day remarking about your company's service so others will know. You can't ignore the impact social media has on your business. What are you doing to generate and encourage positive remarks?

I know businesses, like spas and retail merchants, who reward feedback with coupons and discounts. They know how to encourage customers to write great reviews on social media. What can you do that is "remark-able" in a positive way? Ask your team to come up with creative ideas based on their one-to-one experiences with your top customers. You will be surprised at their feedback.

Quite Frankly

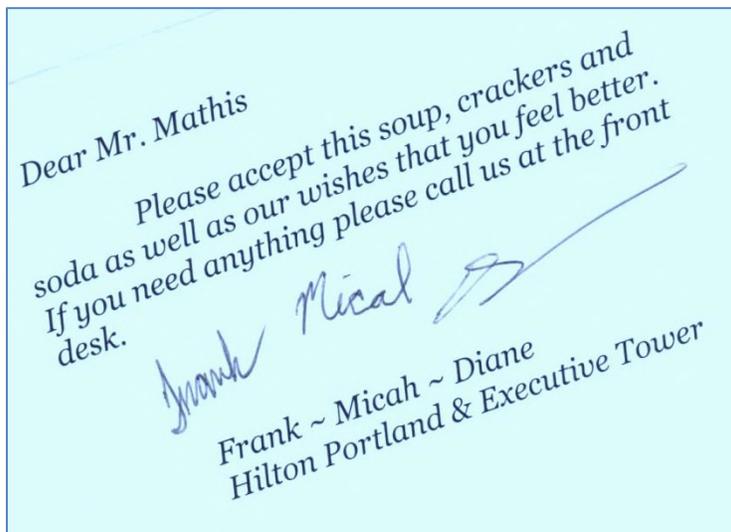
One year later, I returned to Portland to give a presentation. The client booked me at another hotel three blocks from the Hilton. I took time one afternoon to walk down the street to see Frank and thank him in person.

I walked into the familiar lobby and was greeted by the desk clerk. I asked for Frank. She told me that there was nobody there by that name. I explained that Frank was a desk clerk who I had met over a year ago. "Oh!" she said, "I know who you are talking about.... I am sorry, but he is no longer employed here. He is the manager of the Hilton over in Vancouver." "He is?" I asked.

"Yes, about eleven months ago, he received a promotion directly from the corporate office. Everyone was surprised at first, but his service record was so great, they promoted him to manager ahead of schedule." I knew why Frank was promoted so fast.

How valuable is your service? Is it proactive? Does your service reach your most valuable clients personally? Are people remarking about valuable service? If not, what can you do to empower your team and turn it around?

I have kept the note below to remind me what valuable service looks like and means to me.



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