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"SIGN, SIGN, EVERYWHERE A SIGN"

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Happy New Year and welcome to 2008! I spent the end of 2007 and beginning of 2008 as a tourist. It has been a long time since I took the kind of vacation where I was a full-blown tourist. No meetings. No comp rooms. No nothing. Instead, catching cabs, waiting for concierge to get back to me on coordinating outings and the like...and what an eye opener it was.

With this in mind, I thought it best to start the New Year talking about "the signs" that are all around you as a leader and manager of people. Great leadership is fundamental to an organization's success. Leadership without management and training took the makings of 10 amazing days to a "please get me off this island so I can eat good food, have a few competently trained people to help me spend my money and enjoy a good glass of wine!" It is good to be home and back to work!

Throughout my visit, I kept wondering is anyone else seeing this lack of training resulting in an endless stream of incompetency and a sense of employee dissatisfaction. I can assure they were. I met all of the managers who were friendly and quite competent and yet the staff screamed of mediocrity at this, according to someone, "Five Star" resort.

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There really were signs everywhere about the way this organization was run; the community it had created where people were happy yet unproductive; guest oriented when it fit their own timeframe; and a lack of communication from one area to another!

Here are a few signs to get you and your staff thinking in 2008 about what else might be happening that isn't on your guest surveys. I was asked a lot about my challenges and nothing changed so in the end when asked, I gave the "it is fine" answer...and that answer, my friends, is a "SIGN!"

Sign 1: If you have an all-inclusive food plan and your guests keep leaving the property to eat elsewhere, the odds are that the food is not good. And me, like other guests, couldn't help but ask "is this a food margin improvement strategy" or do they just not have quality food standards? Honestly, I lost six pounds! For those who don't have all-inclusive food plans, the same scenario still rings true...if the food stinks, guests won't come back. It is a sign, so take a look at your food revenue per guest, ask them to fill in a form after each meal and have them put it in a sealed envelope. This feedback will begin to tell the real story.

Sign 2: If a guest is at your hotel for more than four days, visits the spa one time and never returns, you may have a spa services problem. Never in my life have I had reflexology for 30 minutes with the majority of the time someone rubbing my ankles. Guests won't find time to use your spa if the spa service person is incapable, no matter the cost. A one-time visit or a lot of cancellations are a big sign that you have to take a closer look.

Sign 3: If the owner never leaves the property and spends more time on the gravel of the golf cart path than with the managers ensuring that the standards of service are being trained. This business is about people before product. A great product without

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great people is a goner. A mediocre product with great people can own the marketplace.

Sign 4: When a single person proceeds to order eight items from the all-inclusive lunch menu it isn't because they are a pig. They are just hoping that they will have enough bites of a few things to leave full until dinner. And, when the plates come back to the kitchen with one bite gone and they still want dessert, it is another sign -- a sign you have bad food.

Sign 5: When you sell an oceanfront bungalow and you give them a lagoon room at midnight in the rain, doubting they will figure it out in the morning, odds are they will be unhappy. Evidently everyone had purchased an oceanfront room and actually there weren't any truly oceanfront rooms around the entire place. This is a sign that categories and value matter, not to mention that bait and switch marketing is not a RevPAR strategy.

Sign 6: If there are nine bartenders behind the bar, no customers, drinks are free and the one customer at the bar can't get service to order a bottle of wine (which actually captures additional revenue) you've got yourself a major sign. Something is wrong here from the staffing, to the "I don't know what I am supposed to do when there are not people at the bar and no management to tell me". With further investigation, it was uncovered that the primary issue was that the bartenders didn't have cork screws so they didn't want to take wine orders. Evidently they steal them all so the solution from management was "no more cork screws". Boy, did I need a drink about now!

Sign 7: If there is dirt all over the bathroom floors of a hotel room that has been in availability for less than a week, the housekeepers are not properly trained, don't care or have no idea of what their responsibilities are. It is a sign of a dirty everything and no

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training. Morale is on its way down because one thing is for sure, when you make people feel incompetent, they don't take pride and begin to not care.

Sign 8: If guests start telling you everything is fine, they don't necessarily mean it. I just felt bad complaining as I know how hard our business is and at some point you just stop asking. Hoping, begging and realizing this is it. Guest solution...I will never be back. As a general manager, if you want to know what your guests really think, start hanging in the bar, lobby and restaurant on a regular basis. When they say "fine" ask if it is really fine for them and what you can do to make their stay better. People talk a lot!

Sign 9: If no one shows up for your free entertainment, odds are it isn't entertaining. Change it up and make it fun.

Sign 10: When guests who have paid in full prior to arrival are still leaving, you got trouble. Not a good sign, period.

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