



30 WAYS TO IMPROVE YOUR ATTRACTION'S GUEST EXPERIENCE

Presented by:

Attraction
pros

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1

Learn and use guest's name

Everyone loves a personalized experience. When you have the opportunity to learn your guests' names, use it multiple times throughout the interaction. Using the guest's name shows that you are emotionally invested in the interaction, and that you genuinely care about their experience while they are visiting. It makes them feel like an individual, rather than a number or dollar sign coming through the door.

Guests' names might not seem easy to obtain at first. But when you look for ways to ascertain it, it becomes simpler. If you ever require an identification or a credit card, you have access to their name immediately. When multiple people are in a group together, you'll probably hear them use someone's name at some point. Or, simply introducing yourself usually prompts an introduction back to you. You might not be able to use the name of every guest you come across, but the more names you can use, the better service you'll be able to provide.

2

Develop specific guest service or experience standards that uphold your values

The values of your company represent what you stand for and how you will engage with your employees and guests. Creating specific behavioral performance standards helps everyone know exactly what they are supposed to do and how their behavior impacts the guest experience.

A behavioral performance standard can be measured by these questions: what can I see? What do I hear? By putting into this context, we can take theoretical concepts (a value such as Respect or Trust) and assign specific, observable behaviors that demonstrate that value. For example, a behavioral example of Respect could be addressing a guest by their name or allowing a guest to go through a doorway first. Not only does this help your employees know specifically what impacts the guest experience, it also helps leaders know what behaviors to look for.

3

Engage in conversation

Asking guests a little bit about themselves goes a long way. Where are you visiting from? How long are you in town? Is this your first time here? These types of questions can spark some great dialogue. Maybe you have something in common with their hometown. Maybe there's something you can recommend to them based on them telling you that it's their first time in the area. In many cases, guests have conversation starters on their hats or shirts. University and sports team logos are great ways to learn a little bit more about your guests and get them talking.

Depending on the point in their visit, lengthy conversation might not be feasible. But when you have the opportunity to go a little deeper into guest interactions, it'll enhance their experience just a little bit more. And at the end of the day, it's usually the little things that add up and determine how satisfied that guest is with their overall experience.

4

Communicate your standards through multiple channels

Many companies include a detailed account of their values in the in their handbook or orientation process. This is a great start, but this should not be the only place your employees hear about your specific behavioral standards. Conversations such as coaching and feedback are great times to refer back to your standards, pointing out how an employee's behavior either supported or fell below your desired level of conduct or service.

It's also a great idea to use the physical employee spaces such as breakrooms, employment offices and other back of house areas to put up posters or murals that show your values in action. Using pictures of current employees also shows a real person performing a real action. Your social media channels can also be great ways to communicate values and standards, whether responding to a guest, announcing a fun new attraction or interacting with employees via an employee portal or channel.

A decorative background featuring several thin, curved lines in light gray and white, some solid and some dashed, sweeping across the page from the top left towards the bottom right. On the left side, there is a large red speech bubble pointing downwards. Inside the top of the bubble is a black circle containing the white number '5'. The main body of the bubble is red and contains the text 'Show your enthusiasm' in white. To the right of the bubble, there are two paragraphs of black text.

5

Show your enthusiasm

If you're in the attractions industry, you're probably used to seeing some very unique things. In fact, you probably see things every day that the general public isn't as privileged to experience as much as you do. And maybe those unique elements of your attraction have become ordinary for you... routine... or even redundant. But that's okay! Because for the guests that you interact with on a daily basis, it might be their first time seeing it.

That's why it's up to you to share that enthusiasm for the most exciting aspects of your attraction. Whether it's a roller coaster, dolphin show, or a multi-level go-kart track, think back to how excited you were about it on your first day on the job – or maybe if you visited the attraction as a guest. If you bring back those memories and share that same level of enthusiasm every single day with every guest you interact with, then they're going to be just as excited about it too.

6

Hold all
employees
accountable to
your standards

When we say all employees, we mean **ALL** employees. From the top of the organization to the newest employee, everyone has the same responsibility, and no one should be “above” the standards, or be allowed to feel that some rule or policy does not apply to them.

Given the make-up of most companies, various departments have differing responsibilities and tasks. Nevertheless, they should all be held to the same universal standards. For example, safety in a technical department is always a high priority, but it should also be a high priority for those working in an office. Trip hazards or obstructed pathways in an office or back room can pose physical threats to employees, much like a machine without it's safety guards in place. Evaluate all of your standards to see how they impact various departments.

7

Be the expert

When it comes to the layout of your work environment, rules and policies, hours of operation, and location of restrooms, who knows the facility better – you, or your guests? You and your team, of course! Your guests may not realize it, but they are relying on you to guide them through the experience, and chart them through unfamiliar territory. If they don't get that expert advice, they might make a wrong turn, literally or figuratively, and they won't have the experience that you wanted them to have.

With that in mind, be the expert for your guests. Help them manage their day, find the way, and have the best experience possible. If you know when the lines for food are going to be the shortest, recommend that guests eat lunch during that time. If you interact with guests immediately at opening, tell them what gets crowded quickly and direct them there first. If guests ask you a question and you don't know the answer, help them get a quick response. Saying "I don't know" doesn't get you off the hook.

8

Role model the service you expect

Especially for service-oriented behaviors, the “do as I say, not as I do” method of leadership and training is definitely the least effective. Employees are watching your every move, and if you walk past a guest and don’t acknowledge them because you are in the middle of a very important text, then employees will see that as acceptable behavior for everyone. They will also wonder if you really meant that the guests were our top priority if they see you treating them as less than that.

If you want your employees to smile, then you need to smile. If you want your employees to greet the guests in a friendly manner, then you need to greet the guests in a friendly manner. As basic as this sounds, many leaders get so focused on their “important leadership tasks” that they forget about the most important part of their job – setting the right example for their teams.

9

Anticipate guests' needs

Sometimes guests don't know what they don't know, and because of that, sometimes they don't know what questions they should ask. If you are the expert in your area, it's your job to identify when a guest might be headed for a less than stellar experience, and then intervene to help get them back on track. A guest should never have a negative experience just because they didn't know what information they needed to know. When you anticipate what they might need, they'll appreciate you for identifying it for them.

Guests might not always be aware of operating hours, outside food policies, availability of stroller rentals, or accommodations for guests with disabilities. Sometimes they'll ask, and when they do, you'll have the opportunity to provide that expert advice. But if they don't, you'll want to look for visual cues that will help you guide them through their experience. This is where being the expert of your attraction combines with identifying who the guest is in front of you, and acting accordingly.

10

Allow employees to put their own stamp on guest interactions (within your guidelines)

This may seem a little counter-intuitive given what we've said about everyone adhering to the same standards. Your standards for service should be your baseline, then allow your employees to infuse their own personal touch and personality into the interaction.

If your retail associates are to greet every guest that enters their store, that's great. The next step is to allow employees to provide that greeting either based on their personality or the situation at hand. It would get boring for the guests and employees if they had to say the exact same thing every time. Instead, encouraging them to address a guest based on time of day, weather conditions, merchandise selection or just a different way to say hello is still upholding your standard, but the employee gets to have a little fun with it.

11

Give them more than what they paid for

Everybody loves a high-value experience. And in the attractions industry, sometimes high value comes at a high price. This makes guests very aware of the quality of the experience that they have connected with what they paid for it. Because of this, it's up to you to make sure that they walk away feeling like they got their money's worth, and if possible, even more. Otherwise, you risk having guests saying that it wasn't worth it – even if you feel that they got what they paid for.

In many cases, there are types of experiences that you aren't able to provide to every guest you interact with every day, but when given the chance, you can make a guest feel like a VIP without a significant cost. Maybe it's expedited access to an attraction or a show, a behind the scenes look at something guests don't normally get to see, or even acknowledging a guest's birthday.

12

Recruit service-oriented employees

Not everyone is a born service provider. Some people find serving others very natural, others need a little more guidance. Either way, when you are looking for new people to join the team, you can look for certain qualities that all service-oriented people have in common.

They generally put others first and show a genuine interest in how others are feeling. This shows up in casual conversation as well as demonstrated behaviors. Always be on the lookout in your community for those service minded individuals who may be interested in a new opportunity. Generally speaking, past behavior is an indicator of future behavior, so evaluate your candidates for their ability to provide service as well as cultural fit.

13

Invite them back

Extending an invitation to return is the pinnacle of hospitality. At the end of a guest's visit, give them a reason to come back! Maybe you have a new attraction or exhibit that is opening soon, or a seasonal event that is coming up, or a promotion that you only run on certain days of the week. Make sure to promote these experiences at the conclusion of a guest's visit so they know that even if they had a full experience on this visit, there is more to see next time they come.

Even if there is nothing coming up in the near future to suggest, simply telling a guest that you hope to see them again in the future sets the tone for a favorable lasting impression of your attraction. They'll already be thinking about their next visit, even if they haven't fully planned it or paid for it yet. The more you can do to keep you on their mind after they leave, the higher the likelihood is that they'll come back.

14

Foster a strong sense of teamwork

While leaders must spend time fostering individual relationships, they must also keep their eye on the overall demeanor and morale of the team. One bad apple can truly spoil the entire bunch.

Employees will work hard for a leader that inspires them, that's true. They will work even harder if they know the team around them is as committed as they are and would have their back when the going gets tough. Watching out for even the smallest of cracks in the team morale and addressing it immediately can reduce frustration and miscommunications down the road. When a team is spending time focused on why George isn't pulling his weight, they aren't spending time serving the guests. That could lead to a lot of missed opportunities.

15

Ask guests for their feedback

Guest feedback is how attractions improve the guest experience for the future. Without knowing what aspects of the visit are the most favorable and which parts are causing frustration, there is no way to know where the attention should be focused. If you ask guests for their feedback, you gain vital information that you can use to your benefit. Positive feedback can lead to staff members being recognized for a job well done, and negative feedback can lead to knowing what parts of the business need to be improved, along with vital coaching opportunities.

It is important to direct certain types of feedback to be submitted through certain channels. For example, you want your satisfied guests to be publicly praising your attraction for the world to see on TripAdvisor, Yelp, and other social media or review sites. At the same time, you want to make sure that if a guest has a concern or a complaint, that it is received through private channels so it can be dealt with before it hits social media. That's why the more you ask your guests for feedback, the more opportunities you have to intercept complaints before they turn into negative word of mouth.

16

Seek input from your frontline employees

Try as they might to the contrary, many leaders quickly forget what it's like to work on the frontlines. They also forget to ask for their input when there is an issue or challenge that needs to be overcome.

Seeking input from frontline employees serves a number of important functions. First, it can provide a different perspective that may not have been thought about, which could lead to very creative solutions. It also allows the employee to see what the process and decision making is like at higher levels in the company. That can be invaluable training for them as they move into leadership roles. Lastly, but arguably most important, it fosters a sense of belonging, value and trust in that employee. They now see that their opinion and ideas are important and valid and that bolsters their confidence in everything they do.

17

Resolve issues quickly

If a guest has a negative experience, time is not on your side. You want to make sure that you learn of any complaints that a guest has immediately, and take quick action. When issues are resolved quickly and effectively, the guest has a higher likelihood of ultimately being satisfied, which will lead to them visiting again and sharing positive word of mouth. Studies have shown that guest satisfaction can actually be *higher* for guests who had an issue successfully resolved than guests who never had an issue in the first place.

Be sure to properly listen and fully comprehend any complaint that a guest may have, and validate their concerns – even if you don't agree with them. Always thank a guest for taking the time to share their feedback with you, and express any concern or apology as necessary that their visit did not go as planned. Successfully recover from the complaint by compensating for whatever may have gone wrong, and thank the guest again for working with you to resolve their complaint, and also for their future business.

18

Effectively recognize outstanding service behaviors

What gets recognized, gets repeated. Once you have your standards in place and you see an employee performing that standard, providing some genuine and specific recognition will encourage them to do it again. We can't make anyone do anything, but we can let them know how much we appreciate their efforts so they feel good about doing it again.

This recognition also has to be delivered effectively. Yelling a blanket "THANK YOU" to your staff as they punch out and leave for the evening is not an effective way to acknowledge their actions and efforts. Effective recognition is timely, personal to the individual, and situational, and it must be sincere. If you don't mean it, the employee will pick up on that and your recognition efforts will likely have the opposite effect of what you were going for.

19

Recognize loyalty

Loyal guests are crucial to any business, and attractions are no exception. A loyal guest can be defined as someone who a) returns often, and b) influences others to visit as well. Loyal guests become an extension of the attraction's marketing, by putting gas on the fire when it comes to positive word of mouth. And because of their commitment and dedication, they deserve to be recognized.

At the minimum, a guest's loyalty should be acknowledged with sincerity. Showing appreciation for loyalty solidifies their decision to continue doing business with you, and allows them to recognize that it is worth their financial investment. By offering perks, discounts, or amenities that are exclusive to loyal guests, you can focus on amplifying the guest experience for those who are going to go out and tell others that they should visit and gain the same satisfaction that they do.

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20

Provide continual training and resources

For any behavior to stick and become a habit, continual training and reinforcement of those actions must be present. This can take on many looks... additional training classes, coaching conversations, informal chats/meetings, articles or videos, books, online courses, etc.

The key to any of these processes is to be consistent and intentional. Even if you spend 15 minutes a week, but do it EVERY week, you will see incremental improvement because you are providing a consistent message. It's okay to start small and build on what works.

21

Thank them for their business

Showing appreciation for all guests is crucial. The alternative options to visiting your attraction are endless – even aside from your direct competitors, consider all of the things that your guests could be doing with their time or money, and they decided to spend both of those with you. That's worth acknowledging, and demonstrating sincere gratitude for their business. This can be as simple of stating, "Thank you for visiting today," or "I'm so glad you're here."

This can also go beyond a verbal acknowledgement by demonstrating your enthusiasm for their visit with a reason or incentive to return. This can include a certain percentage off in the future, a BOGO deal, or a discount for bringing friends/family. However you decide to do it, always make sure that you are thanking your guests for intentionally deciding to come spend their day with you.

22

Share guest feedback with employees

When people know the impact of their actions, they are more likely to either repeat a good action or stop a negative action. Allowing employees to see directly how their behaviors impact guests gives them additional insight that cannot be provided by peers or leaders.

If you already keep track of guest comments, allow department heads access to these comments. These can then be shared one-on-one for specific instances, or during a staff meeting. Anything that calls out a specific employee should be shared with that employee individually before sharing with the group. If a comment is particularly negative, remove the employee's name when shared with a larger audience. It's also important for back-of-house teams to see these comments, as they indirectly have an impact and it's also a great reminder of why we do what we do – no matter what department you work in.

23

Own your job

Regardless of your role within your organization, you are tasked with taking responsibility of any curveballs that are thrown at you. In those situations, it might be easiest to “pass the buck” and make it someone else’s problem, but that doesn’t help the situation, and it certainly doesn’t help the guest. The best instances of service recovery or moments that go above and beyond are created when staff members activate their skills and abilities, and make it happen for that guest.

Have you ever called a customer service number, held for a significant period of time, and when someone answered and you explained your issue, they immediately transferred you to somebody else? Then you had to explain your issue again, talk to more people, and jump through more hoops than you would have if the person you spoke to first was determined to resolving the issue. Whether you’re the first person the guest speaks to or the last, always be committed to saving the day – regardless of the issue.

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24

Allow (and encourage) your staff to experience your attraction as a guest

Even if your employees “grew up” coming to your facility and know it like the back of their hand, it’s different to experience it as a guest now that they work there. All employees, regardless of position or department, should be allowed and encouraged to experience your attraction as a guest.

Provide free tickets for your employees to come in and bring a friend or family member. While this will be a day of fun for them, ask them about their experience when they come back to work. Inevitably, they will see or experience something that could be improved or changed. Your employees really are one of your best marketing tools, so they should be familiar with what you have to offer outside of their specific area or duties.

A decorative background featuring several thin, curved lines in shades of gray. A large, vibrant red speech bubble is positioned on the left side of the page. Inside the top of the speech bubble is a black circle containing the white number '25'. The text 'Be efficient' is written in white inside the main body of the red speech bubble.

25

Be efficient

One of the most frustrating experiences for a guest is waiting longer than they should. Given all of the opportunities for lines to form throughout any attraction, efficiency is one of the biggest drivers that determine how satisfied a guest will be. And if they feel like a line is moving too slow, then their perception is reality – and something needs to be done to fix it.

The most efficient operations are adequately staffed and ready for whatever the volume of business is expected to be for that day. Additionally, the level of service that you provide also goes hand in hand with how efficiently you're operating. While you want to personalize the interaction for as many guests as you can, when there is higher congestion than normal, it might not be the ideal time. Guests will appreciate that you are focused on getting through the experience in an efficient manner, even if it means not being able to take your time with each and every guest.

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26

Remove people
from your
organization that
do not fit your
culture

This is a hard one to justify sometimes when it's difficult to find enough staff. The truth is, though, that those who don't fit in with your culture will be like a thorn in the side of those who do, and want, to be part of the team.

Above practical skill, cultural fit should be the determining factor that someone is going to remain a part of the team or not. They could be a great sales person, but if no one wants to work with them, everyone (including the guests) will suffer. In the long run, it's usually better to be short staffed for a short time but have all of the people committed to the same goal, rather than having full staff but some people are doing more to pull the team apart than keep it together. You'll be continually fighting against their influence, and they could also cause your good employees to want to quit.

27

Be their personal concierge

Your guests are not as familiar with the attraction as you are, and they rely on you to help them plan their day.

Because you are the expert, you can provide that knowledgeable insight that they otherwise would not know. When you get the chance to know your guest a little better, you can suggest how they can have the best experience. This can include which ticket they should purchase, which attractions or exhibits might excite them the most, or perhaps even where they should have dinner in the area after they've left.

This type of interaction can occur when you personalize the experience for your guests, get to know them better, and develop a rapport that ultimately builds trust. And when you build trust with your guest, it no longer feels like an employee/guest type of interaction, but they'll feel as if they've made a friend. That feeling will stay with them long after they've left your attraction and when they consider where they should visit in the future.

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28

Encourage people to take time off

Just like our electronic devices, people need to recharge, too. Working a lot of hours can look good on your paycheck or to your boss, but it likely isn't doing much for your other relationships and interests. Taking some time away can do wonders for your energy level as well as your overall perspective.

As a leader, you again need to lead by example by taking the time off you expect your staff to take. Pursue hobbies and outside interests and spend time with friends and family. If you have professional staff that have work emails and phones, make it a priority to not check in with them when they are out, and likewise do not contact them when you are out. It's too easy to blur the lines of work and personal life, and you need to set the example.

29

Be immaculate

The cleanliness of your facility carries a bigger impression than it might seem. If you pull up any review site and start reading through the comments on just about any tourism or hospitality business, cleanliness will usually be a regular occurrence – even if the feedback is positive. Whether consciously or subconsciously, your guests are considering cleanliness when determining how satisfied they were with their visit. And it's very important that those perceptions are always kept high.

Keep your cleaning supplies fully stocked, and make cleaning a regular habit throughout the day – not just before opening and after closing. Your guests are naturally making the environment a little dirtier, slowly but surely, and in order to continue to provide an amazing guest experience for the next guests, pick up what they may have left behind, or do any reorganizing needed to make your front of house look untouched every time.

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30

Use your marketing budget for training

If we truly believe that our employees are our most effective marketers, then it only makes sense to provide them with the tools and resources to be the absolute best that they can be. Unfortunately, when money is tight, it's usually the training or staff budget that gets cut first.

Allotting some of your marketing budget to cover the shortfalls in other areas allows you to keep the support going for your employees. Cutting back staff to save money will ultimately have a negative impact on guest service, which leads to negative word of mouth. That's not at all what the marketing team wants to hear.

What's
next?

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