

INTRODUCTION

This book is intended for students who have opted to study the hospitality trade and for their teachers, so anybody working in hotels, tourist offices, travel agencies etc. In fact it is for those in any profession where they are in contact with the general public and for people who would like to improve their “services”. The objective is to understand the difficulties of these jobs, using as a base the hospitality and tourism sector. This book will try to simplify the theoretical and practical approaches, teach you to communicate using simple techniques, consider the different categories of tourism and understand the various customer segments.

The role of people in providing services is essential so we will also consider the difficulties of working in a team, understanding your superiors and customers so as to provide a quality service. To do this we will need to look at and discuss the basic concepts of management sciences, such as marketing, leadership and human resources.

This book is designed to be practical and accessible to all those who have a passion for service. That is why each lesson will be followed by exercises and discussion topics based on the subject studied, a reminder of the vocabulary in French and English, visits to local companies and analysis of their efforts and results, preparation of themed talks (presentation and analysis) and various other exercises in both French and English.

The hardest part comes at the end: to become an expert in the oldest profession in the world – selling. You will be helped along by the many role-playing exercises and case-studies in this book. We will look at the art of selling without pushing or intimidating the client thanks to a win-win attitude and a thorough analysis of your products and services.

Here are the reasons why we wrote this book, and we have been thinking about doing so for a long time. Does France, for a long time considered a hospitable country, really live up to its reputation? Are its people, and in particular its workforce, willing and able to welcome all its tourists correctly? Does the service sector offer the quality of service the client demands? All these questions were worrying us. We then had the idea to answer them in a scientific way, by writing a PhD thesis. This was greatly appreciated by our peers and we were congratulated. But despite this honour, we felt that our knowledge should be made available to a wider audience. At the same time this would allow us to teach the new generation, looking for work in a profession where they could easily find a job. For this they need a qualification which includes a welcome/reception module. For the last five years the success rate for this exam has been so low that we decided it was time to share our knowledge. The point at which we decided to put pen to paper came in June 2009 when the annual exam results were published. A 100% pass rate. Congratulations girls! Yes, in this year group all the students were young women.

This doesn't mean that men are not appreciated in these jobs. On the contrary, because they are considered more stable they have none of the common problems associated with female employees. In addition, they are more willing to accept multiple roles in companies, and often ask for that opportunity. Carrying bags doesn't normally worry them, even if they may be heavy.

In this book, we will refer primarily to techniques, words, expressions and attitudes which most of the time we have tested ourselves. It's true, we almost forgot to mention that we have worked for many years in the tourism and hospitality industry, more than twenty years

in fact. We have done almost all the jobs available in a hotel: maid, receptionist, sales department manager, accommodation manager, executive assistant and managing director. Then we helped set up an agency to support tour operators and worked there for seven years. It was interesting for us to see the other side of the tourism world. We loved working in all these areas. They all required us to undertake exciting and incredibly diverse tasks. We met guests of every nationality; most of them great people, but there were a few who could be described as “difficult”.

With a focus on communication and the desire to help and share, we had a wonderful time. It's a real joy when a client gives you a bottle of Dom Perignon to say thank you. You are also likely to receive bouquets of flowers, dinner invitations and certainly many other unexpected items (such as photo calendars from the customer's home country, each year for more than twenty years!). Your reward for a job that requires so many skills may be a simple “thank you” or a grateful letter.

It is true that this book may not allow you to appreciate the full pleasure of these jobs, which can be very rewarding. This pleasure does exist and occurs more frequently than the bad times, but to guarantee this you first need to acquire certain skills and then constantly develop them. The world is changing ever more quickly and if you don't move with it and keep your skills up to date you will get left behind. We therefore need to learn some techniques that will help you to deal better with difficult situations. We need to understand the concept of service and accept it. We need to think about and ask questions so as to always move forward. We must never stop learning. But above all we need to want to please other people.

This book will offer a number of thoughts on the theory of service. You may be able, depending on your experience, to give your opinion on some of these ideas. Exercises will help you apply the knowledge you have acquired. The role playing situations outlined in this book are clearly marked. It is better to try these in groups. One or more people can play the customers and you will need to be good actors to be convincing. You, or someone else, should take the role described – most of

the time a receptionist or front desk worker. The other group members should observe your actions and reactions. They should listen to your words and then give you feedback on your performance. If you need to try this alone then just imagine the customer in front of you. Whether you are alone or in a group try to film yourself if possible because when you run the film back later you will be able to identify your weaknesses.

Most of the time in this book we will use “We” to describe what needs to be done. This is always the case for scientific work and although this book does not fall into that category we have become used to doing so. We will however use the personal pronoun “I” when we talk about our memories. When we use “I” it is usually to tell a “story” illustrating a theoretical concept. When “you” is used, this is to give advice or to emphasize the importance of using a particular technique, attitude or expression.

If you are now ready, let's begin!