10 Step 5: The eco-feedback loop (Skill)

Introduction

Much of this book focuses on the steps needed to reach sustainable hospitality, but there is a final, essential step that takes you back to the start: feedback. This chapter will cover why it is so important and how to do it in ways that enrich your hospitality offering.

For scanners and return readers, below are the key points.

- **Feedback is all around us**. Be it through apps, fitness bracelets, websites, or bills, your guests are already used to live, granular feedback. Many may even expect it. Who are you to let them down?

- **Guests like being trusted**. There is a hesitancy about giving guests and staff eco-feedback, but done artfully the process actually enriches the hospitality experience. It can give even the most casual getaway a sense of meaning and purpose.

- **Embrace responsible technology**. The most useful, actionable feedback is delivered quickly. Energy monitoring systems are vital tools, allowing you to identify areas for improvement quickly.

- **Gamify**! Feedback can and should be fun. Gamification – the tangible sense of progress and accomplishment – hugely boosts guest engagement with your conservation efforts.

- **Put feedback in context**. There is no one-size-fits-all answer to feedback. There are so many variables at play that you have to be able to step back and separate correlation from causation.

The sustainable hospitality process is incomplete without feedback. It's that simple. No-one gets it perfect first time, but if we're willing to learn then the second will be a whole lot better, and the third time even better still. Conserving is a continuous process.

Resources are often invisible to the public, making it hard to compare one activity with another. When you turn on the light, you can not see how much electricity is being used. When using an oven or putting on central heating, you cannot see the gas being burned. Do you know how much water is used when running the taps or when the dishwasher is on? Of course, you can see the food you waste, but that does not translate into a precise carbon equivalent, for you also do not know the wastage and transport involved in bringing that food to your plate in the first place.

Energy and water seem a limitless supply. We often forget the complexity of pipes and cables involved in bringing such essentials to a building. We do not have much idea about the energy and water embedded in the food and beverages either. The invisibility of power and embedded water makes it hard to make greener choices even if we want to. We just cannot compare.

So far we have discussed the designing change that enables guests and staff to consume less (Chapter 6), why it is essential to explain how to conserve (Chapter 7), and how to persuade them to participate (Chapter 8). Now we will focus on feedback and why it is the essential step to sustain change.

Feedback, of course, is two-way communication, and we will look at both offering guests eco-feedback and using that feedback to improve the guest experience. This will be equally true for staff, giving them feedback on their resource use and hearing from them so that operations are more effective. Feedback is only valuable if you use it. Start a continuous process of improvement and identify what prevents conserving behaviours. Also, recognise that feedback is helpful in preparing and surviving extreme weather events.
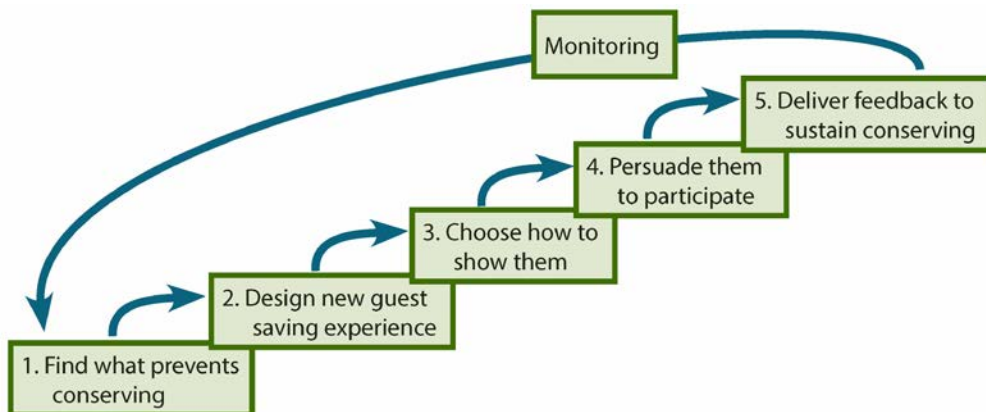

Figure 10.1: 5 Step Method to create transformational guest engagement

Changing our ways

After moving to Australia, I found we can go without real rain for more than six months. Despite owning a white car, I did not wash it. Before living in a desert I seldom thought about the need to conserve water because it was 'on tap'. My car, therefore, was washed weekly. I'm not proud of this now, but I was too busy with work to stop, think, and assess what I was doing.

What changed? In our home and business in Australia, we harvested rainfall for all our water needs. Noting the landscape's dryness made me self-aware. Monitoring the depth of our water tank revealed the ever-decreasing supply. This regular observation comparing our demand to supply was feedback. Feedback changed my behaviour because it made common sense to be water wise*. This feedback helped me endure the observations of others as I would arrive in my car looking less than pristine.

The water storage feedback motivated my family's behaviour to reduce or avoid showers. The weather forecast showing no sign of rain gave us feedback on what was available, so we collected shower water and spread it on the gardens. Rainfall (or lack of it) gave us feedback on taking careful precautions for bush fires. It was not simply one source of input but multiple layers and the nexus of these facts that changed our lifestyle. Many Australians adapted their behaviour in similar ways (Barbour, 2019). This is critical learning. Just like map reading, you need multiple trig points to navigate your course, to improve your skills, change the meaning of those daily practices, and understand which are truly important when materials are running out.

My example here has been water, but what I am describing is equally true of renewable energy (I have worked with renewable suppliers who must adjust a community's consumption based on the changes to the wind and waves). It is also true of changing consumption to meet different energy tariff rates, or changing menu items to avoid preparation waste. Feedback is your key card to sustainable hospitality and continuous improvement.

What feedback is

Feedback turns the invisible use of resources into something visible that can be responded to.

The level of activity is the key. We all have received utility bills, which are a form of feedback. You see your monthly or quarterly bill arrive and scratch your head as to why it was so much more than before. This is known as *indirect* feedback (Serrenho et al., 2015). It is a statement of what you have used and covers a very

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*Now I note many car washes in Australia recycle their water.