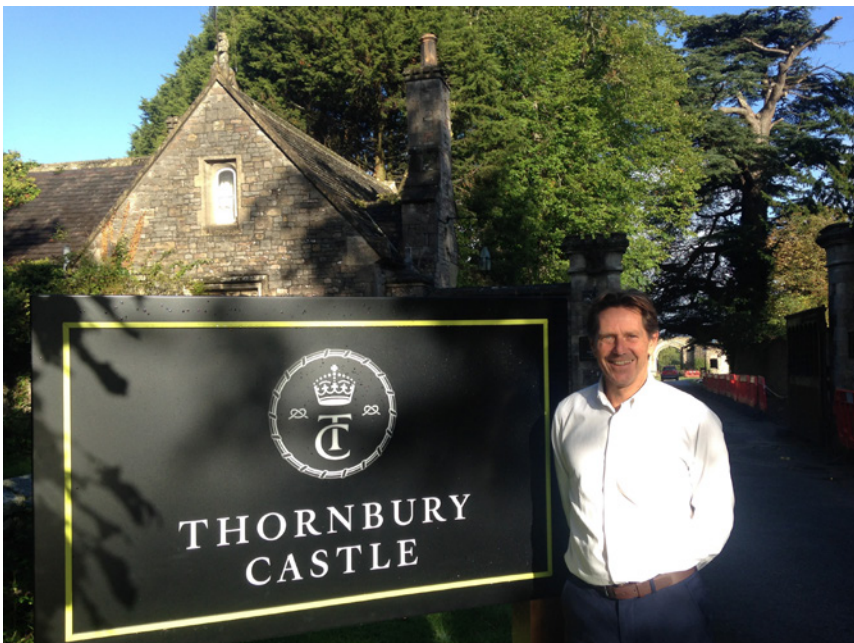


# 10

## The Importance of Service Recovery

### 'At Your Service' Spotlight: Paul Hudson - solving problems for travelers



Paul Hudson outside Thornbury Castle.

Paul Hudson has a wealth of experience solving problems for travelers. Having worked in the travel industry for over 40 years, Hudson has held previous roles as Head of Overseas Operations at Neilson Active Holidays, Product Development Manager at Cosmos Holidays, and Regional Manager Spain and Winter-Ski operations at First Choice Holidays. Hudson is Operations Director for Luxury Hotel Management, responsible for the operation of a 26-room five-star hotel in England – Thornbury Castle – which is the only Tudor castle to be opened as a hotel. The 16<sup>th</sup> century property is located in South West England, close to the historic city of Bath, and has recently undergone a £10 million renovation.

Hudson realized the importance of service recovery very early on in his career. "When I worked as a travel representative, and my customers had a problem with the hotel or the airline, I got sick of these companies passing the buck and saying 'it is not my problem'. The problems could easily have been solved but they couldn't be bothered. I decided that as soon as I was in a position to manage the supply chain, I would make sure these things didn't happen."

Hudson acknowledges that many problems in the travel industry are unforeseen and/or uncontrollable. "Naturally there are myriad examples in tourism where holidays or flights get overbooked. Most of the time, though, you try to train staff to do things that they don't have to do but that they want to do to keep everyone happy. I encourage staff not to wait until the problem arises, but to anticipate the issue. For example, if you are a waiter you have to look around for people who have not been quickly served and if you see someone who has been waiting for too long, you go and offer them a free drink before they even get the chance to complain."

One problem Hudson had to deal with was a forest fire in Greece that disrupted the holiday of his guests. "Basically we had a forest fire in Greece behind one of our hotels and had to evacuate everyone, which was quite a scary experience for them. We put them all up in another hotel and when everything was under control some people stayed and went back to the hotel but others were too traumatized and preferred to travel home. So my team went to those who were going to fly back home and invited them to come back a few weeks later for another trip for free. We had no obligation to do this but it was a gesture that they appreciated when they came back for another visit. I feel that the feedback and the word of mouth was more than worth it."

How does Hudson train his staff in the art of service recovery? "We use case studies, many of them real-life, role plays, and letters of complaints, and then ask them, 'what would you have done to solve this?' We also look at previous complaints and learn from them. I try and get my staff to encourage guests to tell us everything about their holiday experience – both good and bad - so that we can learn from it."

Hudson believes that although empowerment is critical, employees have to work within a framework when making decisions on service recovery: "It is no good throwing money at a problem without working out what the problem was in the first place and how to prevent it in future. It is also important to find out what the customer values in a service, and exactly what we can do to put a problem right. For example, it would be foolish to give a free night's accommodation for a whole family if just one meal was cold in the restaurant. And there is no point giving the customer a bottle of wine if he/she doesn't drink. A free swimming lesson for the kids might be the perfect remedy, and it costs us very little."

Hudson encourages his staff to think outside the box in terms of what value they can add. "You have to work with each particular guest as they all perceive