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Step 3: Teaching guests how to participate (Skills)

Introduction

The most beautifully designed green plan won't be much use if you can't convince your guests to participate. This chapter outlines the importance of having staff who can react to the unique backgrounds of different guests and encourage them to adapt their behaviour.

Some key points:

- **People are the core of your offering.** However sophisticated tech gets, there is no replacement for knowledgeable, supportive staff who can communicate the values of your business.
- **Guests bring their habits with them.** In unfamiliar settings, those habits are what they'll default to. It is the job of you and your staff to give your guests the information, skills, and resources needed to conserve.
- **Travellers want green solutions.** Do not be shy about your green initiatives. Share them! Communicate what they are and the difference they make to the local community. You'll be surprised how many guests want to participate.
- **Make the benefits clear and transparent.** 'Save the planet' is well-intentioned but vague messaging. 'Conserve resources and raise money for the local animal sanctuary at the same time' is concrete and exciting – something to feel proud of.
- **Sustainable hospitality requires shared interests and passions.** Guests and staff being on the same wavelength is essential to conserving, and done right it actually improves the hospitality experience.

When you visit a friend's house and help prepare a meal, how many times will you say, "Where do I find that?", or, "How do you turn this on?" If your friend is

an economic cook and avoids waste, you might need more practical guidance. In exactly the same way we might invite our guests to act eco-friendly, but they will be receiving advice in a new environment where things are unfamiliar. If we want to offer eco-friendly accommodation we should teach our guests how.

Helping guests to be more eco-friendly is now being applied at multiple touch points of leading brands (disposal of packaging, reuse of parts, choice of products, etc.). For hospitality, responsible messaging should be at its core because helping guests to have a perfect stay is what hospitality is about. And the best method to date is using interpersonal communication. This is because people are more likely to respond to the persuasive suggestions of other people, particularly when they view them as an expert, or in charge, or likely to make a positive difference to their situation.

Interpersonal communication essentially means holding a two way dialogue. I will come to the 'contactless' and 'guest-facing-tech' later in this book with messaging examples, but the importance of your staff should not be ignored. They ought to be the framework of your sustainable hospitality drive.

Years ago I was fortunate enough to interview Bill Marriott Jr when he opened the Ledra Marriott hotel in Athens. To this young and impressionable travel journalist he appeared a very approachable man and easy to talk with. I was impressed with his personal interest and respectful attitude towards his staff, which as a young reporter I did not expect to see in a leader of a corporation. It was something I never forget after almost forty years! But much later I learnt that he was caring for his most precious asset – putting people first. It helped him build the world's largest hospitality company.

Marriott knew the power of people when it came to crafting delightful guest experiences:

"This is what it's all about. Taking care of people, making them feel good when they're away from home, making them feel that they're appreciated and recognizing them. You can't do that with a computer. You can only do that with personal contact and that's what we talk about all the time — the importance of personal contact".

(Eisen, 2017).

In the same spirit, we can use our staff to better engage guests with sustainability practices and ask them to participate. Central to the principle of offering hospitality is to guide guests so that they can have an exceptional stay, comfortable and well looked after, enjoying the delights of your destination. Why can this not include advice that helps them conserve if it makes for a better stay experience?

The focus of staff is held by others too, among them Swiss hospitality academics, Demen Meier and Marie-France Derderian:

"Human interaction remains core to the hospitality industry. In the luxury industry, this human service is vital for brands to deliver a bespoke experience, in which guests

can feel both at ease and pleasantly surprised by service that surpasses expectations... these shared moments of personal service may turn out to be the real luxury that guests most value.” (Sommet Education, 2019).

This chapter focuses on *Skill*, the second element that equips people to conduct their holiday routines and leisure activities in an effective manner. Your new design experience should consider how your staff make this as enjoyable and friction-less as possible.

Sharing skill becomes a strategy to help both differentiate your hospitality’s customer service and improve guest satisfaction through greater personalisation and comfort. Sharing skill becomes a method for better communicating the value proposition of your business, something hotel CEOs often feel is lacking.

Lost in translation

When I arrive at a new place, I go to find amenities and then assess how they work. I feel a little lost and want to get my bearings. This inevitably involves some time in the kitchen, opening and closing windows to how I like them, and fighting with the a/c controls. If you are on a business trip, you want to function as efficiently as possible and prepare for meetings (where’s the ironing board?). With the kids it means settling into the new home (finding and understanding the washing machine).

Have you ever felt like this too? This is the time when we need our newly designed conserving services to work smoothly.

Remember, there are three essentials that can instigate transitions: Materials, Skills and Meaning. You might have installed more eco-friendly Materials but guests still need the Skills to use them (we’ll cover meaning in the next chapter). Applying integrated thinking means rather than avoiding guest involvement in conserving, we partner with them.

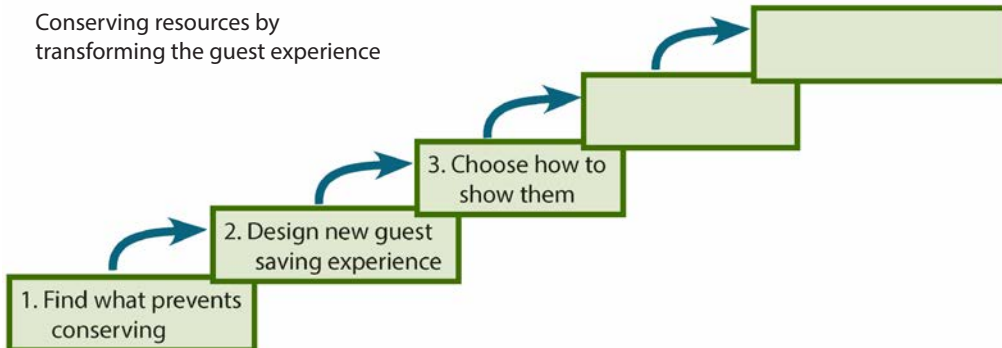


Figure 7.1: The 5 Step Method to create transformative guest participation