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Step 4: Persuasion (Meaning)

Introduction

How is it that some tourist accommodations are able to persuade guests to happily participate in their responsible tourism actions while other properties are not? Messages on their own do not always deliver the response you want, right? Often this is because we fail to recognise the importance of interpersonal persuasion. This could be by ignoring pre-suasion (gaining staff and guest support before requesting a specific action), or allowing a mismatch between messaging directed at guests and the reality they perceive in business operations and management. All these factors have to be aligned.

Managers have asked me, is it the type of accommodation that matters or is it the type of guests? If your accommodation has no contact with guests, then the relationship can be purely an economic transaction. People also behave differently due to cultural reasons, or acclimatisation where it is a business or leisure-based property. So how can you maximise your persuasive potential despite these factors so that they do not hinder you, but actively support your sustainability initiatives?

This chapter covers three golden features of interpersonal communication that make it the most powerful form of persuasion in hospitality. Interpersonal communication can encourage guests to choose of their own free will to behave in ways that support your sustainability programme.

- **Apply Politeness.** Politeness is a skill that can and should be developed. Being courteous and empathetic with your guests, yet also knowing when to be serious, gives your green initiatives a much better chance of being embraced.
- **Leverage 'House Rules'.** Even in hospitality, there is an understanding that the host's way of doing things deserve respect. Share your green behaviour rules expertly and with pride, showing guests that you live by them too.

- **Maximise reciprocity.** It is human nature to want to return a favour. Go the extra mile for your guests and they will meet you halfway, respecting your House Rules and trying out new ways of behaving.

By using interpersonal persuasion, you can introduce your requests in ways that encourage positive responses. It can help you direct the guest's consciousness to make better decisions for their holiday, the environment and the community.

Why move from a purely commercial exchange to one of reciprocation exchange? You can encourage guests and staff, for that matter, to recognise the wisdom of making that decision to participate.

Communication must integrate with the *Materials*, the accommodation, amenities, and facilities, and the *Competency*, the guidance guests are given on how to save. Without creating a service experience that is greener you cannot expect your guests to act more responsibly.

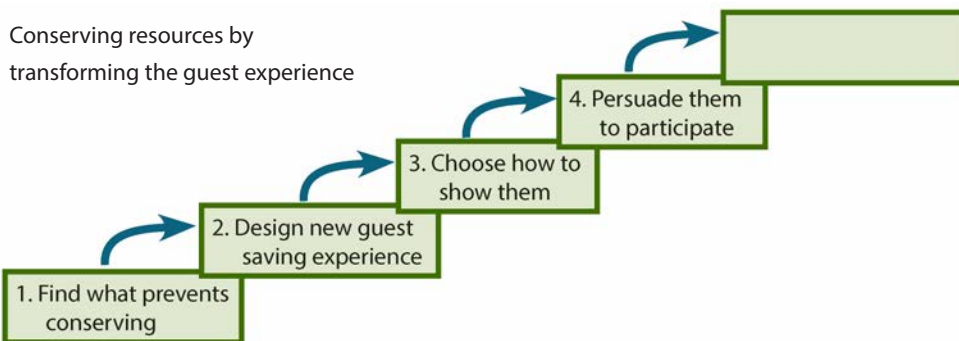


Figure 9.1: 5 Step Method to create transformational guest engagement

Down to details

1. Applying politeness

Guests should be greeted with empathy. Knowing how to apply the right touch of politeness to handle a situation is a valuable skill that enhances persuasion. It is the way the steward asks you if another passenger could swap seats, or sales assistant tells you they don't have that specific model you requested, or at the accommodation reception desk the guest relations manager explains your original choice of apartment is not available, but they have an alternative which is a better match for your needs.

There's a science to politeness, and if mastered well it can add to your persuasive communications. It is more than being subservient or simply smiling. You want to use politeness to encourage people to adapt their behaviours and use facilities that may be new to them. You want to use it to manage their responses and guide them to apply System 2 slow thinking to adopt what you have said.

Politeness tactics are an essential first step to persuading guests to commit to your sustainability programme.

How to manage guests through politeness

Politeness theory is a rich cultural field with strong links to hospitality services. Politeness is demonstrated through our facial expressions, language, and actions. Studies found we each have two 'faces'. There is the positive face – when we want to be socially accepted. Then there is our negative face – when we want the freedom to assess and make up our own mind. (Brown & Levinson, 1987)



Figure 9.2: Taking responsibility for the impacts of your holiday is a new social interaction. Do not be surprised if guests keep a straight 'negative' face. Likewise, smiling guests do not signify that they have accepted and will comply with your requests. Smiling is sometimes used to defuse social tensions.

Staff apply the positive face when guests arrive and are welcomed, which is to be expected. But are staff trained to better interpret facial expressions of the guests? When you deliver your sustainability communication, guests most often show a negative face. That is keeping a straight face with no expression. This does not mean they are rejecting your proposal. Far from it. This is when they are assessing what you are saying and considering it. If staff do not recognise this they can feel hesitant, as we are often taught something is wrong when people do not smile.

Staff can use the negative face too. If they communicate solely using their positive face then guests may interpret it as insincerity, i.e. you are simply going through the process and there is no real meaning. Smiling does not emphasise the importance of what you are saying. If you smile it can suggest that you are not convinced by the sustainability message yourself. If you are not convinced, why should guests be? Instead staff can at the right times use a negative face to explain your programme if you want guests to take the information seriously.