Responsible Hospitality:
Theory and Practice

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Principle 6: Engage employees and customers in actions that support environmental, economic and social wellbeing

> *A new paradigm for both brand communications and design innovation is re-quired. This will invite consumers to participate in the creative process within a framework of global core brand concepts. In this way, real communities will grow around the brands. A brand will no longer grow because of how well it is control-led, but because of how well it is shared. Of paramount importance will be the way in which a brand's traditions and practices relate to contemporary concerns such as well-being, work–life balance, community security and environmental protection. Therefore, a brand's social and environmental depth will become an important deter-minant of its financial value.*

(Bendell and Kleanthous, 2007)

This principle is perhaps the most contentious of the ten that we present in this book. Many businesses (including hospitality businesses) would agree that they have a fundamental role to play in engaging their employees in actions that support environmental, economic and social well-being in the work place and to some extent at home. Many would, however, disagree that it is their role to actively influence customer behaviour to favour sustainable choices. They would argue that this is a role for government and third-sector organisations. If it is, it is one in which they have failed. A decade of effort has proven that these agencies do not have access to the 'skilled group of professionals whose job it is to persuade people to change their behaviour' nor do they have the experience of the marketplace to deliver upon that behaviour change (Rose, 2002: 7). These skills reside with people who work in marketing, advertising, brand development and PR roles.

Securing behaviour change

> *A decade of campaigns by public sector organisations has effectively engaged the pub-lic in understanding that there is a necessity to change behaviour around issues like climate change, but has failed to 'move people from awareness and understanding to secure lasting behaviour change'.*

(NESTA, 2008).

Those businesses that are leading in this field are those that recognise that the real benefits of behaviour change do not just lie in convincing employees and con-sumers to favour products that have 'green' or 'eco' credentials and reside in a niche

corner.[17] They lie also in changing the way that employees and consumers relate to and use even mainstream products. Those companies that are leading the way on this topic are encouraging consumers to change the way they travel to, feel about and use a product or service (primarily through their advertising and branding) – even if it means they ultimately use less. Madness? Apparently not! Early evidence would demonstrate that those companies that go down this route win customer trust and loyalty and these are essential attributes for customer retention – especially in mature market economies where 'the aspirational characteristics of the global brand are less salient' (Dimofte *et al.*, 2010).

Ethics sell?

We are drawn to brands we trust, brands that are different from the rest, brands that are innovative, brands that appeal to the emotions, brands that signify something intelligent or interesting about the user, and brands whose parent company behaves well.

Gordon (2006)

What the responsible business guidelines say

Engaging in the process of changing employee attitudes towards the responsible business agenda is universally embraced by the responsible business guidelines. The International Chamber of Commerce acknowledges that responsible business programmes can 'increase morale, transparency and trust among company personnel'. They go on to state that: 'Companies must raise awareness among their own personnel and other stakeholders if business principles are to be effective and command wide support. Processes or formal management systems for developing, adopting and implementing individual principles should therefore include internal consultation and communication' (ICC, 2002).

The issue of changing customer behaviour receives rather less attention. This is partly because it is a relatively recent theme in the responsible business literature, it is a concept that is not universally embraced by businesses and it has traditionally been seen as a priority for governments and the third sector community. Most of the business guidelines recognise that responsible business programmes can play a significant role in reducing the risk of negative PR exposure and can meet changing customer needs. Others embrace this issue under the heading of stakeholder dialogue. The CERES principles in particular also embrace the concept under the topic of disclosure and product transparency, stating that 'Companies will provide veri-

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17 It is an irony that some of the brands, particularly in the hotel sector, that sell themselves on their 'eco' credentials are actually relatively unsustainable, basing their claims around rather flimsy choice of organic spa or food products rather than a genuine commitment to responsible business or the principles of sustainable development.

Chapter extract

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