

Checking Customer Satisfaction: Rare or Well Done?

by Leah Brewer, Leasing Queen, Full House Marketing

I eat my steak rare. Actually, I order my steak medium, it is just rare that I eat steak. Yet the mouth-watering photos in the menu at the steakhouse showing melt-in-your-mouth beef persuaded me to order the filet mignon, imagining my experience would meet my expectations.

Instead, I remembered why it is so rare I eat steak...I know my experience will not match my expectations.

The steak was good. Not great. Just good. Perhaps it was my fault expecting awesome greatness, believing my heightened expectations would actually be satisfied. So when the manager came by our table as is customary in many restaurants, asking the standard “everything OK tonight folks?” he got what he expected to get, a weak nod of acceptance from a patron with a mouthful of food. Yet his customer was unsatisfied. His system of checking customer satisfaction failed.

He failed to get good information. He does not know I expected *great* and only received *good*. He does not know I will not return. He does not know I will not refer this steak house. He is happy in his thoughts that “everything is OK”.

Successful marketing of our apartments attracts prospects then great sales skills turn prospects into residents. These new residents expect the level of service we touted in our advertising and boasted in our sales presentations. The photos and verbiage in OUR menu (brochure) defines our customer’s level of expectation.

Do we have a system in place to check our customers’ satisfaction, or have we failed to discover that our residents expected *great*, and received *good*? We often discover we have lost their patronage and their referrals only upon receiving their move-out notice, which is too late. We were happy in our thoughts that “everything is OK”.

I am a typical consumer. Unless extremely dissatisfied, I simply accept my unfulfilled expectations and say nothing. Although I wasn’t totally satisfied with my steak and had decided not to patronize or refer this steak house, it wasn’t a horrid experience worth verbalizing my disappointment.

But what about the management system that failed to discover customer dissatisfaction? “The question” asked was formulated to get a positive response rather than a truthful answer. To report “95% of our guests said everything was okay” doesn’t mean you truly have satisfied customers who love your service and who will return and bring friends.

Small changes would have gathered better information. The manager, walking by our table, asked “the question” mid-

stride. His feet were pointed in the direction he was walking, not toward our table; his body was turned away from us; he did not make eye contact or engage us conversationally; he asked “the question” designed to get agreement; he nodded and went on; he only asked once.

Small changes could have made the difference. Suppose he walked up to our table as if we were his destination rather than just passing-by, introduced himself and stated his appreciation that we chose to dine in his establishment, giving us time to swallow our food and engage in the conversation. Suppose he asked a question designed to get factual information: “Did the food meet your expectations?”

Do we have a system in place to check our customers’ satisfaction, or have we failed to discover that our residents expected *great*, and received *good*?

Suppose he asked a second question: “Would anything improve your dining experience tonight?”

In contemplating how easily small changes would have provided truthful and complete information, I understood how we make

these same mistakes. A resident drops off rent and we say, with body language still focused on the project in our hands and still seated behind our desk, “everything OK in your apartment?” and we get the answer we expected...a weak nod of acceptance or a standard answer of “fine”. We will hear about the major concerns, yet it is often the small dissatisfactions that eventually cause a resident to move out.

Small changes will impact retention and referrals. Stand up and engage a resident when they give you the opportunity. Make time for them and you will let them know how important they really are. Ask questions designed to get truthful and complete information that you can use to raise your level of service: “Are we meeting your housing expectations?”

Ask a second question in a different way: “Is there anything we could be doing to improve our level of service to you?” or “Can you think of one thing in your apartment that our maintenance team could service this month?”

Design your system to check customer satisfaction and get honest feedback and information that will help meet and exceed your residents’ expectations. Once you know you have satisfied residents, you can honestly and easily ask for continued residency and referrals....and know that everything is **WELL DONE**.



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