

MINISTRY OF TOURISM

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO BUSINESS ETIQUETTE
& PROTOCOL SPECIALISTS LIMITED

**CUSTOMER SERVICE STRATEGY CONFERENCE
ON CREATING A STRATEGY TO ACHIEVE &
MAINTAIN A SERVICE CULTURE**

AN ADDRESS

**THE HONOURABLE SHAMFA CUDJOE
MINISTER OF TOURISM
TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO**

Date: Tuesday May 24, 2016
Venue: Hyatt Regency Trinidad, Port of Spain
Time: 1.15pm

- Ms. Margaret White, Managing Director, Business Etiquette and Protocol Specialists Limited
 - Mr. John Tschohl, President, Service Quality Institute;
 - Specially Invited Guests
 - Ladies and Gentlemen
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Good afternoon.

Tourism is one of the world's fastest growing industry, as well as, a major source of foreign exchange earnings and employment. Globally, international tourist arrivals grew by 4.4 % in 2015 representing the 6th consecutive year of above-average growth. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), Tourism 2020 Vision, the number of international tourist arrivals is forecasted to reach 1.6 billion by the year 2020.

Today's travel and tourism industry environment is more complex, volatile, and competitive than ever before. Travellers are also more sophisticated. Shifts in world demographic and travellers' tourism consumption pattern create both new challenges and opportunities for tourism. A notable change occurring in the tourism industry is consumer's growing orientation towards an emphasis and demand for a quality experience.

More than ever before, operators in the tourism industry recognise that it is a **“high quality service experience”** that would encourage tourists to visit a particular country or establishment and to return.

Consequently, the tourism industry is becoming more competitive in the race for a higher level of service.

As one industry executive states: **'The race for service has no finish line. As the race progresses, the finish line moves further away. Those who do not run fast enough will fall behind.'** The race for quality service will continue to intensify as the industry becomes more competitive and the tourism end-users have an even wider range of choices in their tourism purchase. This means that hospitality and tourism operators must develop service delivery systems that create value for their target markets.

Service quality is important to the tourism industry. A destination must offer distinctive, authentic and a high value holiday experiences and develop competitive advantages in an increasingly competitive global environment.

Service quality in tourism depends to a large extent on value added through a range of skills delivered during the service encounter. In tourism, **guests require "products" where they are guaranteed high-quality, value-for-money services.**

SERVICE QUALITY AND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Service quality and customer satisfaction have increasingly been identified as key factors in the battle for competitive differentiation and customer retention in the tourist industry.

International tourism includes business and professional travel, visiting friends and relatives, religious travel, and health and wellness. For a destination to get a piece of the pie, destination marketing and tourist satisfaction are considered to be very important.

Research indicates that measurement between service quality and tourist satisfaction allows destinations to fully understand how to provide the best possible service quality to satisfy tourists.

A satisfactory experience may affect customer attitude and the assessment of perceived service quality. Satisfaction therefore with a specific transaction may result in positive global assessment of service quality.

With the increasing trend for leisure and business travellers to select and make their own reservations for travel, accommodation and dining, they increasingly depend on past experiences and the recommendations from others to guide their choices. Research confirms how much those choices are affected and recommendations diminish once a customer has a poor experience.

Customers who have experienced a problem or concern are typically **25% less likely to return** or recommend a service than those who are completely satisfied with the service they have received.

MONITORING FEEDBACK AND STAFF

Obtaining actionable customer feedback is particularly challenging in an industry where customers, by definition, are on a journey and often travelling on a tight schedule. The task of monitoring service quality is even harder across an airline, a chain of hotels, restaurants or a franchise network but it is important to get feedback and take action as necessary.

Travellers, who are our customers, have options about where to spend their vacation, where to stay, dine, go on tours etc. Top-notch customer service is often the difference between choosing you or choosing your competition.

THE ONLINE EFFECT

Modern travellers are also internet-savvy. They find and book trips, destinations and hotel rooms on their laptops and smartphones. They also tell the world about their experiences with your business on online review sites.

When guests book online, they often choose businesses that have the best customer feedback within their budget. **Bad feedback about customer service can be extremely damaging.**

If enough guests have bad experiences with your business, word will spread rapidly.

It is therefore important to provide **excellent customer service to all clients.**

COMPLAINTS ARE OPPORTUNITIES

The oldest adage in customer service is that “the customer is always right”, even if he is 100 percent wrong.

This is not just about making customers happy and keeping them from visiting your competitors, it is also an opportunity to learn what shortcomings or problem areas your business might have.

Courteously helping a guest solve a problem often creates a loyal patron more willing to return in the future.

CUSTOMER SERVICE AND T&T

Trinidad and Tobago’s diversification thrust includes making a concerted effort to develop the local tourism sector.

More than ever, this will make the adoption of a **customer service excellence philosophy in Trinidad and Tobago an absolute necessity.**

In a recent study conducted by the World Economic Forum on various travel destinations, Trinidad and Tobago was ranked 16 out of 25 countries surveyed in the Americas.

If we are to increase our competitiveness, we need to put measures in place to improve our rankings in the short to medium term.

Underpinning any such measures taken, is the adoption by all stakeholders of a culture that is committed to customer service excellence.

We are all ambassadors of our country!

In order for Trinidad and Tobago to establish a profile and reputation as a premier tourism destination in the Caribbean, there must be excellent customer service at every point of contact that visitors have with the country.

From the minute the traveller lands at the airport, to the time he/she checks into the hotel or guest house, to the various restaurants, malls, groceries and stores that he/she visits, the level of customer service offered must be of a consistently high quality.

It is recognised that for any significant societal transformation to be realized, customer service sensitisation needs to be done at an early stage.

One of the main methods of achieving this is by introducing the philosophy of customer service in the education system. Teaching a young child good manners, ethics and consideration lays the foundation for good customer service.

If tourists get good service in a well-known hotel, then they will consider that hotel chain first whenever they will travel again and would recommend it to others within their social circle.

Similarly if the traveller gets good service from any specific airline or from the travel trade then he will consider being a frequent customer with that specific service provider and in turn will generate future business for the country or the establishment.

To be competitive, **Trinidad and Tobago must strive to offer a better level of customer service for both locals and visitors.** The Ministry of Tourism and the Tourism Development Company are doing their part in improving customer service in the industry. There are a number of quality assurance programmes, including Service, Training, Attitude and Respect (STAR); Small Tourism Enterprises Project (STEP), Trinidad and Tobago Tourism Industry Certification and soon there will be a Visitor Relations Management system.

This Conference is, therefore, crucial as it provides the tools in **creating the strategy to achieve and maintain a service culture.**

I wish to thank the organisers for such a timely intervention and to stress that excellent customer service needs to be an integral part of a high functioning tourism sector and country. **We all want quality service wherever we go!**

I am grateful for the opportunity to add my voice to the call for quality customer service and urge all of you to work towards creating a better Trinidad and Tobago, one which we will all be proud of and benefit from.

I thank you.

May 24, 2016