

## Our Current Climate- the Need for Hospitality Leadership

We are all in this together. Not in our lifetimes have we been front row participants to what is happening in our country. And it keeps changing every day.

While I work with companies to take their customer experience to the highest levels, today isn't the day to talk about that. I am sure your business is being affected somehow by COVID-19. Stress levels are rising; you may have had to furlough staff (or you are one of the yourself), sales are down. I get it, as I am feeling the same thoughts as you.

And while we all need to practice "social distancing" right now, that doesn't mean we need to stop exercising the Power of Hospitality. I think now, more than ever before, we need to make that personal connection with others (my definition of Hospitality)- namely your employees and co-workers, your clients, your vendors, and your community.

Ideas that you can use to continue to practice Hospitality Leadership.

- 1- *Now's the time to make that phone call or send that handwritten note.* Just to let people know you are here and thinking about them. Provide some guidance about what you can do to help them. And don't be afraid to ask for help on your end. We're all in this together. Practice Hospitality traits that some of us in this great country of ours have gotten away from - traits like empathy, caring, consideration of others, and kindness. Common sense- sure. Standard practice- I sure hope so now. If you must lay off employees until this situation blows over, they need to know that you are still there for them.
- 2- *If possible, still celebrate the occasions in people's lives.* It may be easy to forget the birthdays and anniversaries of employees and clients during this time. Or safety and wellness team milestones. But don't forget. It's these little details that your staff and clients will remember.
- 3- *Stay true to your Core Values (both individual and organizational).* These are what got you to this point and more likely why you have Brand Ambassadors (your employees and clients). Now, more than ever, don't cut corners. Stay true to your Core Values- others will notice.
- 4- *Keep Communicating.* Especially to your staff. Keep those lines of communication open to them. They are anxious and nervous during this time. Be transparent and authentic with them. If not, they are going to start assuming things that may not be true.

Make that personal connection to someone. Remember, first and foremost, all of us are in the People Business. Let's take care of each other.

*Bob Pacanovsky is a Keynote Speaker and Strategic Trainer who works with organizations to attract and retain more clients and employees for your organizations to deliver The Black Tie Experience!*

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## 25 Lessons I learned from over 25 years of Hospitality

The ESPN Series "30 for 30" happens to be one of the favorite shows. The documentaries that they have produced are wonderful to watch. I have my own version of this show...well, sort of.

What have you learned in your career? Someone asked me that the other day, and I must admit, I was stumped by that question at first. But when I sat down to think about it, I realized that because of great employees and wonderful coaches, I have learned some pretty powerful concepts over the years.

# 25 25 for

Since I have been an entrepreneur now for 25 years, this is my "25 for 25". Here are just some of the lessons learned in my career that I still put into practice today. I call them now - "Our Black Tie Beliefs". They all focused on the Power of Hospitality- making that personal connection to make people feel something special about our product, or services, and our people.

**Lessons Learned - When training Employees, we mentored and coached them that...**

1. They understood that we were in the Hospitality Business, first and foremost. *That means that we were in the people business, creating wonderful events and memories, not the other way around. Make sure you're involving your people in how to wow the client and their guests, and to make that personal (and emotional) connection with them.*
2. Perception is 9/10ths of the law; how people perceive us usually becomes their truth. *This is one of my favorite sayings. Meaning, everything your staff does reflects first themselves, then your brand. A guest or client may determine the entire experience by how your staffer treated them, cared for them or (dis)respected them.*
3. Knowledge is confidence. *Give people the knowledge they need. The goal is to empower your people and make sure they know what is expected of them and give them the tools to be successful. The only way to do that is to teach them your systems so that they become experts.*
4. Training never ends, especially if you want to be the best. *Make sure that staff training, and development is continual. Whether through quarterly training seminars,*

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*pairing up new employees with veterans to act as mentors, a certification training program, etc. make training an investment don't just see it as a cost.*

5. **We allowed for mistakes, not errors.** *Everyone makes mistakes. Be sure each misstep is an opportunity for learning and growth, and you won't see people making the same errors repeatedly. Empower team members to fess up to their mistakes, because that provides an opportunity to be a coach, helping them to be on a winning team.*
6. **We truly cared about the wellbeing of our people.** *What we did was hard work. Do be sure to always thank your staff for working hard. Remember they're people not robots. Celebrate all types of successes with them, give them room for hard days and heartbreak. It makes a difference.*
7. **We taught everyone on our team how to handle customer complaints.** *This is one of the best lessons I've learned. Empower each team member to handle most of the challenges you can anticipate and to never pass a customer from person to person like a hot potato. Train them how to confidently and effectively diffuse an unhappy customer by role playing and practicing potential situations that could arise. (I teach a technique in my seminars that is easy for everyone to master and it gives them the confidence to work with unhappy customers.)*
8. **We needed them to work smarter, not harder.** *Most of the team is already working hard enough, but to work smarter requires thinking outside the box and looking for ways to improve your processes and procedures. Encourage them to be innovative and be prepared to at least listen to their ideas and not shoot them down immediately. And if it's a good idea be sure they're involved in the implementation.*
9. **The little details made the big things happen.** *My experience has taught me that one of the keys to success is how the smallest of details gets handled. Train everyone to spot the little details and maybe even fuss over them a bit. Clients will be impressed that you've taken care of everything for them, no matter if it's in your purview or not.*
10. **We never could underestimate the power of Appreciation.** *It's amazing what a "great job" or "thank you for being here today" does for the morale of your staff. I learned that you can never say it enough. And the key is to mean it. And you should, because well-trained and well-regarded staff are the key to your business success. When you run multiple events in different locations on the same day, you'll quickly figure out that you cannot do it alone and that your staff absolutely represents you and your company.*
11. **We needed to keep calm under pressure.** *Unlike many industries, our staffs must be "on" for every event. People are spending a lot of money with you for three or four hours. That alone is a lot of pressure. If you're running multiple events on a given day, that just compounds the pressure. Staying calm comes from the top down. Never let*

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*your team see you (or any of your leadership) panic. We've all seen it, when you panic...so do they. That doesn't mean you'll never panic. Of course, you will. But try to do it in private, away from them and your clients!*

12. **We built a culture based on the respect of our employees.** *Sure, we wish that everyone who worked together liked one another but that isn't always the case. However, it's crucial that they respect their co-workers. If they don't, that puts a strain on the work environment and ultimately your clients and their guests will suffer. There should be zero tolerance for anyone who doesn't agree to this rule.*

**When working with our customers, we used the Power of Hospitality to...**

1. **Make it easy for our clients to do business with us.** *Show them you're taking the worry from their minds by having systems on your end to cover every detail. Clearly outline that you've thought of everything including a Plan B. Most people don't think of Plan B. We did and it always paid off for us.*
2. **Do everything you can to ensure your customer looks Great!** *If you have their back and they in turn look great to their clients, bosses and guests, you will look good too and book more business with them!*
3. **Be sure to greet clients by name (and with direct eye contact).** *In every setting, whether onsite or in a planning meeting, this was so critical for us. Train your people to know the names of the person or people who booked your services. And for respect-sake, try to use their surname unless they tell you otherwise.*
4. **Make it personal** – *Note the little things about each client's likes and dislikes and then act on it. For instance, do they have a favorite beverage (yes, there is a big difference between the two major diet soft drink brands); did their daughter recently start college, then ask about it. The little civilities will go a long way.*
5. **And speaking of the little niceties, we're in the food business so why not use your food to say, "thank you."** *Whether that's a complimentary food item for an event, a special gift at the end of the event; a follow up gift of cookies or partnering with a preferred vendor to send something special, these little details can make big things happen.*
6. **Ask their opinion on how you're doing and listen!** *This makes them feel that we truly care about our services and their satisfaction. And when they give you an idea that improves your services, let them know with a thank you.*
7. **Know that mistakes happen – be sure you take responsibility and make it right.** *Don't apologize with an excuse. Wowing them a little can't hurt, show them not only*

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*that you want to make it right, you want to really make it right. Have them walk away thinking, “if this is how they take care of us when they mess up, I can’t wait to see what they do when everything is great!”*

8. **Follow through on your promises.** *I can’t stress this enough. Do what you say you are going to do and when you are going to do it. And then, make it happen. It’s that simple. Sometimes you can’t do what you said, tell them, immediately and give an alternative solution. If you must push a deadline or you don’t have the answer yet, be proactive with them, let them know the progress and when you will be back to them.*
9. **Be flexible with last minute changes and embrace them.** *This was one of the most difficult lessons I had to learn. Often the request is coming from someone else, a boss, a spouse or who knows – be sure to practice the art of professionalism all the time. However, also try hard not to let them walk all over you with changes. Sometimes you do need to put your foot down, just do it gently and with a smile.*
10. **Make them feel like they’re your only client because in fact at that point in time, they are.** *Focus all your attention on the customer, especially during meetings, phone calls and of course on-site visits. Show that you are knowledgeable about their needs and are really listening to them.*
11. **Try to think one step ahead of them – being proactive, not reactive.** *Anticipatory service is one of the highest forms of service that we teach in staff training. The goal is for your staff to anticipate the needs of your guests by reading body language, listening for cues and being completely prepared. Your clients will be wowed if it seems like they never have to ask for anything, because you’ve already thought of it for them.*
12. **Listen to what is important to your customer about the products and services you offer.** *Fully understanding what they’re telling you will create loyal fans. Why? Truly listening shows that you care and that it is always their event and never yours.*
13. **Create friends and not just clients.** *It’s about being genuine, authentic and empathetic with every client. When you do this, trust happens. And when trust happens, friendships blossom.*

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