

## ETHICS - ( eth'iks ) AND THE HOTEL/MOTEL MANAGER

Is ethics the current fad or is it a necessity for survival in the 90's? When asked to write an article on ethics this was the first thought that went through my mind. So I decided to consult some dictionaries. This is what I discovered; Ethics 1. the study and philosophy of human conduct, with emphasis on the determination of right and wrong ( Doubleday ); 2. the principal of right or good behavior ( Webster's ); 3. the rules or standards of conduct governing the members of a profession ( Webster's ).

In studying these definitions three terms stood out: HUMAN CONDUCT, RIGHT AND WRONG, AND STANDARDS OF CONDUCT. How can these terms be another passing fad I asked myself. They have to be the basis, the foundation of how we do business.

Of late there has been much academic discussion on ethics and related topics, such as ethical decision making, values, and morality. It is tempting to continue this discussion. Yet, what we really need to examine is how to set up an ethics policy, or better yet, an ethical environment in our businesses. To do this lets take a look at the people we managers have to deal with daily. They are our customers, employees and owners/stockholders. Now lets assume that we are responsible only for the conduct and behavior of the members of our organization, and not our customers. Even though we are responsible to our customers, we cannot be held accountable for their behavior. So, our challenge is to create an environment that will nurture good behavior. This behavior must be right for all members of the organization. Thus, it will set a high standard of conduct.

In a recent article in Lodging magazine, Stephen S.J. Hall wrote, "Recognize that service excellence requires not only quality, but a sense of morality, and understand the limitations that prevent you from reaching the ideal. Then you will be an ethical decision maker." It is this sense of morality that should drive an ethical environment. Sure, one can develop a checklist of do's and don'ts that all employees must follow to ensure an ethical environment. But will such a checklist ensure an ethical environment? At the end of the day, no list is going to be complete or thorough enough to cover every situation imaginable. What may work better is empowering all members of the organization to use moral judgement in each decision they make. Note, I am suggesting each and every member be assigned responsibility. This means every desk clerk, housekeeper, waitperson and dishwasher, as well as, the restaurant and the general manager. The underlying assumption, of course, is that people are inherently moral.

So what do we need to do to empower our employees effectively and to nurture positive change? First, we must lead by example. If senior management is not ethical, or more importantly perceived as ethical by its organization, they set a bad example. In addition, some employees may feel they are being expected to perform in an unethical manner and their performance is being based on it. This is where standards of conduct become an issue. What may be unethical for one may be the practical thing to do for another. For example, is it unethical to wine and dine our local inspectors or is it just good business? Is it unethical to manipulate our year end financial reports to reduce our tax liability or is it just good business? Better yet, do we owe it to our stockholders?

Furthermore, standards of conduct are impacted by culture and past practice, both of which we have no control over. It is likely that in an organization, each employee has their own standard of conduct. Therefore, the challenge is to create a uniform standard of conduct for your business. This can only be done by consistent role modeling by the senior management and owners.

Second, we must be willing to let our staff make ethical decisions on their own even if these decisions may be perceived by management as inappropriate, or worse yet, expensive. For this to work, each member of the organization must feel management will support them regardless of their decisions. For example, can a desk clerk charge the lowest rate to walk-ins if they feel it is the only ethical thing to do. Should management support this regardless that it is policy to sell up.

Third, and probably most important is effective communication of this policy to the entire organization. Everyone needs to know that this is the new modus operandi and that they are expected to follow it. In addition, a system of checks and balances must be set in place. This system should allow management to determine who is operating ethically and who is not. Employees should be recognized for their efforts publicly. This recognition will act as a motivator for the rest of the organization.

Finally, do not expect results immediately. Consistency and patience will eventually pay off. Changing bad habits for an individual is tough enough. For a company, it is excruciatingly slow.

Now, let me ask the question again. Is ethics the current fad or is it necessary for survival in the nineties? Of course the answer is it is absolutely essential for survival in the nineties and it is up to us to make it more than a fad. Let's make it the new buzzword in our businesses.

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