CUSTOMER ORIENTATION

INDUSTRY REPORT

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EHL

FOREWORD

Many people have heard companies saying "People constitute our most valuable asset."

This is particularly true for hotels and restaurants due to the intangible nature of their services. Nowadays, **quality of service is under scrutiny with online platforms and social media.** For that reason, it is essential that employees have a genuine orientation toward their guests. On top of the importance of hiring the right people, another challenge is to retain them. It is, however, difficult to retain employees in this labor-intensive industry due to low wages, long hours and stressful conditions. The US Bureau of Labor Statistics indicates that turnover in the hospitality industry could be as high as 74%, whereas **a healthy turnover rate should be around 10-15%.**

"Hire for attitude and train for skills" is another motto which is frequently expressed in the hospitality industry. Hoteliers do not need employees who have the right skills, but rather the right personality that fits the role and industry. The aim of this report is specifically to **help hoteliers identify what they should look for in candidates who apply to open positions and how they could train their employees to become more customer-oriented**. Customer orientation comprises friendliness, reliability, responsiveness and courteousness. It is at the same time a personality trait but also a set of behaviors that can be learned and practiced, we call them "customer-oriented behaviors."

Some portions of this report are based on data collected between November 2015 and October 2016 in Switzerland. They come from a research project sponsored by the Ecole hôtelière de Lausanne (EHL) and the HES-SO (the University of Applied Sciences Western Switzerland), aimed at determining if restaurant employees could be trained in the use of certain customer-oriented behaviors in a short amount of time and examining the effectiveness of this training.

The aim of this report is precisely to help hoteliers identify what they should look for in the candidates that apply to open positions and how they could train their employees to become more customer-oriented.

100%   ▲ 74%
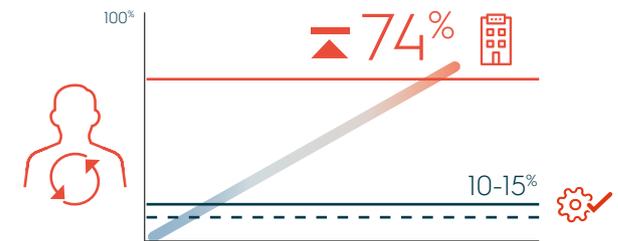
10-15%

Turnover in the hospitality industry
could be as high as 74% whereas a healthy turnover rate should be around 10-15%.

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ACTIONABLE INSIGHTS FOR LEADERS IN THE HIRING PROCESS

PAY ATTENTION TO DESIRABLE CHARACTERISTICS

General intelligence

It can be surprising for many people, but this characteristic is probably the most important. The more candidates do well on general intelligence tests, the better they perform at work. Hundreds of studies have replicated this finding in the last century. The relationship between intelligence and job performance can be explained by the fact that **candidates who do well in intelligence tests are fast-learners and great problem-solvers**. **Obviously, in every job, fast learners and great problem-solvers are more successful.**

So far, it seems that for every job studied, the higher the candidates score, the better they handle problems at work. For instance, a study from Tews, Michel and Lyons howed that supervisors described servers who scored high on an intelligence test as more effective, furthermore, objective data revealed that they were the ones who generated the highest amount of sales (2010). It means that they learned more effectively how to upsell and be friendly to the guests. Even if no selection decision is made based solely on general intelligence tests, businesses that do not measure this aspect will make less effective decisions than those which incorporate the tests. Their administration is relatively inexpensive with online tests costing less than 30 dollars.

Conscientiousness

Conscientiousness is an indicator of the candidate's work ethic. **It is associated with perseverance, self-discipline, dutifulness, orderliness and perfectionism**. It is measured by many of the personality inventories described below such as the HEXACO-PI-R, or the NEO-PI 3. Many reasons could explain why employees scoring high on this characteristic might then go on to become successful employees. They anticipate more, procrastinate less and tend to set higher goals for themselves than people scoring low on this characteristic.

Studies generally indicate that this is the personality trait which is the most consistently related to job performance. The only contexts in which this trait might be counterproductive are the ones in which employees have to do a creative job that does not necessitate adherence to principles and rules. In restaurants and hotels, it is important that employees comply with the rules imposed by management. **Employees who are conscientious tend to be more loyal to their company** and are less likely to behave inappropriately at work (arriving late, drinking alcohol, being rude to customers, etc.).

Research has shown that certain characteristics are required across many job categories.

General intelligence
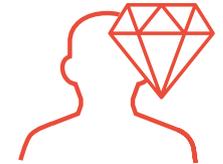
Conscientiousness

Emotional stability

Agreeableness

Emotional stability

Emotional stability is the tendency to **remain calm under pressure, to resist stress and to manage negative emotions such as anger or sadness**. This personality trait is very important in the hospitality industry, since it is a sector in which employees have to carry out an "emotional labor" by showing desirable emotions in front of guests even if they are under pressure or having a bad day. It seems that employees who score high on emotional stability are more likely to be able to overcome their negative emotions in order to really care and show concern toward the guests.

Furthermore, **employees who score high on emotional stability tend to stay longer in the same job and are less likely to behave inappropriately** (stealing money or being abusive to co-workers or guests).

Agreeableness

Agreeableness refers to the tendency to be **cooperative, trustworthy, easygoing, courteous and forgiving**. This trait is not an indicator of performance in all the industries but it seems to be important in service settings. Many studies have indeed shown that people who score high in agreeableness tend to be rated as more effective by their managers when serving others.

Agreeableness is also an **indicator of team performance so when employees have to work closely with others, they are capable of having more harmonious relationships with their colleagues, as well as being able to use more constructive conflict management strategies**. This trait is usually considered a good indicator of the service orientation of the candidate, (along with emotional stability and conscientiousness).

When employees have to work closely with others, those who score high on agreeableness will have the ability to have more harmonious relationships with their colleagues as well as use more constructive conflict management strategies.

DO NOT OVERRATE LESS IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTICS
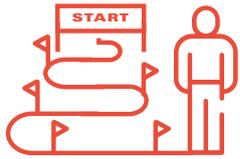
Experience

Experience

Experience is not a strong predictor of performance. Obviously, one would expect an employee with 5 years' experience to be more effective than someone with no experience, at least at the beginning - but after a few years there seems to be no difference. It means that **the learning curve is fast when someone starts a new job but this curve reaches a plateau after three years in many contexts**. Another reason why you could attribute less importance to experience is because every job is different and will require employees to learn new habits. As mentioned previously, the employees that are most likely to learn new habits quickly are the ones who score high on intelligence tests (and not the ones who have more experience).

School and companies

Schools and companies

Even if many managers are impressed by the prestige of some companies for which the candidates have worked or the quality of the schools they have attended, this kind of information is not very important as in any company or school there is a huge diversity of profiles. Usually, a hiring decision which is influenced by the location where the candidate worked or studied in the past is **more influenced by stereotype than useful information about the candidate's ability**.

Emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence

This is a term that has gained importance in the last decades following the influential book written in 1996 of the same name by Daniel Goleman. Media have also claimed that emotional intelligence is more important at work than cognitive intelligence. Despite the intuitive appeal of this claim, scientific research has produced different results. For instance, **emotional intelligence tests predict less well employees' future performance than cognitive intelligence tests**. Another problem with emotional intelligence is that it is a characteristic that is measured by many different types of tests, some of which are very similar to personality questionnaires that have existed for a while.

USE PSYCHOMETRIC TESTING

Psychometric tests refer to a set of questions that **measure psychological characteristics such as personality, interests, intelligence and competences**. These questions are usually administered on paper format or by computer. Candidates' responses are aggregated in order to compute scores reflecting where one person stands in comparison to another (i.e. if the candidate memorizes information more quickly or is less extraverted than the average person).

Psychometric tests represent an important part of the selection process. There are different types of tests that vary according to the model on which they are based and their effectiveness to predict job performance. Below are six psychometrics tests that measure personality.

	Number of items	Duration	Scales/ preferences	Professional context
EVERYTHING DiSC A Wiley Brand	80	15 min	4 preferences	No
mbti	93	15 min	4 preferences	No
HEXAPRO	160	30 min	6 dimensions of personality 20 facets	Yes
HPI	206	20 min	7 scales and 42 subscales	Yes
opa32	230	30 min	32 scales	Yes
NEO PI-3	240	30 min	5 dimensions of personality 30 facets	No

COMMON CONCERNS ABOUT PERSONALITY TESTING

"Candidates will not tell the truth"

Managers should not expect candidates to respond with total honesty to the questionnaire, nor should they rely entirely on personality testing as the sole means of selecting a member of staff. Past studies have however shown that personality tests still correlate with employees' success, even when they are administered during the selection process. Similar questions are repeated many times throughout the test in order to reduce the chance of candidates faking their replies. Moreover, there are personality tests that are more immune to the issue of faking. Forced-choice questionnaires represent a good method as candidates do not have to state if they agree or disagree with certain affirmations, but have to choose the response (very often among four possibilities) that most closely describes what they think.

"Personality changes from one situation to another"

Even though human behavior is not entirely consistent from one situation to the next, results on personality questionnaires tend to remain stable over the years. This doesn't mean that individuals get exactly the same results each time, but the overall tendency of the results remains generally the same. This is why we can sometimes make long-term predictions about a person's future performance based on personality testing.

How to get the best from personality testing

- Use personality tests that have a track-record of being able to predict workplace success.

- Align the personality results with the job profile.

- Use personality tests with questions that are adapted to the professional context.

- Do not use personality testing in isolation, it is better to make a holistic decision that considers many other factors aside from personality.

Vendor websites

All of these test vendors provide validated instruments to assess personality and/or general intelligence.

www.cut-e.com/assessment-solutions

www.hogrefe.co.uk

www.pearsonclinical.com/talent.html

www.shl.com

www.signa-assessment.com

ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS DURING THE INTERVIEW

It is almost impossible to be hired today without being interviewed by a manager or HR representative, either face to face, by Skype or a remote device. Despite its prevalence, interviewing is not a skill that comes naturally.

There are many **popular questions** that are asked in interviews such as "Why have you chosen to apply for us?", "Where do you see yourself in 5 years", "What are your strengths and your weaknesses". The advantages of these questions are that they are easy to prepare and put the candidates at ease since they have probably prepared some answers in advance. The problem with these questions is that they are **so well-known that they provide no useful information about candidates**. For instance, you might often hear that the main weakness of the candidates is that they are "too perfectionist".

Instead of asking very broad questions that provide little information, (apart from putting the candidate at ease), **you should ask specific questions for every competence that is important for the job**. Let's imagine that you consider stress management as an essential competence for the job, it is likely that many recruiters in this kind of situation would ask questions like "How do you deal with stress?" or "What is the best method in your opinion to manage stress?" These two questions will unfortunately not bring useful information as they require candidates to provide declarative knowledge on stress management.

Two different questions might be more helpful: past behavior and situational questions. In past behavior questions, the interviewer asks candidates to recount in detail how they have acted in a specific situation and the consequences of their actions. Examples of past behavior questions could be: "Tell me about a time when you had to deal with an extremely unexpected and urgent situation at work", "Tell me about when you had to deal with an extremely impolite guest". It is possible that candidates do not respond precisely to the questions and respond along the lines of "When I have unexpected situations, I try to put forward the right priorities". If this happens, you have to politely interrupt the candidate and restate that **your question was not about how they deal with unexpected situations in general but in one precise situation.** It is the only way to gather accurate information.

"Tell me about a time when you had to deal with an extremely unexpected and urgent situation at work",

"Tell me about a time when you had to deal with an extremely impolite guest"

Past behavior questions relies on the principle that **past behavior is the best predictor of future behavior.**

"Imagine a guest with a dead insect in their plate, what would you do?"

Situational questions can be effective in eliciting accurate answers because **intentions and goals are good predictors of actual behavior**.

You also need to ensure that you have enough information about the context in which the candidate reacted, the precise actions and/or what the person said and the consequences of their actions. The usefulness of past behavior questions relies on the principle that **past behavior is the best predictor of future behavior.** If candidates have convincing examples where they dealt successfully with stressful situations in the past, it is very likely that they should be able to do so in the future. On the other hand, if candidates have only been able to manage stress in slightly stressful situations, it is not sure they will be able to do it in more stressful environments.

A second type of question that might be useful, particularly if you interview candidates who have no or very little experience, is to **ask situational questions**. These questions refer to hypothetical situations such as "Imagine a guest with a dead insect in their plate, what would you do?". Situational questions can be effective in eliciting accurate answers because **intentions and goals are good predictors of actual behavior**.

I have frequently seen companies using these two types of questions, and although they are necessary – they are not sufficient – in determining a candidate's potential unless managers make the extra effort of recording employees' replies. Some leaders ask past behavior questions and then on a whim make the decision to hire the person (or not).

There are other aspects that recruiters need to consider before making an effective hiring decision. Firstly, leaders need to ensure that they are **asking exactly the same questions to all candidates**. Failing that, they are not being fair and are not giving the same chances to everyone. If you put people in different environments, you do not know if their reactions stem from individual differences or from situational differences. Secondly, recruiters should **take note of the candidate's responses in order to avoid forgetting or distorting information**.

We often overestimate our ability to clearly remember all the information we've been told, the truth is that we often only remember a narrow portion of what we hear or see.

Finally, recruiters have to evaluate objectively the candidate's responses. To do so, they need to **establish in advance a grid of the correct answers that are expected or the possible bad answers**. They can do so by asking actual employees what constitutes appropriate and inappropriate replies, or by observing employees performing the job.

Then, recruiters just have to compare the answers provided by the candidates to the criteria prepared in advance. Points can be awarded for answers according to their quality.

If the candidate's replies fit perfectly with a good answer, 5 points might be attributed; if the response is adequate without being outstanding, 3 points might be awarded; if the response is completely inadequate, only 1 pt should be given. You can attribute 2 points or 4 points when hesitating between two possible levels.

This procedure looks very similar to grading an exam and can appear laborious, but **it ensures objectivity, fairness and accuracy**. Finally, it might be essential to ask more than one question for every competence. Experts recommend **asking at least three questions for every competence**. The more questions you ask, the more confidence you have on the applicant's level of proficiency.

How to establish the number of points for each answer

when compared to the grid prepared in advance.

5 PTS — If candidates' response fits perfectly with a good response

4 PTS

3 PTS — If the response is adequate without being outstanding

2 PTS

1 PTS — If the response is completely inadequate

When you hesitate between 2 possible levels

BE WARY OF FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Even if many managers and hoteliers like to make intuitive decisions at the end of an interview, most studies on decision-making in personnel selection have shown that intuition can easily lead to mistakes.

In an interview, people who tend to make first good impressions are candidates who are extraverted. Extraverted people are at ease in social settings and tend to smile more, mimic their interlocutor, nod and speak more. They tend to be more assertive and are able to sell themselves more effectively than introverts. Even if extraversion is not an important component of the job, it is likely that recruiters' impression of the candidate overall might be influenced by the extent to which they score high on extraversion.
For that reason, it is important to **keep in mind all the criteria that are important for the position and to gather data both on what the candidate is saying and is doing**.

The danger with interviews is that you have access to what the candidates are saying but not to their real competences. It is likely that extraverted candidates will show more enthusiasm for a job than introverts but that does not mean that they will be more motivated, stay longer or perform better.. In order to overcome impressions heavily influenced by extraversion, you should ask situational and past behavior questions (as described in the previous section). You should also measure the competences during the interview by creating simulations of tasks to be performed on the job: bartending, housekeeping, greeting a guest at the reception, using software applications.

You should **observe the candidate's behavior and body language**. Among all the personality traits, conscientiousness might not be the one that is the easiest to observe, but you might observe how the candidate is seated - sitting up straight or in a casual posture? You can take note of how long they arrived before the interview. If they are one minute late or just on time, they might not be as conscientious as someone who arrived 10 minutes in advance. You can also notice if they have prepared questions or have brought something to write on. **The more tangible signs of preparation for the interview, the more the person is likely to be conscientious.**
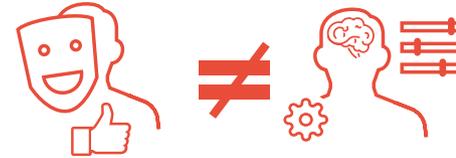
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SECTION 2:
ACTIONABLE INSIGHTS FOR SERVICE PROVIDERS

As we have seen above, it is possible to identify employees who have a better profile for delivering high customer service. Now, we will turn to **actions that service providers can adopt to increase service quality**.

All the recommendations come from actual studies where the effectiveness of the following behaviors has been demonstrated.

All the customer-oriented behaviors that are described in this section are categorized according to the PPePPS model.

PPePPS model

PERSONALIZATION

SURPRISE

POSITIVE EMOTIONS

PROXIMITY

PROFESSIONALISM
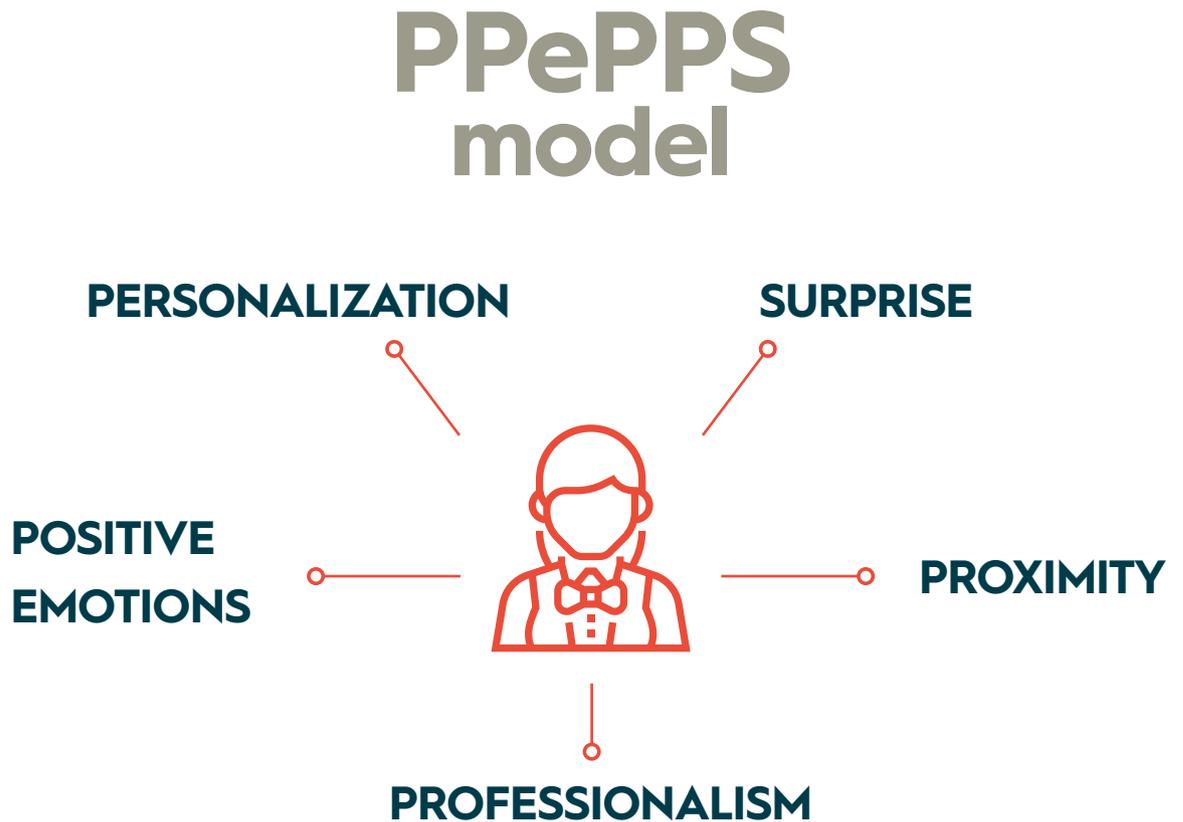
PERSONALIZATION

Personalization refers to the creation of more personal interactions with guests.
Interactions are more personal when customers and employees know each other.
For this reason, an easy step is for employees to introduce themselves by their name.
One study has shown that employees who introduced themselves by name received 36%
more tips than employees who do not. This simple action reinforces the perceived
friendliness and availability of the staff.

Employees should also not be shy to ask questions such as: "Is this your first time you here?",
"Where do you come from?", "How old is your baby?". Employees do not have the time
(and probably neither does the customer) to engage in a long conversation, but **small talk
can be highly appreciated**. If employees **use the customer's name** during interactions,
it reinforces the perception of professionalism and personalization. A customer's name
can be gathered either via the reservation, by informally asking the guest their name or
by looking at the credit card if used. If the employee can remember and **correctly spell
a customer's name**, this also makes a favorable impression. Another useful tactic could
be for the employee to **speak the guest's language**. All these attentive gestures
demonstrate that the service providers care about their guests and want to offer the
best service possible.

Personalization works in two ways: 1) Showing the guest that employees recognize them
as a unique person; 2) Employees differentiating themselves from others.
There are various ways in which **employees can stand out from the crowd**,
e.g.: wearing clothes/uniforms with specific colors or accessories that attract
the customer's attention.

Personalization works in two directions:

1 Showing the guests that employees
   recognize them as a unique person.

2 Employees differentiating themselves
   from others.

*"Hello everyone. My name is
Nathalie. Here is your menu.
What would you like to drink?"*

*"Thank you, Sir! If there is
anything I can do for you,
just ask me. My name
is Anthony."*

+ 36%

INTRODUCED
BY THEIR NAME

NOT INTRODUCED
BY THEIR NAME

Employees who introduced themselves by their name received 36% more
tip than those who did not, one study has shown. This simple action
reinforce the perceived friendliness and availability of the staff.

POSITIVE EMOTIONS

When employees are in a positive mood, customers are more likely to be satisfied by the service and return to the establishment. Emotions are famously contagious, so it is essential that employees are in a good mood before starting their shift.

Here are a list of small actions that can be undertaken to increase positive emotions among the clientele:

A simple smile makes a huge difference. By a process of emotional contagion, employees who smile bring about a positive response. A study has shown that customers gave 42% more tips when they were served by a smiling employee than when they were served by a neutral employee. As it can be difficult (and even counterproductive) for employees to force themselves to smile, it is **important to recruit the right people with the right disposition**. **Some people are more skilled at smiling and showing positive emotions**, e.g. those who are extraverted and emotionally stable.

When employees adopt 'impression management techniques' such as providing compliments, they are more likely to create positive emotions in the guests. Employees might compliment a dish that was chosen by the customer, as well as "Your kids eat very well", "I really love your jacket". The more honest the employees are, the more likely their compliments will be perceived positively by the customer.

In order to elicit positive emotions, it is also possible to inquire about the well-being of the guest. "How are you today?", or by telling a joke. In a study conducted in a French bar, there were 69.5% more customers who gave a tip when they received a card with a joke at the same time as the bill.

Another simple behavior tactic that could lead to more positive mood is to forecast good weather to the guests.

Smiling

Providing compliments

Inquiring about well-being

Telling a joke

Forcasting good weather

PROXIMITY

N.B. This section, based on a series of training sessions carried out in 2019, was written before the outbreak of COVID-19. It is important to mention that many of the strategies reported here might not work in the current context, due to social distancing measures and the fear of contamination.

Employees have to **pay attention to their nonverbal behavior as it can tell more about their friendliness, professionalism and availability than what they actually say**. For that reason, they should show immediacy with the guests. In other words, smile, look regularly at the guest, nod, stand at a close distance, lean forward when they interact and even slightly touch the customers on the shoulder or the arm.

Even if these practices seem to contradict common sense and what is prescribed in formal training that employees might have attended, there is a lot of empirical evidence to show the usefulness of being close to the guest.

In one study conducted in the US, waiters received 25% tips more when they squatted down while taking the order than when they stood. Another study conducted in France showed that the number of customers giving a tip almost doubled when waitresses stood at a distance of 15 cm to the guest than when they stood at a distance of 75 cm.

Nonverbal behavior that might seem counterintuitive is the effect of touch. Indeed, many people are afraid of touching others and many more report that they hate being touched. **In spite of what people claim, touching others is a powerful method of influence**. The effect is often called the "Midas touch effect". For instance, waiters and waitresses earned more tips when they briefly touched the guest's arm or shoulder to ask if everything was alright. Another study showed that there were 42 % more customers who followed the recommendation of a waitress when they were briefly touched on the forearm.

+ 25%

SQUAT DOWN
WHILE TAKING

STOOD WHILE
TAKING ORDER

In the US
Waiters received 25% tips more when they squat down while taking the order than when they stood.
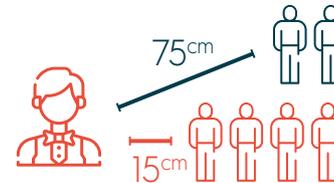
75cm

15cm

In France
The number of customers giving a tip almost doubled when waitresses stood at a distance of 15 cm to the guest than when they stood at a distance of 75 cm.

+ 42%

In France
42 % more customers followed the recommendation of a waitress when they were briefly touched on the forearm.

Another example comes from a study in which customers that were touched by an employee rated more positively both the employee and the restaurant.

These results show the overall benefits of touching customers. There are many more studies that show how **tactile contact increases patient health, learning, persuasion and sales** for instance. In contradiction to the intuitive appeal of the harmful effect of touch, touching others is a behavior that conveys warmth and interest. **If done professionally and subtly, the positive effect is even unconscious**, (similarly as the negative experience of being pickpocketed demonstrates that we are not always aware of being touched by others).

There are nevertheless some contexts in which one should not touch another person. For instance, **it would be inappropriate to touch someone who is older, a person of the opposite sex in the context of a date or people from certain cultures**.
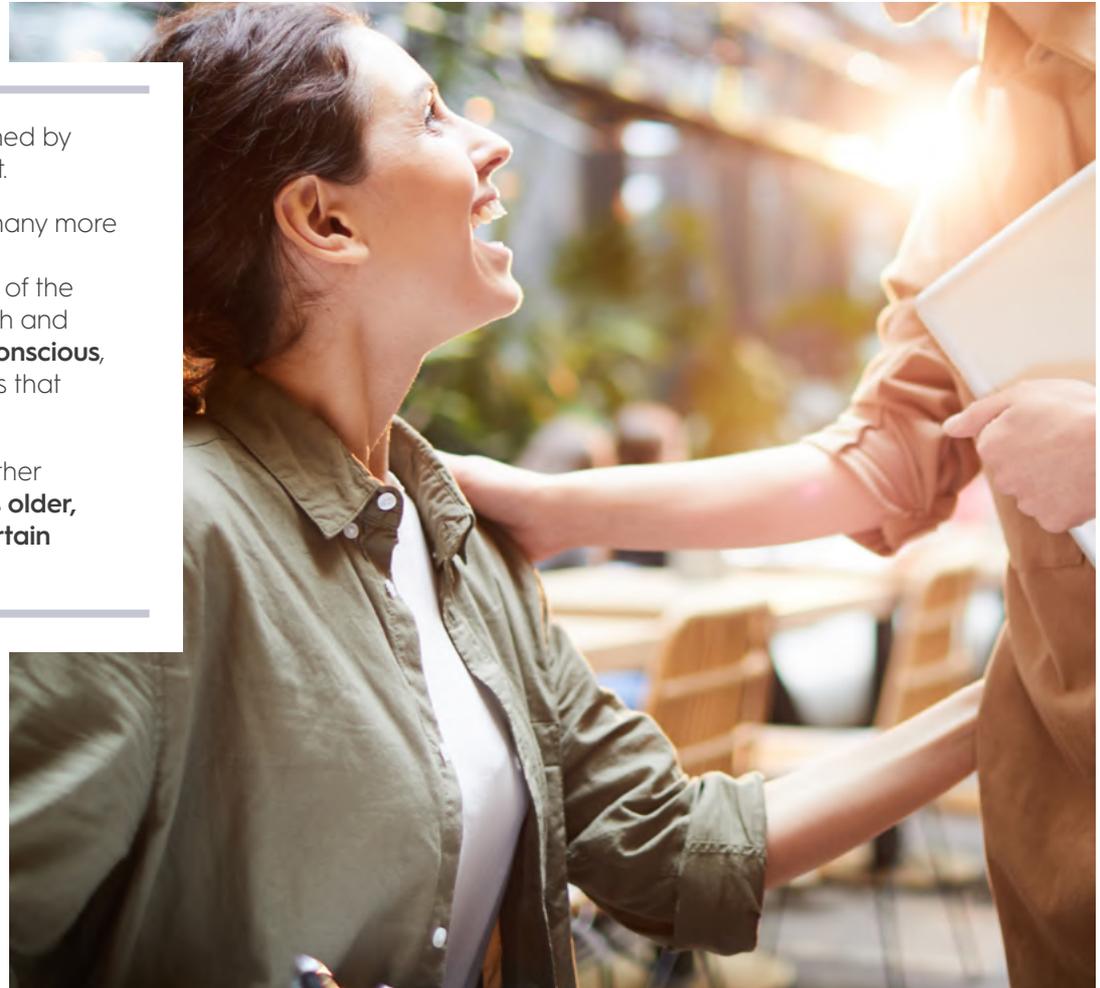
PROFESSIONALISM

It is obvious that employees who make mistakes will create a negative impression on the guest. **Employees must endeavor to be as impeccable as possible at all times**. Below are two tips that can increase the perception of professionalism of the service providers.

First, by **making recommendations and suggesting other items**, employees can increase sales whilst being perceived as more caring. Employees can guide their customers by offering choices and knowing the products offered in the menu. For this reason, it is really important that employees are familiar with the menu, ingredients and cooking procedures.

Repeating the customer's order by using the same words can diminish the risk of error in taking the order and can induce a sense of similarity between the customer and the employee. Dozens of studies have shown that mimicking others creates a feeling of familiarity and closeness among people. **By simply repeating the words of the customer, employees help to put them at ease**.

Two tips that can increase the perception of professionalism of the service providers:

1 Making recommendations, guiding the customers and suggesting other items.

2 Repeating the words of the customer help to put them at ease and can diminish the risk of error in taking the order.

SURPRISE

A final component of the model is surprise. **Positively surprised guests are more likely to give good word-of-mouth feedback and become loyal customers**. One way to positively surprise a guest is to be generous and to exceed their expectations.

In one restaurant, researchers controlled the number of candies given to customers at the end of the meal. When the waiter brought a candy at the same time as the coffee, customers on average left tips that were 20% higher than when no candy was given. When they received two candies with their coffee, there was a 40% increase in the tips. But when only one candy was provided, and that the waiter unexpectedly gave a second candy a few minutes later, guests gave tips that were 53% bigger than when no candy was given at all. This means that **being generous and doing something unexpected has a positive impact on the clientele**.

On a similar note, service providers can positively surprise guests by **drawing a smiley or writing "Thank you" on the bill**. Studies conducted in the US and in France have shown that customers leave larger tips when they receive these small attentions.

The element of surprise has many positive aspects, but its most positive impact on guests relies partly on the **norm of reciprocity**. The norm of reciprocity is universal and states that **people who have received a favor feel indebted to return this favor in the future**. There are many other ways that employees and restaurant owners can stimulate this norm among customers. They might for instance offer appetizers, coffees or a liquor. They can offer a discount on the bill or a voucher for drinks.

I have seen a restaurant where employees give guests a postcard at the end of their meal with the instruction to write something on it. Then, employees offer to send the postcard to a recipient anywhere in the world.
This practice is very original and **stimulates positive word-of-mouth feedback, as well as a willingness to tip and come back in the future**.

Being generous and doing something unexpected have both a positive impact on customers who left higher tips.

No candy with coffee

with 1 candy +20%

with 2 candies +40%

+53%

1 candy
+ 1 unexpected candy
a few minutes later

In one restaurant, researchers observed an the increase in the tips provided when the number of candies given to the customers was manipulated.
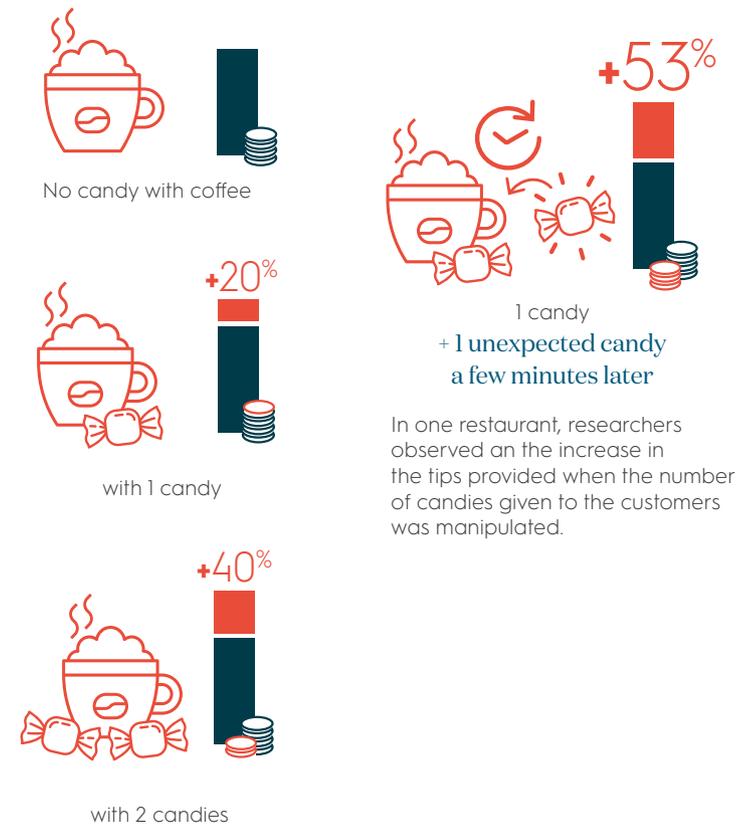
SECTION 3:
TRAINING EMPLOYEES IN THE USE OF CUSTOMER-ORIENTED BEHAVIORS

It is advisable for managers to train their staff since many of the points in Section 2 are not consistently applied in restaurants and hotels. This type of training can be delivered either by external consultants or by managers themselves. In the following section, I describe the positive effects this kind of training might have on customers and employees, followed by tips on how to properly conduct this type of training course.

The training course I developed for the study I conducted in Switzerland lasted 90 minutes and was delivered in over 50 restaurants. Many customer-oriented behaviors were reviewed and discussed, and in general, the course proved efficient in increasing the overall level of tips earned by employees.

The training course revolved around these specific behaviors. The principle to which they relate is indicated on the right.

· Introducing oneself by name	**Personalization**
· Smiling	**Positive emotions**
· Squatting next to the table	**Proximity**
· Standing at a close distance	**Proximity**
· Repeating the customer's orders	**Professionalism**
· Complimenting the customer	**Positive emotions**
· Upselling	**Professionalism**
· Calling customers by their name	**Personalization**
· Touching the customer	**Proximity**
· Giving the customer a second candy or chocolate	**Surprise**
· Drawing something on the check	**Surprise**
· Writing "thank you" on the check	**Surprise**

How the training course influenced employee customer-oriented behaviors:

+24%
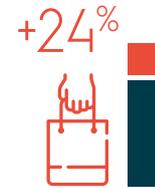
Frequent upselling

Thank you

+ ×4

Employees who wrote a "thank you" after the course

77%

my name is...

Employees who participated in the course frequently introduced themselves by their name

91.2%

This This

Employees reported often or always repeating the order after having attended the course

Apart from the increased tips, restaurant managers might expect the following:

· Expression of appreciation of service

· Better customer experience

· Increased employee satisfaction and engagement

· Employee retention (lower turnover)

· Increased customer satisfaction

· Sales growth

· Better communication between employees and management

· Better online restaurant ratings and positive word-of-mouth feedback

· Increased customer loyalty

· Higher restaurant occupancy
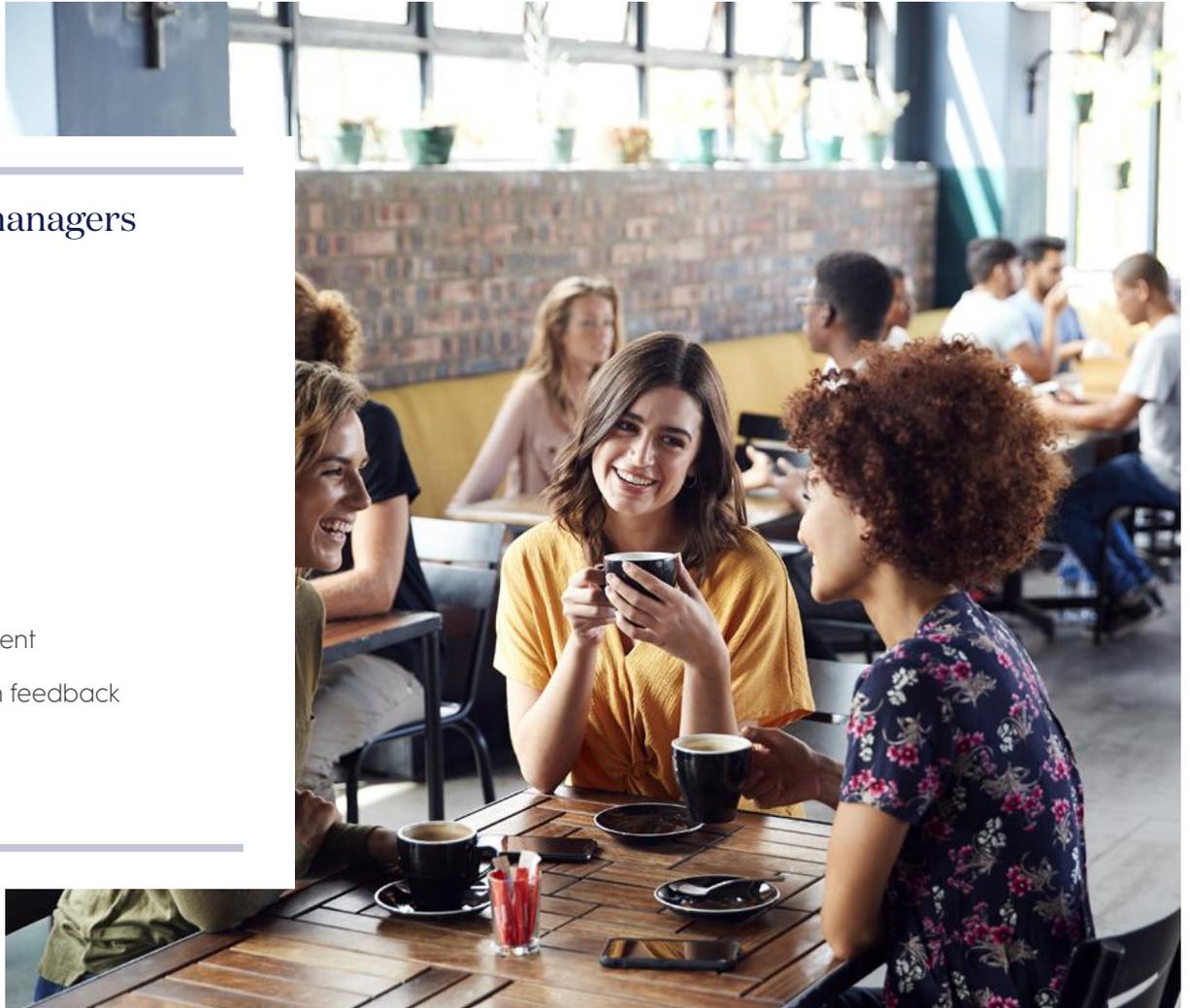
TIPS FOR MANAGERS

Conduct the training course in the restaurant.

The closer the training is conducted to the work environment, the better the skills are likely to be transferred.

Conduct the training in an active manner.

Employees will not be able to apply what they have learned if the session consists of a lecture about positive customer-oriented behaviors. It is highly advisable to include role-play and feedback. It is also necessary that employees discuss how they might apply and integrate these behaviors in their daily habits.

It should not be a one-time session.

Employees will be more likely to use specific behaviors if their efforts are supported by the managers. For that reason, it is essential to provide ongoing feedback on the way waiters interact with customers.

Acknowledge employee resistance.

Not all employees are enthusiastic about the use of certain methods. Instead of forcing employees to use specific tactics, it might be preferable to ask them how they might adapt these techniques to their personality and circumstances. Moreover, it could be interesting for employees to identify what they might change (instead of being told exactly what they have to change).

ACKNOWLEDGING EMPLOYEE RESISTANCE

During the study I conducted in Switzerland, I have seen some recurrent concerns voiced by the employees about the use of customer-oriented behaviors.

> **At midday, we don't have time to apply all these methods in frontof the guests.**

Every behavior takes a few seconds maximum. It is understandable that servers will not try out all these techniques, nor should they. However, if service providers have identified a few actions and made them automatic, this will require no additional time or effort.

> **We already do all these things.**

This is really interesting because some employees say they already know and apply all these techniques. However, the idea is not to try them on some occasions but to use them more consistently. The fact that not all employees use them clearly show that **there is room for improvement** in the use of customer-oriented behaviors.

> **We can't do everything.**

Admittedly, it's impossible to use all these techniques. I suggest **using them in a flexible manner**, keeping in mind the acronym PPePPS: Personalization, Positive emotions, Proximity, Professionalism and Surprise. The precise actions used do not matter as long as your actions contribute to foster one or more of these principles.

> **I cannot do something that I find inappropriate or bizarre.**

If you touch a client on the shoulder while talking to them and this makes you feel uncomfortable, the guest will not feel at ease either. I suggest that you **start by doing actions with which you are comfortable**. However, practice makes perfect. It can be good to sometimes go beyond your comfort zone. This is why any training program takes time. Like any behavior in the workplace, it has to be practiced and mastered. There are lots of professionals who are scared to make presentations, however, **if the job requires it they will face their discomfort** and become more proficient over time.

> **I do not think these methods work with all clients.**

All clients are different and hence, **it is necessary to size up the table, the personality of the guests and the purpose of their meal to adjust the way you serve them**. If you feel that the customers do not want to be interrupted in their discussion or are fully immersed in the reading of a book, try to keep interactions to a minimum. That does not mean however that you should not use at least one or a few customer-oriented behaviors listed above.

INTRODUCING ONESELF BY NAME

my name is...

This is a natural way to enter into contact with a person in many social situations, so why not in a restaurant? It can directly foster a personalized experience for the guest. Despite the importance of this customer-oriented behavior, there are however elements to keep in mind.

> **I have seen this work in the US, but in Switzerland (and other European countries), it doesn't work that way**

Admittedly, it is uncommon to hear a service provider say "Hello, my name is Stefano, what would you like to order?" in Switzerland. However, **just because it is uncommon does not necessarily mean that it would create a negative impression**. On the contrary, guests can be positively surprised and might appreciate this polite initiative.

> **Very often, guests don't care about our names. We don't want to bother them.**

The importance of providing one's name is not for the guest to remember it. Most customers will probably forget it quickly, but they won't forget their impression of a server who is amiable and approachable. **By giving your name, you're implicitly saying "I am available, I am trustworthy"**.

> **I don't want customers to know my name. It is private and I would prefer that they didn't call me by my first name.**

Again, it is not because you give your name that guests will use it. **This is just a way of appearing kind and available**. However, if service providers are really against giving their names, they can simply choose the customers who they would like to introduce themselves to. For instance, some waitresses reported having been harassed by some male customers in the past. They were then afraid that customers would be more demanding and harassing once they learned the name of their waitress (particularly, if perceived as a seduction attempt). Even if waitresses give their name, it is not certain that it will lead to harassing behavior. Waitresses are however encouraged to give their name **only if they feel it will not have negative consequences**.

" We cannot apply this method because there are several waiters in charge of an area. **"**

Obviously, **it does not make sense to have 4 waiters greeting customers**, it would go against the idea of personalization. In that situation, there are three possibilities:

· No waiters introduces themselves.
· The waiter who takes the order gives their name.
· The person who brings the menu introduces the name of the colleague who will take the order.

" We already have a badge with our name. I do not see the point of saying it, the customer can read. **"**

The name on the badge serves one goal, saying it out loud serves another. The badge helps customers call you by your name, **giving your name orally serves to create a positive impression.** This is why it might still be beneficial to say your name, even if it is indicated on a badge.

" When should I introduce myself? **"**

The timing is very important. The best moment seems to be when the guest is seated. **It could be either when you bring the menu or before (or after) you take the order**. If you give your name when the guest enters, it could make an odd impression because their main concern at that particular moment is to find a seat.

REPEATING THE GUEST'S ORDER

By repeating the order, service providers diminish the risk of error and show attentiveness. Moreover, by using the exact same words as the customers, they reinforce the perceived similarity between the guest and the service provider.

> Should I really use the same words?

Yes, this is important. By changing the wording, **you could give the impression to the guests that they didn't mention the order in the correct way**.

> Customers know what they have ordered and repeating the order could give them the impression that I haven't understood or that I'm not confident about the order.

I would suggest that you **repeat directly the order at the same time you write it on paper or electronic device.** Done in this manner, it will be perceived as an acknowledgement of what they have said. If employees wait until everyone around the table has ordered, it can create annoyance among customers.

> It is too time-consuming to repeat the order when there are many guests.

It can take a lot of time to repeat orders when everyone has finished specifying what they want. It is exactly for this reason that **it is best to repeat every item after every order**.

COMPLIMENTING THE GUEST

Making compliments creates positive feelings and can reinforce customers' confidence about having made a good choice.

> " It would seem odd if I do it with large tables. "

Complimenting guests in that situation only makes sense if everyone has chosen the same dish, otherwise **it is best to give a compliment when customers eat alone or with another person.**

> " How can I compliment people if I do not like the plate they have chosen? "

A phony compliment is worse than no compliment at all. For that reason, I suggest either complimenting the plates you truly like "That's my favorite dessert, I hope you like it", or **providing information about other customers' ratings of the dish** "That's a good choice. All the customers say it is one of their favorite".

> " I am sure my compliments sound insincere. "

Making compliments does not mean lying to the guests, but it certainly helps to believe in what you say. It could be a good idea to **identify 2 or 3 ways of praising certain dishes on the menu**.

TOUCHING PEOPLE

This is probably the most controversial customer-oriented behavior **(and in the current situation of the COVID-19 pandemic, I would suggest not to use it)**. When you are chatting with a guest, you are encouraged to touch them briefly on the arm or the shoulder. It can help you come across as more convincing, confident and caring.

> **I do not like to be touched... I would not want someone else to touch me.**

There are many people who claim that they do not like to be touched. However, there are different manners to be touched. If it is done briefly, subtly and in the right context, it can help give a positive impression. Moreover, **when done briefly, people do not even notice it**.

> **We cannot do it with everyone.**

It is true that you should never do it with someone who is older than you (it can be perceived as rude and condescending), or with someone of the opposite sex on a date. It's also a gesture that you should not make at the beginning of a meal or if you perceive the guest is angry or annoyed by the quality of the service. **It is preferable to touch guests with whom you sense a good atmosphere**. It should be used at certain key moments, e.g. if you want to have the guest's attention, touching them on the arm can produce a positive effect. It can also be applied while you are bringing the bill or if you want to know if the guest is satisfied with the meal.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Even if the hospitality industry is known for providing low salaries and requiring little experience or education, the demands and expectations for excellent service are very high. It is then not surprising to see a high turnover among staff and that on some occasions customers might complain because of the low quality of service. Not everyone would fit perfectly well in working in the hospitality industry which is incredibly high-pressured, and even among those who are suited, it's necessary that they learn customer orientation behaviors that will satisfy guests and prepare them to stay in this labor-intense industry.

The rationale of this report has been to provide evidence-based tips to hoteliers in order to recruit, select and train their employees in a way that maximizes employee satisfaction and commitment, while at the same time increases the service quality and reduces staff turnover.

Human beings are obviously complex and all the techniques and tips provided in this report need to be adjusted to each working environment. Future research will demonstrate the effectiveness of new customer-oriented behaviors, and consequently, the effectiveness of the existing ones described in this report will be better understood, notably in which kind of situation they are the most appropriate.

We would be glad to hear from you in order to continue the gathering of new information in the field of customer orientation.

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Sébastien Fernandez (Ph.D., University of Geneva) is an Associate Professor of Organizational Behavior and People Analytics, active in the field of Applied Psychology at the Ecole hôtelière de Lausanne (EHL, Switzerland). He performs research in the fields of personality and talent assessment.

He worked in the Swiss Army for five years where he was in charge of the assessment of the candidates for officer positions. He has taught courses in human behavior and performance, people analytics, talent assessment, psychology and interpersonal relations.

His goal is to help leaders take into account the psychological forces that drive high performance in organizations and to make sound talent decisions.

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