



EXPERIENCE INSIGHTS

In Conversation with:

Shangri-La Hotel Toronto

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IN CONVERSATION WITH: SHANGRI-LA HOTEL TORONTO

We recently had an opportunity to engage colleagues from the Shangri-La Hotel in a thoughtful dialogue about customer experience. The Shangri-La Hotel is the latest addition to the luxury hotel segment in Toronto where the 2012 Customer Experience Strategy Summit was held.

5P: I'd like to begin by asking about your definition of customer experience.

SH: The customer experience for Shangri-La is best defined by our advertising campaign "It's in our nature." We characterize hospitality as "To treat a stranger as one of our own." It is about taking care of our guests, providing genuine care and hospitality. This kind of hospitality from the heart creates brand familiarity and loyalty. We want to welcome our guests back time and again.

5P: So, where does the Shangri-La customer (guest) experience begin and end?

SH: The Shangri-La customer guest experience begins the moment we first connect with the customer, whether that's a telephone conversation, an in-person interaction, or via the internet through our website, reservations or Facebook. We want to make a genuine, sincere connection at every opportunity. In terms of it ending, we hope that it does not. There might be a finish point to a particular stay or a service experience, but we hope that memories of our service lingers and the guest returns.

5P: Your website suggests the essence of the Shangri-La brand is "To treat a stranger as one of our own" and is differentiated by "Hospitality from the Heart" – I call this your "Promise Made". What does Shangri-La do uniquely to make that a "Promise Kept"? How do you maintain the consistency of this with so many employees and so many properties?

SH: The Shangri-La culture is the foundation for this. It comes to life through our core values of humility, courtesy, helpfulness, respect and sincerity, and these inform how we care for guests and colleagues. For all employees of Shangri-La Hotels and Resorts, these are not simply words on paper or posters. These core values are highlighted each and every day in staff briefings, with colleagues being asked why and how these values are expressed in their daily job. Humility is one that also sets Shangri-La apart. It's part of our "pride without arrogance" belief.

5P: What part of your organization is accountable for customer experience?

SH: All parts of the organization are accountable for the customer experience. We all play a role,

whether it is directly or indirectly - direct guest contact, or behind-the-scenes supporting our colleagues who engage customers directly. The guest experience is the sum of many moving parts that move together.

5P: If you had to choose percentages, how much of the Shangri-La experience would you say is driven by the physical interaction guests have (the sensory experience at the property, amenities, etc.), the digital interaction (onsite or offsite websites, social media, etc.), and the human interaction (interacting with people whether on the phone or on the property)? Please tell me more.

SH: I think percentages can vary. The human interaction is without question the most important. The physical experience is also important, and is further enhanced by the human interaction of our staff. Digital interaction is incredibly important for certain people but requires that subsequent human interaction be most effective.

5P: How does the Shangri-La employee experience contribute to the Shangri-La customer (guest) experience? What does Shangri-La do so well to ensure employees deliver the desired guest experience?

SH: I would take that back to question #3 – the core values of the company.

5P: You've had the advantage of building the Shangri-La experience from the very beginning. Have you ever had to transform the existing experience of a property you acquired? If so, what? What were the lessons learned from that?

SH: I can speak from the perspective of opening the Shangri-La Hotel Toronto which was a new-build hotel. Hiring the right people is critical. We were fortunate to acquire staff who had worked at other hotel brands as well as people who had worked in other sectors and identified with Shangri-La's core values and mission. You hire staff who bring together a wide-range of both employee and guest experiences, and you teach them what it means to be part of the Shangri-La family.

5P: Can you describe a legendary Shangri-La guest experience – one that might be told for generations?

SH: This is incredibly difficult as Shangri-La shares a story each day across the company. Each day we share a story of a colleague who has made an important difference to a guest experience. Each one stands on its merits.

Fifth P is the customer experience agency that designs and implements ways to help organizations become who they say they are. Do you want to learn more? Let's start by saying hello.

hello@fifthp.com

