

# Signature Press

## MANAGING THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE DURING TROUBLING TIMES



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**By John Ely**  
*Hotel & Motel Management*

As an avid traveler, both for business and pleasure, I've come across some misleading situations at the hotels where I've stayed. One of my least favorite scenarios is when I've reserved a beautiful "ocean view" balcony room that, in reality, turns out to be a "construction site" view. It's happened a couple times.

Or, after a full day of meetings or travel, when I'm really looking forward to using the state-of-the-art workout room, I come to find that it's closed for improvements. That's an inconvenience at any time, but presents a special challenge for someone who is unable to leave the property or can't exercise outdoors.

Sometimes, the setback can also come from the presence of a service company, like an exterminator or carpet and upholstery cleaner. And more likely than not, most hotels have experienced uncontrollable situations like power outages and plumbing issues.

Now, I understand that hotels must renovate. And I'm completely aware of the fact that service companies are always on and off of the property. Being from the Midwest, I also know that things like weather can unexpectedly make the power go out. But what really irritates me more than the inconvenience itself, is when the hotel staff is not proactive, and even seems unprepared to handle questions, concerns and complaints.

As I see it, when your hotel is going through planned renovations or is experiencing unexpected issues, you have two options. You can pretend like the

situation isn't happening and prepare for the complaints to roll in. This immediately puts you and your staff in the defensive position and can leave a lingering bad impression on guests.

Or, you can be proactive and prepare your staff, especially those at the front desk, to address the problem from the very beginning – during the reservation or check-in. Ask a simple question like, "We're experiencing some troubles with our cable service right now. Do you plan on watching much television during your stay?"

This will immediately allow you to understand the situation's impact on the guest and offer a simple solution, like a free movie rental or a complimentary daily newspaper to help cushion the inconvenience of the circumstances.

Being proactive opens the lines of communications with your guests and secures their trust. In troubling situations, it also puts the hotel in the offense and empowers the staff to create personalized solutions to a problem on the spot.

Here are a few tips to consider when training your staff to address guests during troubling times:

- Role-play possible inconvenient and emergency situations with your staff. By looking at the hypothetical in advance, you can create an easy-to-implement plan for the future.
- Provide talking points about the situation – make sure every staff member is conveying a similar message.
- Give guests an easy way to voice

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their concerns. (“Just pick up the phone and give us a call here at the front desk if you experience any inconveniences.”)

- Empower the staff to make decisions about how to best handle complaints.

This lets them create on-the-spot fixes to problems.

- Encourage your sales team to follow-up with guests who stayed with you during the situation. Ask how you did during that time, and encourage guests to come back for a return visit.

With the right customer service techniques in place, it’s possible that your hotel’s inconveniencing situation may not negatively impact your guest’s stay. And with the right preparation and training, you might even win repeat guests.