

Signature Press

THE LAST IMPRESSION: WHY CHECK-OUT IS JUST AS IMPORTANT AS CHECK-IN



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By John Ely
Hotel & Motel Management

I arrived at my destination feeling energetic and ready to take on a week of conferences, meetings, social activities and all the other trappings of a tradeshow. I barely remember checking into my hotel other than the thought that, "this place must be haunted!" It was an old resort (built in 1914) and looked very similar to the Stanley Hotel of "The Shining" fame. I got to the room with no problems and began preparing to talk and walk a lot!

By the end of the week, after all the talking and walking, that energetic guy who arrived just days earlier was now feeling tattered and worn out from all the activity. Anyone reading this who has ever worked even a one-day tradeshow knows exactly how I felt, and this was a four-day event! I dragged myself to the front desk to check out and the same friendly faces that greeted me on Monday were now there on Friday. But for some reason, I noticed them more. It was probably because I really needed a friendly face at the end of my week, more so than at the beginning.

The valet brought my car around and the bell attendant helped load the luggage — all thanking me for staying with them. It's funny how just a few days at a place can give you a sense of family and familiarity, at least at the well-trained establishments.

I drove in with no real expectations or preconceived notions about the hotel (other than the haunted thing), but drove away thinking that this was one of the more charming places I've been in a while. I attribute much of my departing attitude to the wonderful check-out experience. While

some check-outs have been simply a receipt and a quick glance to the next person in line, others have been sincere expressions of thanks and gratitude for my business. This was obviously the latter.

Why is check-out so important? This interaction with the customer is your last opportunity to demonstrate your concern for the guest and your overall character. In the days of in-room or automated check-out processes, the face-to-face interaction should be viewed as a rare occasion and a chance to build guest loyalty.

Many of the same techniques used during check-in still apply at the end of a guest's stay. Use the guest's name to make the interaction more personal. If you are really good, comment on the guest's reason for visiting. For example, "How was your tradeshow Mr. Ely?" By analyzing the response, you will be better able to gage the guest's emotional state. In my case, the front desk agent could easily see that my energy was drained. Therefore, her efficiency and helpfulness was greatly appreciated, especially her call to the bell attendant who helped me with my luggage.

So many times I've felt that staff was merely trying to "make room" for the next guests during the check-out process. It's important to create a positive and memorable last impression in order to keep guests coming back to your hotel. There is no better way to say goodbye to a guest than to let them know that you truly enjoyed their company and were happy they stayed with you.