

Outstanding Service Case Study: Ritz Carlton Hotels

- Post author: [Mark Lloydbottom](#)
- Post published: November 1, 2021

Don't Miss Out on These Essential Service Lessons

"We are ladies and gentlemen serving ladies and gentlemen"

Have you ever stayed at a Ritz Carlton hotel? If not, then allow me to suggest you plan one day to stay at one of these leading-edge hotels.

Horst Shultze, former President of Ritz Carlton wrote about the importance of serving guests while training to work in the hotel industry. As a young boy growing up amidst the vineyards of Winnigen, Germany the young Shultze knew his future lay in hospitality. At the age of 11, he informed his parents that he wanted to work in a hotel, even though he'd never set foot in one – or even in a restaurant.

Three years later, Horst quit school and started work as a busboy at the Kurhaus more than 100 miles from home. He juggled his job with weekly hotel school, where he penned the essay, "Ladies and Gentlemen Serving Ladies and Gentlemen."

OUTSTANDING SERVICE AND INTEGRITY

I have listened to Horst speak on a number of occasions and have been captivated by his ingenuity and commitment to delivering outstanding service. He is zealous about everyone respecting the hotel staff who are, of course, all *ladies and gentlemen*. He inspires everyone through his commitment to training – while CEO he personally led the three-week training programme at every new Ritz Carlton hotel. He has a passion when he talks about his commitment to *zero* defects in the running of the hotel in *every* area.

Key point: *How highly do you regard your fellow firm owners and staff? How can you improve your view? For example – find them doing things well and side-step criticizing them when they do things wrong.*

RETURNING THIS GUEST'S CLOTHES. A WOW FACTOR

On one occasion I stayed with my wife at the Ritz Carlton, Reynolds Plantation, Atlanta, USA. Our stay was the culmination of a three-week vacation. With a case full of dirty clothes my wife asked if she could avail herself of the cleaning facilities. My first reaction was, "well of all the places to have clothes cleaned this is just about the most expensive.".... So, the overflowing laundry bag was duly picked up by housekeeping – this included a dress and one of my jackets. The next day our clothes were returned. The freshly cleaned clothes were all neatly returned with tissue paper separating each item. My jacket was returned in a suit bag complete with tissue paper lining the sleeves. I also called for my shoes to be cleaned only to have them given back to me in a Ritz Carlton shoe box. The lesson? Well, applying this to my

accounting business I realised I should return client records in a better state than which they were received. So, I ordered a supply of white boxes [as an alternative to manila] from a carton supplier and had these overprinted with our firm name and strap line together with a line to enable the box content to be labelled.

Q: How can you return your clients' records in a better state than when they were given to you? Box? Recyclable bag? Disc case?

OTHER LESSONS?

Another [minor] incident

While at the same hotel, there was another incident – so minor I cannot recall the circumstances and I won't make anything up for the sake of this story! I can recall chatting one evening before dinner to the gift shop manager, and mentioning what I am sure was only a minor shortfall in the hotel's high standards. Returning to our room after dinner I was amazed to find a Ritz Carlton gift wrapped coffee mug together with a note that read, "I trust you enjoy your evening here with us at the Reynolds Plantation."

SIMPLY THE BEST

Ritz Carlton specialise in giving WOW experiences. They claim, rightly in my opinion, to be the 'king of hoteliers and the hotelier of kings'. While Four Seasons may argue that case, I have always been mightily impressed by every Ritz Carlton hotel I have ever visited. They have won every single award possible for a hotel chain and some many times over. Yes, the room rates are higher than most, but they certainly deliver better value than any other hotel I know.

CREDO

The Ritz Carlton Credo, developed in 1986, defines the required and ultimate guest experience and is expressed in three stanzas:

1. The Ritz Carlton is a place where the genuine care and comfort of our guests is our highest mission
2. We pledge to provide the finest personal service and facilities for our guests who will always enjoy a warm, relaxed, yet refined ambience
3. The Ritz Carlton experience enlivens the senses, instils wellbeing, and fulfils even the unexpressed wishes and needs of our guests.

Ritz staff carry their Credo card with them. This card also includes a listing of the "Three Steps of Service" which are:

1. A warm and sincere greeting. Use the guest's name
2. Anticipation and fulfilment of each guest's needs
3. A fond farewell. Give a warm goodbye, and use the guest's name.

LINE-UP

Line up defined: A daily line up (stand-up) meeting is an opportunity for the service team to discuss work progress, commitments and plans. These meetings typically last up to 15 minutes and allow each contributor to report on their accomplishments since the last line up meeting.

True to its name, all participants in line-ups usually remain standing to keep the meetings short and on-topic. However, digital stand-ups are also possible. Making sure there's a repeatable agenda is the best way to keep either format of a daily or weekly stand-up meeting running smoothly.

The leadership of Ritz Carlton perfected a powerful process of daily conversation with their teams about the ongoing implementation of their 'Gold Standard' approach to guest service referred to as 'line-up'. This takes place at the beginning of each and every shift. The magic of line-up? Among other things it evidences the following:

Repetition of values: The core belief that values need to be discussed on a daily basis and that these cannot be discussed enough.

Common language: The inclusion of a common language with terms like 'credo', 'a fond farewell' and 'unexpressed wishes and needs of our guests.'

Visual symbols: The integration of the Credo Card into the experience.

Oral traditions: Personal, direct, face-to-face communication in a world dominated by email, text, voice messaging and social media.

Positive storytelling: The ability to capture, share, and inspire through tangible examples of what it means to live the Credo and core corporate values.

Modelling by leaders: The active, daily presence of all leaders in the process and the commitment of resources to free up staff for daily participation.

LINE UP – A POWERFUL APPROACH TO MESSAGE REINFORCEMENT AND TEAM COMMUNICATION

At line-up, the leaders share letters and guest comments in order to communicate to staff members the impact they have on guests by making Ritz Carlton a safe and secure environment. On one occasion during line-up the following words of a guest were shared throughout all the group's hotels:

"I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere appreciation and thanks to Andy Sun, Club concierge at the Portman Ritz Carlton, Shanghai. I will always remember his personal attention upon seeing my discomfort and chest pain and insisting on going with me to the World Link Clinic. He stayed with me throughout; accompanied me to hospital as I underwent an operation; and supported me beyond the call of his duty in my time of need. During my hospital stay, he visited regularly and provided me with support until my wife reached

Shanghai. Upon my release from hospital, he was a constant source of support and took any and all steps that were needed to make us comfortable. He is not just a hard-working individual but a caring and compassionate person and an asset to any team."

Andy Sun's behaviour, which could be viewed as lacking boundaries in some workplaces, is held as being "The New Gold Standard" of concern for the physical well-being of the guest and represents a template of what is not only excellent but what is exemplary at Ritz Carlton.

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

There is so much more that can be learnt from the Ritz Carlton service approach that I am unable to impart. Time does not permit and neither is my experience so deep that I can write without just recounting what others have said and written. I strongly recommend, "[The New Gold Standard](#)" by Joseph Mitchell which will enable you to continue your research on how Ritz Carlton maintains a consistently high standard of outstanding customer service.

Mitchell's book contains insights such as Ritz Carlton '20 Basics and Service Values':

Leaders are most effective when they can remove themselves from the day-to-day management of their people and instead offer an inspirational vision of how their staff can enliven corporate values in the service of others. The power of service is magnified when leadership acknowledges teamwork and efforts that break down traditional departmental-based 'stove pipes.'

The steps involved in salvaging a bad experience are fairly straightforward; yet all too often these are not followed:

1. Share a genuine and compassionate reaction to the guest's distress
2. Offer appropriate apologies
3. Assure the person you will take care of the issue
4. Individually, and through the resources of your team, see that the problem is taken care of in a way that meets the satisfaction of the customer and does not recur
5. Go one step further to demonstrate you want to try and compensate for the person's loss or frustration.

ONE FURTHER POINT ON RITZ CARLTON

On the occasion of my first stay at a Ritz Carlton I was reading a Tom Peters book (if you have not read any of Peters' books then add *Liberation Management*, *Leadership* and *Thriving on Chaos* to your reading list). In the book there was a picture of a member of a Ritz Carlton cleaner and in her hand she held a placard which read, "I have a \$2,000 budget to fix any guest problem." That still stands today – such is the level of trust in the ladies and gentlemen who serve the guests, who of course are all ladies and gentlemen!

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

If asked, could everyone in your firm offer a clear and concise understanding of your firm's mission and purpose?

What are the most important aspects of service that you wish to see consistently delivered in your business?

How can you improve your firm's client service and deliver a WOW experience?

How can you improve communication and teamwork in your firm?

How can you further improve staff ownership in their role in serving clients?

Are your staff being paid what they are worth?