

GOYA

I'm just familiar enough with about a half dozen or so languages to know that they all have a saying that goes something like "if you take care of the little things, the big things will take care of themselves." Now I don't have enough faith in these international sayings to focus only on the little things, but as managers it's often our job to focus on the big things. Those big things take most, if not all of our time, and the little things slip by unnoticed. A stain appears one day in a carpet and it isn't immediately removed. Somebody told somebody about it but it didn't get taken care of.

Often, when I walk into a hotel or restaurant I see lights burned out, window glass that's cracked, some paint that has chipped, or ceilings that are stained. I've found nail clippings in desk drawers, "clean" drinking glasses with lipstick on them. Somebody said somebody about it to somebody but nothing got done. Patrons in the dining room complained about dirty silverware and they were brought clean replacements but nobody did anything about it.

Years ago, when I was an up-and-comer in the hotel industry, I had a manager who gave me some wonderful advice one day. "Peter" he told me, "if you want to do well in this business you need to GOYA." The only Goya I had heard of was the painter, and I was sure that's not what he meant. And indeed, he didn't. "GOYA," he told me, "means 'Get Off Your Assets,'" or words to that effect...

It was not easy to take that advice. I was drawn to my desk and the problems stacked on it, and the telephone and people I needed to call. But I respected this manager and I knew this was good advice. So I (loosing weight or to quit smoking was easier) forced myself to get away from my desk for a while. At various times I would get off my butt and walk around. I'd stick my head into every crook and cranny of the property at all times of the day. I saw the night shift at work at 3 AM, and went into some rooms with the housekeepers at 10. I saw the kitchen at work at 6 in the evening. And I talked to everybody. And I listened to what they told me.

I also trained myself to look critically at things around me. Some things were easy for me to spot, like the money we were throwing away by preparing the wrong breakfast choices, for instance. (And, of course, I worried about the guest we might have disappointed with our poor selection.) I made a special effort to look for broken things and cleanliness. But I'm not a technical guy – if I don't know about something, I ask an expert. We paid for energy audits and mystery shoppers. I try to learn from what they told me. I tried to learn from my accountant.

For most businesses it is hard work to find new clients. Thought, creativity, labor, perseverance, and money is needed.

But keeping clients is another story. Clients can be fickle. Just a little carelessness on your part and they're gone. A brusque or inconsiderate response by a staff member, a poor selection at breakfast, a noisy room air conditioner, a plumbing leak, a plugged showerhead, a dirty fork, any of these things can trigger a response. A negative response, usually.

The really sad thing is that, most of the time when clients leave you, they won't even tell you why they're not coming back. And sometimes when they do tell you, you're not really listening.

So here's my challenge. And look as it as a fun thing to do; Use a randomizing technique (dice work well) to select a totally arbitrary day and time, and single out a part of your business for some detailed scruting. Put yourself in the shoes of the whiniest, most unreasonable guest you ever had and look at everything critically. Imagine every criticism that person might possibly have and give those complaints an objective hearing. Do your people have the attitude you would like them to have? Does your property sparkle and shine? Is the food appetizing, the room clean and quiet? Is this bed you would like to sleep in? Don't be too quick to dismiss negative feedback.

If this suggestion helps you save a few bucks, maybe you'll want to buy me lunch. If you've tried it and it doesn't work, drop me a line. I'll may buy you dinner just so I can hear your story.