

Monthly Musings



courtesy of Fletcher Consulting

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SMART RESEARCH:

Marriott constantly innovates

Remember all those times you completed the customer satisfaction survey either online or with the card when you left your hotel room? Your comments were helping your hotel room become more functional on your next trip.

Welcome to the Marriott Innovation Lab in Bethesda, Maryland, where designers constantly tinker with creating the ultimately positive experience for travelers among its 19 brands.

Have you noticed these changes recently?

- The desk size is shrinking as more hotel guests do their work while sitting on the bed
- Wooden floors are replacing carpeting
- Closets are shrinking
- The armoire with the big, thick TV is going away
- There are more power plugs for charging electronics

Those changes mark just the beginning. The hotel wars are so fierce that the old competitive advantages of better shampoo and crisp white duvets have become the ante simply to play the game. You may recall the October edition of *Monthly Musings*, where I wrote that one of the great battlegrounds is gourmet coffee.

Here is an interesting stat from the *Wall Street Journal*: 69% of Millennials say Wi-Fi for multiple devices influences which hotel they choose. Among Gen Xers, that number is 58%, and 52% of Baby Boomers have that preference.

Along that same line, hotels are installing higher speed Wi-Fi, and are increasingly frequently charging for the service. Customers report they would rather pay (and expense the amount to their company) for faster speeds than have slow speeds for free.

Today's travelers – particularly Millennials – unpack less on business trips, usually leaving their clothes in the suitcase, with the exception of any suit or dress they may need for their business meeting.

Your comments are helping your hotel room become more functional on your next trip.

Welcome to the Marriott Innovation Lab...

As a result, Marriott is cutting back on the size of closets and...

As a result, Marriott is cutting back on the size of closets and the number of clothes hangers.

To allow couples to travel and get ready at the same time, some Marriott brands are moving to what they call

“deconstructed bathrooms”: shifting the sink and brightly lit make-up area into the bedroom and leaving the shower/tub and toilet as the only items inside the bathroom itself.

Marriott started to remove its mini refrigerators but learned quickly that 69% of its guests want and actually use the fridge.

Kudos to Marriott for its constant communication with its customers, then listening and putting their preferences into action.

What is your mechanism for listening to your customers? How well are you putting their preferences into action?



NOT-SO-SMART ATTENTION TO DETAIL: CorVel fails

The story was front-page news in the *Star-Telegram* last month: The City of Fort Worth is replacing its workers' compensation administrator for lack of diligence, among other reasons.

This series of incidents serves as a powerful reminder to pay extreme levels of attention when dealing with sensitive issues.

CorVel sent letters to families advising them that a third-party administrator would manage their claims and offered wishes of “a speedy recovery.”

Unfortunately, the letters went to all City of Fort Worth employees involved in the incidents – including many deceased.

Rather than establishing a protocol that would deliver customized communication to the families having death claims, the easy thing to do was to treat all situations the same with a form letter filled in

We wish you a speedy recovery.

Sincerely,

Marilyn Miller

Claims Specialist

with dates, names and addresses.

By now, I am confident the company has reconsidered that decision.

Thinking through ALL the elements of your customer communications plan, and having specific solutions for the exceptions to the norm, helps distinguish the outstanding from the merely good.

SMART FOCUS:

Choose to be Exceptional

This past month led me to interact with two amazing people who provided extremely invaluable insights as they led group meetings.

Dick Hammond, President of Leadership On the Move in Ponder, led the Leadership Colleyville program (I am the volunteer advisor) through a SIMSOC.

If you have never experienced SIMSOC, you may be more familiar with the unabbreviated term: **Simulated Society**.

I will not give away all the details here because it would ruin the experience for you if you have the opportunity to participate in such an activity. This full-day class allowed our participants to experience the dynamics leaders on city councils and school boards face on a regular basis.

Dick, who is a two-time past chair of the



American Association of Leadership Programs, is involved with over 40 leadership programs on an ongoing basis and has led this training nationwide.

By day's end, all participants had each gained a far greater appreciation for the complexity of creating and growing successful communities.

Just when I felt my week had been the best it could possibly be, I attended a retreat with the Hurst Eules Bedford Chamber of Commerce with Bob Harris, President of the Nonprofit Center, based in Tallahassee, Florida. He is a legendary authority on nonprofit management.

Bob led members of our board to identify the chamber's current position in the competitive marketplace and then clearly identify what the chamber of commerce landscape will look like in 3-5 years.

He challenged us to consider revenue streams, activities, our role in the business community and general community, and to establish specific targets rather than simply say, "We will keep doing better."

Bob asked if current programs and events have reached the peak of their potential, could still grow, or if some of these events might need to be replaced or repurposed.

I learned through Dick Hammond and Bob Harris that the principles of these meetings are identical to those that result in successful business enterprises.

Skilled leaders in communications and business distinguish themselves by sharing an initial direction for the meeting and then making sure everyone in the room has the opportunity to be heard.

Now **THAT** is leadership! More than just a clear definition, their style of leadership is helping me further direct the future of my company and how I serve my community.

I hope you have such an inspirational experience with someone at work or with the nonprofits where you volunteer.

THE Tiebreaker

Broken burger promise

Last Tuesday, Rebecca and I went to a restaurant we had not visited in months so we could enjoy this incredible salad they make.

A woman walked in ahead of us and the hostess asked, "Are you here for the burger promotion?" When the customer said that she was, the hostess replied, "We have run out of meat so the promotion is over."

The frustrated woman left. After she departed, I asked if the restaurant was giving rain checks for customers who had taken the time to drive in, only to be disappointed. By this time the shift manager had walked up, and without any apology she said they were not issuing rain checks. She pretty well made me feel inadequate for even asking.

It did not matter to me because we were there for the salad. Once our server visited the table, I asked what the burger promotion was.

She said, "We had an online coupon that promised a free burger and fries yesterday and today. We had so much response yesterday that we were running out of meat. We wanted to have some left for tonight so we just cut off the lunch promo today at 12:15."

Rebecca and I immediately tried to think through the promotion's pitfalls. Rebecca's first solution was very simple:

Since the restaurant chain had to know

by midday Monday that this campaign was providing strong demand, why not just place an additional order of meat to fulfill all the demand for the second day?

Everyone who received the free burger and fries shared a positive impression of the restaurant. However, I assure you that those turned away talked to at least five times as many people than the average customer and told how the restaurant had broken its promise.

Having a Plan B in case your Plan A is too successful is the mark of a smart and successful company.

