

## Who is the Round Peg For Your Hotel's Square Hole

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Having just finished presenting a seminar on delighting the customer, I was standing at the front of a large room, taking off the lavalier microphone, putting my laptop and other materials in my briefcase. Out of the corner of my eye, I spotted one of the attendees walking, very purposely, up to me. I could tell by the look in his eye that he either had a question or disagreed with a point I had made. Either way, I figured we would be having an interesting conversation. After the usual obligatory introductions, he cocked his head slightly to the left, pointed his finger towards me, and said, "I don't believe in all this delighting stuff; I just give the customer what he expects. No more, no less.

"Oh," I asked, "Why is that?"

"Because if you start trying to delight customers, you just have to do more. You end up adding to your costs, which takes away from your profits. And the more you do, the more they expect. I stick to the basics."

In a way, I couldn't argue with him. There are two things that the attendee missed, however. The first is to understand exactly what delight is. While our friend, the dictionary, has several definitions for delight, basically, it means making someone really happy. In business, delight has taken on a narrower meaning that is closely aligned with the term, *lagniappe*. If you go back in history, *lagniappe* entered our lexicon from Louisiana French and Spanish phrases that meant giving a free item, usually very inexpensive. Throughout the years, it has come to mean "a small gift given to a customer by a merchant at the time of a purchase...an unexpected...benefit." The operative words here, are *inexpensive* and *unexpected*.

The second thing that the attendee missed is the cost aspect. If you have never seen *The Simple Truth of Service* video clip, stop reading this now, and go watch it on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sepARXV8MRI>, then come back. I'm a huge advocate of *lagniapping* your guests. Because, as the video clip so powerfully shows, *lagniapping* can be inexpensive, unexpected, and most importantly effective. Not long ago, I showed *Simple Truth* at a business workshop, touting all the benefits of *lagniapping* – of delighting. A few weeks later, one of the managers, who had been in the audience, sent me an email describing how she used it to challenge her staff to *lagniappe* their hotel guests. She then related the story of how a banquet server took her challenge to heart. The server was breaking down the ballroom after a

large lunch function. Noticing that a fresh floral arrangement had been left on one of the tables, and knowing that there was a group of four senior women in the next room for their weekly noon time “gab-fest” lunch (the manager was quick to point out that the gab-fest label was one that the women themselves had coined, not anyone on his staff), she carefully pulled out a quartet of red roses out of the arrangement and wrapped each stem in a piece of cotton and foil to keep it fresh. As a final touch, he tied a small red ribbon around each stem and placed them on a silver tray. With great aplomb, he went into the next room and, kneeling before each lady, presented her with a rose, reciting the well-known poem we all learned as children: *Roses are red. Violets are blue. Sugar is sweet. And so are you.* As the manager quipped to me, there were smiles, giggles, and smart phones clicking all around. And yes, the ladies all posted the pictures on their Facebook pages.

This is a perfect example of delight. It was inexpensive; it was unexpected; it was effective. Said another way, lagniapping is like having an unpaid marketing department for your hotel with two great results. First, delighted guests sing your praises to friends and family alike. As the old marketing mantra says, word-of-mouth (or as I say in today’s social media world, word-of-finger) is still the most powerful advertising tool you can have. According to Eric Qualman, author of the *Socialnomics*, more than a third of bloggers talk about their experiences with a brand; 90% of consumers trust recommendations from family and friends about a brand; only 14% trust a brand’s advertisements. And second, the Law of Motivation says that people are motivated to recreate the good times they remember. This is why a hotel can build loyalty. If your guests feel good about their hotel experience, you can bet they will back. And, if they feel really good, they will probably tell others about it too. That’s that word-of-mouth (or finger) advertising – the best that money cannot buy.

There is a well-known Disney story about a little girl who lost her favorite doll in the theme park. When it was found by a cast members (Remember that Disney doesn’t call staff employees, they are cast members), it was covered in mud so they gave the doll a “bath,” washed its hair, and even gave it a new clean outfit before returning it to the little girl. Talk about delight! The cast members didn’t refer to a manual nor did they ask a supervisor, they did what they did because lagniapping is part of the Disney culture. Is it part of your hotel’s culture too?

When I get on my soapbox advocating this delight thing, the question I always get from managers is how do I build that culture? How do I get my staff to go above and beyond the call

of duty. To see what others don't see. To do without being told. Every manager knows to hire for attitude not for aptitude, and then reinforce the aptitude. But that is often easier said than done. A lot of "how to" books and articles have been written about empowering employees, giving them a purpose, not rules, and tapping into their creativity. Most, if not all, of them say the same thing – and they are probably right. In my mind, however, I like to think about it in terms of finding and hiring the round peg for your hotel's square hole. In other words, look for the person who sees the world from a different perspective for he or she will intuitively be more likely to see that unexpected delight opportunity. To emphasize this point, please stop reading again and go back to YouTube to watch two more video clips. The first is a video clip of the famous scene from *Dead Poet's Society* in which Mr. Keating (the late Robin William's character) has his students stand on his desk to see the world differently.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RgWDUKP6Quk>. He admonishes them to "dare to strike out and find new ground." Isn't that what we want our employees to do. To find new ways of delighting our guests. Of giving the gift of hospitality? The words he uses to inspire his young charges are a perfect mantra for every hotel manager.

The second video clip is Steve Job's *the Crazy Ones* at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8rwsuXHA7RA>. It is often said that there is a thin line between genius and insanity. But those that straddle that line are fun to have around because they *do* see the world differently. They see connections for new possibilities. Without them, Isaac Newton wouldn't have seen an invisible string pulling the planets towards the sun. He named this string "gravity." Without them, John Gutenberg wouldn't have seen that he could rub ink on the bottom of a coin stamp and attach it beneath the plate of a winepress. Replace the coin image with letters and grapes with paper and the printing press was born. Without them, George de Mestral wouldn't have seen the cockleburs clinging to his cloth jacket after a walk in the woods. Thus, we can fasten jackets, backpacks, and children's shoes with Velcro.

Without Edward Pembroke, guests wouldn't be delighted by the entertaining Peabody ducks. Rumor had it that Frank Schutt, General Manager of The Peabody hotel, and his friend, Chip Barwick, enjoyed a little too much of Jack Daniel's sippin' whiskey while on a weekend hunting trip to Arkansas. Returning to the Memphis hotel, they thought it would be funny to put some of their live duck decoys (which were legal in the day) in the exquisite Peabody fountain. So they selected three small English call ducks, placed them in the water, and voila! Guest

reaction was nothing short of elated. Not long after that, North American mallard ducks replaced the original live decoys.

But it was Edward Pembroke who was the round peg in the hotel's square hole. A former circus animal trainer, he offered to help deliver the ducks to the lobby fountain each day from their home on the hotel's rooftop and return them at night. Most importantly, he taught them the now-famous Peabody Duck March. Edward was given the title of Peabody Duckmaster, serving as such until he retired in 1991.

Finally, without that round peg, there wouldn't be four senior women gushing over four red roses in a hotel dining room. Every hotel needs at least one round peg for its square hole to see opportunities for delighting guests -- to lagniappe them -- that no one else sees. So, now, there is one more video clip every hotelier should watch. It is Michael Bahr's Box at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5aUJyDC\\_gT8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5aUJyDC_gT8). He will help *you* connect the dots.

Your REVPAR will thank you!

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