

Leveraging Filipino Hospitality

The leader of every organization sets the tone and texture of its culture. Recall your first job interview or that quick visit to your friend's office? Or how you felt when you set foot in a new establishment — from security check to reception and being ushered to the meeting room?

That whole experience — what one sees, hears, touches, feels, tastes — somehow triggers you to ask “who runs or owns this place?” It is this experience that will form impressions that last and shape future decisions.

Within the broad services sector, it is the travel and hospitality industry that has mastered the art and science of delighting customers. They could be transport providers, hotels and resorts, restaurants and convention centers, fastfoods and coffee shops, pubs and clubs, casinos and cruise ships, or spas and sports facilities — all these businesses rise or fall on how well they please their clients.

The conspiracy to delight involves a cast of thousands: from cabin crew to kitchen crew, housekeepers to waiters, dealers and entertainers. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council, one in every 10 jobs is in hospitality, and this lucrative industry employs over 235 million people worldwide.

Central to the business strategy of players is creating and sustaining relationships that must add value, even as new concepts and themes come and go. It takes leadership at all levels of this vertical and horizontal matrix of systems and processes, products and brands to deliver on a promised guest experience.

We Filipinos have that ingrained passion for hospitality. Almost to a fault, we are a warm and most welcoming culture. Our relationship and service orientation, when sharpened through education and training, supported by sufficient resources and challenged by engaging and empowering leadership, can drive economic growth and lift thousands of families out of poverty.

Not counting travel, the latest statistics show that the global hotel industry alone reached \$550 billion in 2016, up 22% from \$457 billion in 2014. Asia Pacific and Europe are registering the highest occupancy rates at approximately 69%. Close to half of all hotels constructed globally between 2013 and 2016 are located in Asia. As predicted by experts, a strong driver is the Millennial generation (20 to 35 years old) that is now replacing



“
Our relationship and service orientation can drive economic growth and lift thousands of families out of poverty.”

baby boomers as the dominant consumer group. Add to this equation technology drivers like social media, mobile devices and apps that personalize guest services and the Philippines can be positioned as a strong player capable of besting its ASEAN neighbors.

The Research and Statistics Division of the Department of Tourism reports that total earnings gained from tourism activities from January to May 2016 amounted to about Php106.61 billion, showing double-digit growth of 13.53% compared with Php93.91 billion earnings for the same period in 2015. The twin drivers of foreign direct investments and visitor arrivals, with South Korea, the U.S., Japan, Australia and Canada as the “top spending markets”, are opportunities that the new leaders in government and private sector can leverage.

I have had the chance to work with the general managers of five-star hotels in the last few months. The work ethic I have seen in the likes of Dottie Wurglar-Cronin of Marco Polo Davao and Bobby Horrigan of Acacia Hotel — both hotels registering significantly higher than average occupancy rates — demonstrates in no uncertain terms that leadership is that “secret sauce” that links vision to talent and organization resources. In short periods of time, they

have created highly engaged work environments that give you the feeling that every hotel associate you encounter “runs and owns the place”.

I discover recently that there is no single international standard that gives the coveted “five-star” rating and hotel ranking systems differ widely from one country to another. Hence, countries use a range of authorities, from tourism bodies to government agencies, as basis for ratings. There is consensus, however, on what makes a hotel five-star: level of customer service, amenities, cleanliness, location and price.

It is interesting to note that these five-point criteria can apply to a home, a company, a country. I wonder what first impressions are created when guests step into yours and ours? 📍

SUSAN GRACE RIVERA IS MANAGING DIRECTOR AND EXECUTIVE COACH OF TALENT, LEADERSHIP & CHANGE CONSULTING AND COACHING SOLUTIONS. SHE CAN BE REACHED AT SG.RIVERA@THETLCSOLUTION.COM

AD