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FRONT OFFICE ROLE EXPECTATIONS
AS DEFINED BY HOTEL MANAGEMENT AND BY FRONT OFFICE PERSONNEL
A COMPARATIVE STUDY

by

Mark D. Scott

A thesis/project submitted to the
Faculty of the School of Food, Hotel and Travel Management
at
Rochester Institute of Technology
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree
of
Master of Science

August/1994

ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
School of Food, Hotel and Travel Management
Department of Graduate Studies

M.S. Hospitality-Tourism Management
Presentation of Thesis/Project Findings

Name: Mark Scott Date: 6/15/99 SS#: _____

Title of Research: Front Office Role Expectations As Defined By Hotel
Management and by Front Office Personnel A Comparative Study

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Date Department Chairperson's Signature

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF THE STUDY

The front office has traditionally been thought of as a check-in, check-out point by the guest. Secondly it is seen as a source of infinite information, and third, a problem-solving center. Working as a front line manager, situations developed which created a definite 'gap' between management's expectations when defining the role of the front office personnel and how the front office employees perceived these expectations as they were related to their guest service responsibilities.

To cite an example, a two-hundred and fifty room convention hotel would not allow a guest to register without a credit card. Cash could not be accepted without a credit card imprint. If a guest wanted to pay cash and could not comply with this policy the manager would have to be contacted and an OK given by initialing the registration card. The check-in process was often slow and frustrating, almost to the point of being absurd. While managements's credit policy was a necessity in certain circumstances, the awkwardness of many situations could have been avoided by simply allowing the front office agent to assume some of the responsibility. By using his or her own judgment and utilizing management only when they felt uncomfortable, a friendly, compatible first impression would have been the result.

Another example occurs when the front office personnel are not allowed to call an emergency number such as the fire department or ambulance (911) without permission from the manager on duty, even though the situation may be life threatening. The rationale behind this management policy is the hotel did not want to risk disturbing the guests unnecessarily by the sounds of sirens. Life and death situations could and would be put on hold because strategic managers were concerned about the possible negative consequences that could arise from empowering front office employees.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The traditional perception that only upper and middle management could make the important decisions is now in question. Management realizes the importance of the 'Moments of Truth'. Every point of contact between the hotel employee and the guest has to be realized by management, through empowerment, that front office personnel may assume more responsibility in the areas of decision making and problem solving. If the front office employees' concerns reflected a fear of the consequences of poor decision making, then certainly this would tend to lead to an overly cautious reception area leaving the guest with a second-rate impression of the operation.

With companies facing this internal re-structuring in order to maintain or gain a competitive edge, front-line departments face new challenges trying to meet management's expectations. Understanding these expectations could prove to be a formidable task as management requires the personnel to now act as 'associates' and participate in the company's day to day decision making process. How then can the front office personnel understand and meet these new expectations when traditionally they have simply been receptionists responsible for following the company's policies and procedures?

PURPOSE AND SIGNIFICANCE

Strategic management realizing the dilemma have had to decide whether front office personnel can be effective decision makers. The purpose of my research will be to study the problems management face in their effort to avoid 'gaps' in management-employee expectations and perceptions, while in a stage of transforming employees roles. Managers expect their front-office employee to be efficient and contribute to profitability. However guest expectations of good service often runs counter to what company policy defines as the limits of front office personnel's freedom to act. Statistics show that negative experiences by guests are relayed to their associates far more than positive experiences. Even though strategic managers recognize the importance of the front office in services rendered, they often feel they are caught in a trade off between company policy set by upper management and the realities of the front office.

During the course of this study, it is hoped some insight will be gained that may help management to decide if it is feasible for their property to employ strategies and systems such as empowerment at their front office and lend a better understanding of the process thereby avoiding some of the pitfalls that can occur when new systems are put in place.

METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

Concepts such as empowerment are vague in definition and encompass a huge range of ideas and expectations. The hypothesis of this study is that gaps now exist between how the front office personnel define their role and how it is defined by management. Further, it is contended that this lack of consensus hinders the effectiveness and efficiency of the front office personnel and results in poor customer service.

The population being studied consists of management and front office personnel in hotel-resort properties located within a three hour drive of the major urban and business centers in the province of Ontario, Canada. The sample will be studied through a questionnaire format of six strategic managers and their front office personnel. The independent variable will be a description of management's expectations and the dependent variable being the effectiveness of the front office personnel. The intervening variable is the ability to define the role of front office personnel.

Correlational research through the two fifteen item questionnaires will be used to investigate the roles of the two groups in guest service and determine if their perception of these roles differ. Both historical and developmental research will be used to show traditional perceptions of the front office compared to the new roles that are evolving.

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

The focus group being the strategic managers and the front office personnel of six resort-hotel properties, rated four star by the Canadian Hotel and Motel Association. The framework of topics developed from this study are not meant to represent the entire scope of the resort-hotel business in Ontario. Rather they represent the properties that were located within a drive (three hours) from the major urban and business areas for both convention and recreational purposes. Realizing all properties are unique it would still be hoped management could utilize some of the information to help them better understand the relationship between management and the front office personnel and help them implement the customer friendly systems necessary for their success.

LONG TERM CONSEQUENCES

If the study shows that these companies are willing to put a continued effort into ensuring front desk personnel are empowered service driven employees, major changes may have to take place. Training methods will have to be developed and recruitment methods may have to be carefully studied. It may even involve hiring professionals to present the new systems to all concerned. One of upper management's new roles would be to ensure middle management supports front line associates as there is the danger of resentment if middle management feels the new systems are eroding their power. The effectiveness of communication will be of primary concern along with the company's employee motivation and reward systems. Avoiding 'gaps' in management-employee relations generally results in positive consequences but initially any radical change in a companies strategy produces turmoil. In the long term all the personnel and their guests should benefit.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Strategic Manager: General Manager or Director of Operations of the hotel-resort property.

Management Strategies: Methodology used to realize the objectives and the short and long term goals of the resort-hotel.

Moments of Truth: Every point of contact between a guest and the resort- hotel's personnel.

Empowerment: The process of endowing the front office employees with the power to make decisions within certain guidelines.

Service Recovery: The process of retaining a guest and having that guest as a repeat customer after an error has occurred, been recognized and rectified.

'Gap': A grey area in Management-Employee relations where company policy is unclear or misunderstood by employees which results in a lower level of guest service.

Front-Line Employee: Personnel who's job description requires direct contact with the guest on an ongoing basis.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The hotel industry has often been called "traditional" and part of that tradition is represented by fairly fixed occupational roles and the front office is certainly no exception. The duties of the front desk personnel formerly centered on the basics like registration but as our society and economy changed, the work force also changed to become service-oriented, emphasizing guest relations. Shriver (1988) writes of "engaging managers, supervisors, and employees in a planning process that challenges them to think beyond the demands of day-to-day activities." What is this planning process so many strategists write of and how does it effect the roles of hotel management and front office personnel.

In reviewing some of the present literature available, a close look at how authors approached these four questions; What does this planning process involve? How is it being implemented? Are barriers being met and does it create 'gaps' in role expectations between management and front line employees? Shriver (1988) believes the planning process simply means that employees are to identify and solve problems that affect the quality of services delivered by the organization. Tony Marble, the executive assistant manager of the Opryland Hotel in Nashville (Kasavana\Brooks, 1991) states that "it

is nothing more than ensuring that people have the tools, training, incentives and leadership to perform up to standards". By these two statements alone it's apparent that the planning process encompasses a wide area and the effects on the front office personnel are profound.

An issue encountered immediately was that of the intangibility of the service in the resort hotel. Traditional quality service checks can not be appropriately applied to the service rendered at the front office. The recipes of menu items can be tested, guest rooms can be inspected after cleaning but duties like registration as Kasavana\Brooks (1991) implies, is "a service that is produced, delivered and consumed simultaneously in the presence of the guest and only the employee can make quality a reality." Assuming this to be true a 'gap' may appear between the method management uses to measure service quality and the method the front office personnel see as appropriate. Just imagine the front office agent turning to their supervisor or the strategic manager for that matter and saying I did the best I could! What did you expect? Czepiel, Solomon, Surprenant (1985) explain that unless the measurements of quality service are taught to the customers, customers will set their own personal, arbitrary goals for the service. Because personal goals are different for each customer, the service provider can never know what the goals are. Therefore, they cannot manage the service process to dependably satisfy more guests. Management would have to take this into consideration when defining front office role expectations.

The importance on measuring the quality of service, the methods of delegating responsibility and empowering personnel would be key to avoiding such a gap. Zadka (1971) states "the delegation of responsibility and authority is basic to the principles of organization. If efficiency is expected, delegation of responsibility and authority must flow from the highest to the lowest level within the organization. The lines must be clear and distinct and clearly set forth in writing to eliminate any possibility of misunderstanding." This inference paints a clear picture unless compared to Shriver (1988) and Smith (1993). Shriver believes people like to do things that are their own ideas and like to be involved in each step of change independent of where they fit into the organization structure. Smith writes "it is very important in the hospitality industry to provide an atmosphere where each and every employee is able to self-motivate."

Zadka's implementation sequence follows the traditional pyramid structure with the executive committee at the top followed by department heads, supervisors and front line employees. Front office personnel are basically there to accomplish the job objectives within a framework of upper managements established policies and procedures. Shriver and Smith have flattened the pyramid which is geared more to an empowered system. Management would have to be careful or a gap could appear as it often does when management incorporates differing principles into their decision making process.

Its essential the front office personnel understand the process of delegation and empowerment implementation in order to fully

comprehend their roles at the front desk. Sternberg (1993) discusses in the Cornell Quarterly two different aspects concerning this problem. Are employees allowed to make and implement only routine decisions or are they also allowed to actually change the system to meet managements expectations. How far can they go without prior approval, or to what extent does management trust their employees to make proper decisions? Traditionally the reason for requiring approval in the first place was to reduce mistakes and to ensure accountability. However when Sternberg (1993) did a study he found many approvals were a mere formality because the supervisor relied completely on the subordinate's judgment anyway. Although he concedes there are risks inherent with front line employees making all decisions, the benefits of having an empowered front office are greater. He cites one example in his study where front office personnel at a hotel were empowered to adjust guest bills in any amount in response to disputes over charges. The hotel recorded fewer adjustments, while receiving many positive comments about service at the front desk.

It is also Sternberg's (1993) belief that not all employees in a particular job classification need to be empowered at once. By empowering only a few employees, the hotel creates a classification to which the other employees aspire to. However, this may lead to destructive competition, infighting, rivalry and front office politics.

Regardless of how management delegates or empowers the employees to make decisions there will certainly be mistakes made. It would

seem to be of extreme importance that the front office personnel understand the empowerment process but just as importantly, understand managements role as it pertains to disciplinary action. Steinberg (1993) contends the only appropriate reaction by management is coaching. "Punishing employees for mistakes will cause them to avoid taking the initiative or making additional decisions without approval. Instead of making things happen for the guest, chastised employees will spend their time covering their backside." If management wants subordinates to take on more responsibility, their nurturing the power of the personnel below them would seem to be more appropriate.

When defining role expectations, determining the division of power is often the most difficult barrier to surmount. From the management's point of view, Block (1987) suggests "the power of a boss is asymmetrical. It is easier to use authority to tighten up, shrink, and make organizations more cautious than it is to use power to open up, expand and make an organization more courageous." Using power to open up and expand an organization leads to the increased significance of the role of leadership. Marble (Kasavana\Brooks 1991) asserts that front office manager must first and foremost lead their people. A leader inspires and creates a sense of well being and trust.

An article "Techniques for Motivating Employees" (Hospitality & Tourism Educator 1993) claims a secure manager should not fear the success of, nor possible challenges by, his or her employees. Except in very extreme circumstances, ambitious employees are no threat to

their managers; on the contrary, they help run a better business and contribute to the industry as a whole. Foss (1992) writes in a article for Foodservice and Hospitality "leadership is inspirational, a quasi-religious experience that excites people's imaginations, fires their loyalty and develops a common feeling of being part of something important." No better description of leadership can be found then Foss'es (1992) as it not only connects individuals but illustrates that leadership does not just radiate from the top down but also from the bottom upwards.

Leadership certainly is important when the defining the roles of front office personnel but as Carolyn Clark, vice-president, human resources, Canadian Pacific Hotels & Resorts, writes in a article for Foodservice and Hospitality (March 1993) management wants to see our front-line employees as business partners, and encourage them to make, and be accountable for, their own decisions. The worst thing a company can do is wave an 'empowerment wand' over the organization. We have to give them the tools to make these decisions and the key is training, training, training."

What type of training and how much is relevant for a organization could be a study in itself. To note a few author's observations that pertain to how training effects the roles of front office personnel. Ransom (May 1983) sees a growing demand for customized training where the needs of each and every individual participating in the program are considered. It can certainly be seen that customized training is important today because the diverse background of front office personnel make finding a common

denominator difficult. Only a self-paced, competency-based program, although costly and time consuming, would prove to be effective in many cases.

Ranson (May 1983) goes on to say that "this is especially true for a small resort area where employees want a personal relationship with those they work with. Each person needs to be recognized as an individual and not just a unit of labor. This helps to alleviate a worker-establishment gap." It can be readily understood that if resort-hotel management connects both with what employees do and what they can do, it would add a sense of personal involvement to their roles. However Ranson (1983) did not attempt to define personal relationship and of course management would want to avoid any situations which generated any semblance of favoritism.

Thaddeus Ashby, Senior Assistant Manager for the Opryland Hotel, Nashville (Kasavana/Brooks 1991), has a unique cross-training format called a 'swat team' where as the front office personnel actually spend time with supervisors in various departments to learn their patterns, habits and techniques. If not too disruptive it could certainly be seen how this could help the employees understand management's perception of the service encounter.

Management could also use this 'shadowing' technique as Jeff Slater, Director of Human Resources, Desert Springs Marriott Resort in Palm Desert, California (Kasavana\Brooks 1991) points out. In their role as recruiters it is evident that the front office personnel's job is more than one-dimensional. He or she needs to be able to deal with an incredible number of demands, all different and

all at the drop of a hat. They have to be extremely versatile, good natured, and adept at switching modes. The author also says this is why they look for certain characteristics when recruiting for the front office. To help set the criteria, the human resource department actually spend time 'shadowing' the front desk personnel to get a feel for what their job entails. Applicants are asked to watch a video that dramatizes on-the-job situations and respond to questions choosing the most appropriate ways to deal with situations. The purpose is two-fold, to learn the type of interpersonal qualities the job requires as well as what technical proficiencies a person will need to develop. By utilizing this method, the appropriate front office personnel are carefully selected thus avoiding some of the difficulties that lead to gaps.

It can be readily seen by the previous example how much importance the relationship between various departments plays in the roles of the personnel. Craig Flickinger of the Radisson Plaza Hotel in Southfield, Michigan (Kasavan\Brooks 1991) says the communication role is critical, the front desk personnel must be able to clearly communicate with people in and outside their department. This sort of teamwork is vital to a hotel. At the Radisson Plaza they cultivate open communication by holding formal and informal weekly meetings between the departments and the front office. This open attitude makes the employees feel more at ease about calling one another to discuss a guest's request or problem. Craig Flickinger's view proves worthwhile by mollifying the front office personnel's problem solving role, should the ways and means be found to hold the meeting.

Personal work experience indicates that resort hotels find scheduling the time for holding weekly meetings very difficult.

A survey conducted by Rutherford in 1983 (Czepiel, Solomon, Surprenant 1985) of front office managers, indicated that employees needed training and knowledge of how to interact effectively with customers. Of the survey respondent, 91.5 percent indicated that "communication with guests" was "of vital importance" in terms of what a trainee should know about the operation of the hotel front desk. From among the 105 job requirements listed, "communication with guests" was seen as the most important.

The literature search concludes that in the last fifty years to compete effectively in the market place the hospitality industry relied on tighter controls, greater pressure, more clearly defined jobs and tighter supervision. Now the industry has shifted their attention to the need for employees to personally take responsibility for the success of the business if it is to survive and prosper. To quote Block (1987) "people at the top have tremendous impact, yet we are constantly reminded that in very practical ways, the inmates run the prison." The transformation of the corporate vision to quality service requires fundamental changes in roles which in many ways are radical. Since the front office personnel represent the hotel to the guest throughout all stages of the guest stay the consequences are profound. The challenges that lie ahead for both management and front office personnel when defining their roles will require compromise and will often rest on an amalgamation of opinion and a fusion of standards which leads to the purpose of my research project.

CHAPTER THREE

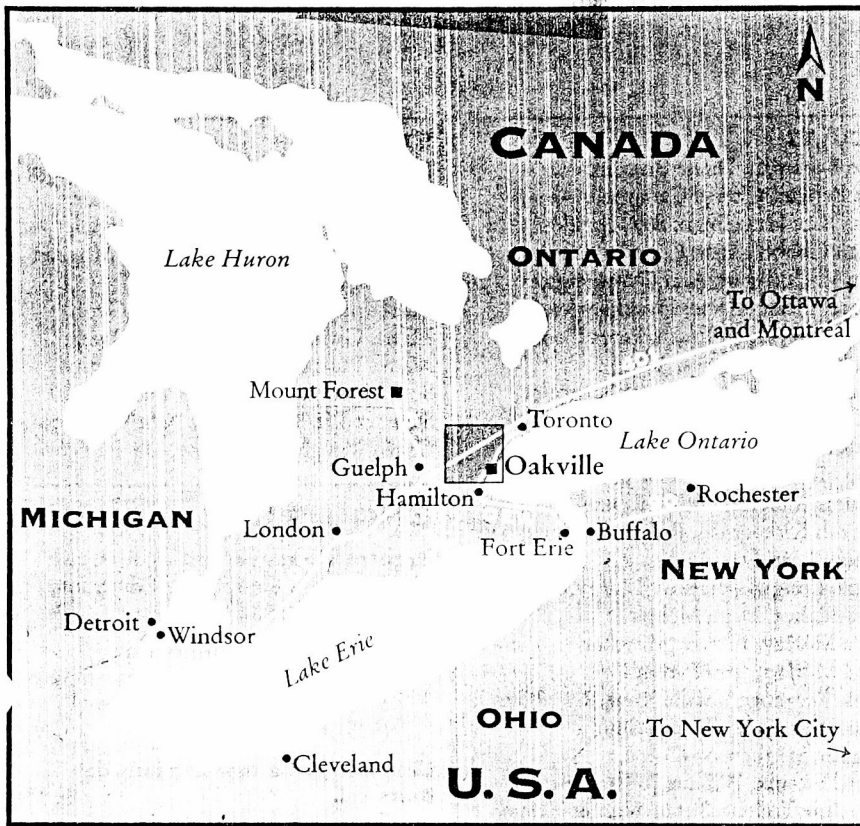
METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

This chapter will present the methodology and research design used to test the hypothesis that 'gaps' exist between the new role expectations management have regarding front office personnel and the role the front office agents perceive to be accurate.

The survey was administered to six resort-hotels located in Ontario, Canada. The resorts all being four-star establishments of approximately one hundred and twenty-five rooms catering to both business conventions and golf and skiing enthusiasts. These properties may not fully represent the entire scope of the resort-hotel business in Ontario, but were intended to allow the study to target the upper range of service available to business and recreation travellers within a three hour drive of southern Ontario's major business and urban centers. (see exhibit 1)

The survey instrument developed for this project were two fifteen-item questionnaires, one directed to the strategic manager of the property while the other was addressed to the front office personnel. (exhibits 2 & 3) The questionnaires were formulated using three variables, the independent, being a description of management's expectations, the dependent being the effectiveness of the front office personnel and the intervening variable being the ability to define the role of front office employees. (exhibits 4 & 5)

Exhibit One



Windsor approx. 344 km (214 miles)
 Fort Erie approx. 127 km (79 miles)

Toronto approx. 36 km (22 miles)
 Montréal approx. 580 km (360 miles)



Exhibit Two

School of Food, Hotel and Travel
Management
Department of Graduate Studies
George Eastman Building
10 Lomb Memorial Drive
Rochester, New York 14623-5604
716-475-5666 Fax 716-475-6401

Dear General Manager:

As per our telephone conversation of Oct. 24th, I appreciate your willingness to review my survey. The purpose of this questionnaire is to compare managements expectations of front office personnel to that of the front office agent's perception of their role in meeting these expectations. The objective is to see if 'gaps' exist and if so determine the influence it may have on the effectiveness of the employee servicing the guest and also look at possible corrective action.

The envelope should contain a questionnaire for yourself and eight front office personnel questionnaires. If you would please answer the management questionnaire and have your front office personnel complete theirs, it would be of tremendous assistance to me in successfully completing the thesis.

I would be happy to pick up the results as I will be travelling through your area next week but I will contact your office in advance. If you have any questions or comments I can be reached in Guelph at 519-824-3979 or in Haliburton at 705-457-1712.

I certainly^s value your help with this project and I hope the results prove useful for strategic managers like yourself.

Sincerely,

Exhibit Three

School of Food, Hotel and Travel
Management
Department of Graduate Studies
George Eastman Building
10 Lomb Memorial Drive
Rochester, New York 14623-5604
716-475-5666 Fax 716-475-6401

Dear Hotel Employee:

My name is Mark Scott and I am a graduate student at the Rochester Institute of Technology in Rochester, New York. Currently, I am working on a research paper in order to complete a Master Degree in Hospitality & Tourism Management. The topic of my thesis deals with role expectations as they are defined by hotel management and front office personnel. Your management has agreed to take part in the study.

I would appreciate if you would take a few minutes to fill out the following survey. The purpose of the study is to compare management's expectations of front office personnel to that of the personnel role as defined by you, the guest agent.

Along with your resort, five others will be involved in the study and the results will be shared with your management. The information you share is strictly confidential, so please answer the questions as truthfully as possible and enclose the completed survey in the envelope provided.

The conclusions drawn from the study will help to identify 'gaps' if they exist and if so, help formulate corrective action. Studies such as this help us meet one of the prime objectives of our business which is to meet and exceed guest expectations and create a prosperous environment both internally and externally.

Thank-you for your time.

Exhibit Four

FRONT OFFICE PERSONNEL QUESTIONNAIRE

PLEASE READ EACH QUESTION AND ANSWER BY PLACING A CIRCLE AROUND THE NUMBER THAT MOST CLOSELY REPRESENTS YOUR FEELINGS.

STRONGLY	AGREE	NOT	DISAGREE	STRONGLY
AGREE		SURE		DISAGREE

1. Your company provided you with an orientation (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) program so you felt comfortable when starting your job.
2. Your company provided you with an accurate (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) job description when you were hired.
3. Management's expectations have been clear to (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) you since you were hired.
4. Your company provides you with on-going (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) training in order to meet managements expectations.

5. Your company provides up to date equipment (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
allowing you to meet their expectations.
6. Company policies are a reflection of your (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
concerns regarding the best interests of
the guests.
7. Management expectations are constantly (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
changing.
8. Your contributions in meeting management (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
expectations is reflected in the pay scale.
9. Your company allows you to make corrective (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
decisions within guidelines without their
involvement.
10. Your company has a open door management (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
policy.
11. Your job description clearly defines your (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
role as a representative of management.
12. There is an understanding about the standards (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
of service that have to be met in order for
them to be considered acceptable.

STRONGLY	AGREE	NOT	DISAGREE	STRONGLY
AGREE		SURE		DISAGREE

13. Management's concerns are clearly (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
communicated throughout the organization.

14. There are a lot of rules, policies and (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
practices one has to know to get along
in this organization.

15. Shown below is a conceptual framework for thinking about the skills needed at various levels with in a organization. The skills are divided into three categories: conceptual (devising new systems) technical (use of equipment) and human skills (communication etc.). Personnel are divided into management, supervisors, front-office employees. Fill in the chart below with the percentage of each skill you feel is necessary at each of the three levels.

	Technical skills	Human skills	Conceptual skills	
Management				= 100%
Supervisors				= 100%
Front office employees				= 100%

Comments on your rational for choosing the percentages as you did.

Exhibit Five

MANAGEMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

PLEASE READ EACH QUESTION AND ANSWER BY PLACING A CIRCLE AROUND THE NUMBER THAT MOST CLOSELY REPRESENTS YOUR FEELINGS. NOTE: PERSONNEL OR EMPLOYEES REFERS ONLY TO THOSE WORKING AT THE FRONT OFFICE.

STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NOT SURE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
-------------------	-------	-------------	----------	----------------------

1. Personnel understand the mission statement of the organization. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
2. Your company provides personnel with a job description which you feel is accurate for meeting managements expectations. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
3. There are set procedures by which to convey the goals of the property to the front desk. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
4. Managers encourage personnel to participate in making decisions. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
5. Personnel are free to determine their own means to reach the goals of the property. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

6. Management and personnel establish and document work methods and goals. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
7. The policies of the owner (or management company) are known throughout the organization. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
8. Personnel understand their responsibilities and what is expected of them. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
9. Management requires personnel to work with other departments on joint projects. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
10. Management consistently measures how well the property accomplishes its goals. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
11. The personnel communicates effectively with other departments. (1) (2) (3) (4)(5)
12. The owner (management company) will fund job training programs. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
13. The property consistently evaluates turnover, absenteeism, guest feedback and productivity. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

14. What are your biggest problems concerning front office personnel with respect to their attitudes? please rank the following:

Lack of interest in work:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Big			Somewhat of			Not a
problem			a problem			problem

Consider hotel-resort work to be of low status:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Big			Somewhat of			Not a
problem			a problem			problem

Money is everything to employees:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Big			Somewhat of			Not a
problem			a problem			problem

Employees expect too much (short work hours, coffee breaks, long lunches, freedom to leave work, etc.).

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Big			Somewhat of			Not a
problem			a problem			problem

WHAT MATERIALS DO YOU CURRENTLY USE TO DEAL WITH THESE PROBLEMS AND CONCERNS?

_____ Use my own resources*

_____ Use resources provided by professional organizations

_____ Private consultants

_____ None

* If you use your own resources which have you found to be successful and why?

15. Shown below is a conceptual framework for thinking about the skills needed at various levels within an organization. The skills are divided into three categories: conceptual (devising new systems), technical (use of equipment) and human skills (communication etc.). Personnel are divided into management, supervisors and front office employees. Fill in the chart below with the percentage of each skill you feel is necessary at each of the three levels.

	Technical skills	Human skills	Conceptual skills	
Management				= 100%
Supervisors				= 100%
Front office personnel				= 100%

Comments on your rationale for choosing the percentages as you did.

The conceptual instrument called Servqual developed by V. Zeithaml, A. Parasuraman and L. Berry (1990) for measuring gaps in service performance was used as a reference for developing the survey. Although the 'Servqual' studies were aimed more at defining and measuring customer's perceptions of service quality outside the hospitality business sector, Servqual's sound properties and broad acceptability made it ideal for this study. The three variables were expanded to incorporated six of Servqual's gap factors that were found to contribute to the front office employees being unable or unwilling to meet management's expectations concerning guest service. Using a five-point scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree," the raw questionnaire data was computed as a simple average of one-hundred percent to show the five dimensions in a bar graph format. Excluding questions fourteen and fifteen, a high positive percentage implies a insignificant gap is all that might exist.

The six gap contributing factors chosen from the Servqual instrument (Zeithaml, Parasuraman, Berry, 1990) were the following;

1. Role Ambiguity
2. Role Conflict
3. Technology Job Fit
4. Perceived Control
5. Supervisory Control Systems
6. Teamwork

These factors can be defined through the expectations and pressures communicated to the employees by management but the issues that

evolve from them are far more complex. Chapter Three will look at these issues as a structural overview of the questionnaires leaving the specific reasons for each question to Chapter four where the findings are evaluated.

The first issue the questionnaires explored regarding the independent variable was role ambiguity. The questions here pertain to whether management provides accurate information regarding company policy and procedures. Do employees understand what managers expect from them? Are employees trained to satisfy these expectations and are these expectations constantly changing? Avoiding role conflict also would play an important part of determining management's expectations. A gap could be created if the number of demands on the front office employees prevented them from properly servicing the guest or if management's expectations of the front office personnel were different than those of the customers.

The technology-job fit and the supervisory control systems are two issues that pertain to the dependent variable; the effectiveness of the front office personnel. Inadequate equipment and inappropriate technology could seriously interfere with the employee's performance. This could also have a negative effect on staff morale, an outcome which often occurs when a gap exists.

Perceived Control and Teamwork would influence the intervening variable; the ability to define the role of the front office employees. To what extent should management empower the employees to make individual decisions to satisfy guests expectations and resolve their problems? Is working as a team with management and other

departments part of the employees role as defined in their job description and if so to what extent?

Question fourteen asked of management and fifteen asked of both management and the employees were not influenced by the 'Servqual' instrument and will be discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION

Chapter four will endeavor to determine if the hypothesis that a 'gap' or 'gaps' exist between management's expectations of it's front office personnel and the expectations that front office employees perceive as accurately describing their role as guest service representatives is true. It has been proposed that any such 'gap' would have a direct negative impact on the quality of guest service within the operation.

Section one uses a format which shows the employee's responses as percentage to each question asked of them in the form of a bar graph. Preceding each graph I have made observations and drawn some conclusions from the employees perspective. In section two, the manager's perspective is analyzed and an evaluation done by correlating the two questionnaires.

It was felt that some conclusions and recommendations that were pertinent to the individual questions should be included in both sections. It is hoped that this wold allow the reader to more easily identify the grounds for these inferences. Chapter five will include the overview of these conclusions with recommendations on how it may be possible to close any existing 'gaps.'

SECTION ONE

QUESTION NUMBER ONE

Your company provided you with an orientation program so you felt comfortable when starting your job.

It was appropriate that to begin the survey with a question that is directed to the employee recently hired to perform the many tasks of a front office agent at a resort hotel. Did the property offer him or her an orientation program? The reason asked the question is that many management consultants now believe an effective orientation program for one of many reasons may well mean the difference between success and failure for the new employee.

The focus of the orientation, if effective, should first welcome the employee to a warm, friendly, caring environment and be made to feel important. The employee who feels welcome and important will make the guest feel welcome and important. (Desatnick, 1987) It's a simple principle that is all too often overlooked by management.

If one of management's concerns is team building, the orientation program is the place to begin. Team building starts with the employee understanding the company's history, the internal structure of the business they are in, and the customer being served. Soon they will begin to believe they are not only part of the company, but that the employees are the company. The program will also give them a chance to meet the other members of the team, their co-workers, supervisors, and members of management.

The new employee will need to know what the specific duties and performance expectations are and to whom and for what they are accountable. It is during the orientation program that these responsibilities and accountabilities are fixed and clearly defined. There are many other reasons for an orientation program but the above mentioned seem to be of major concern to managers today.

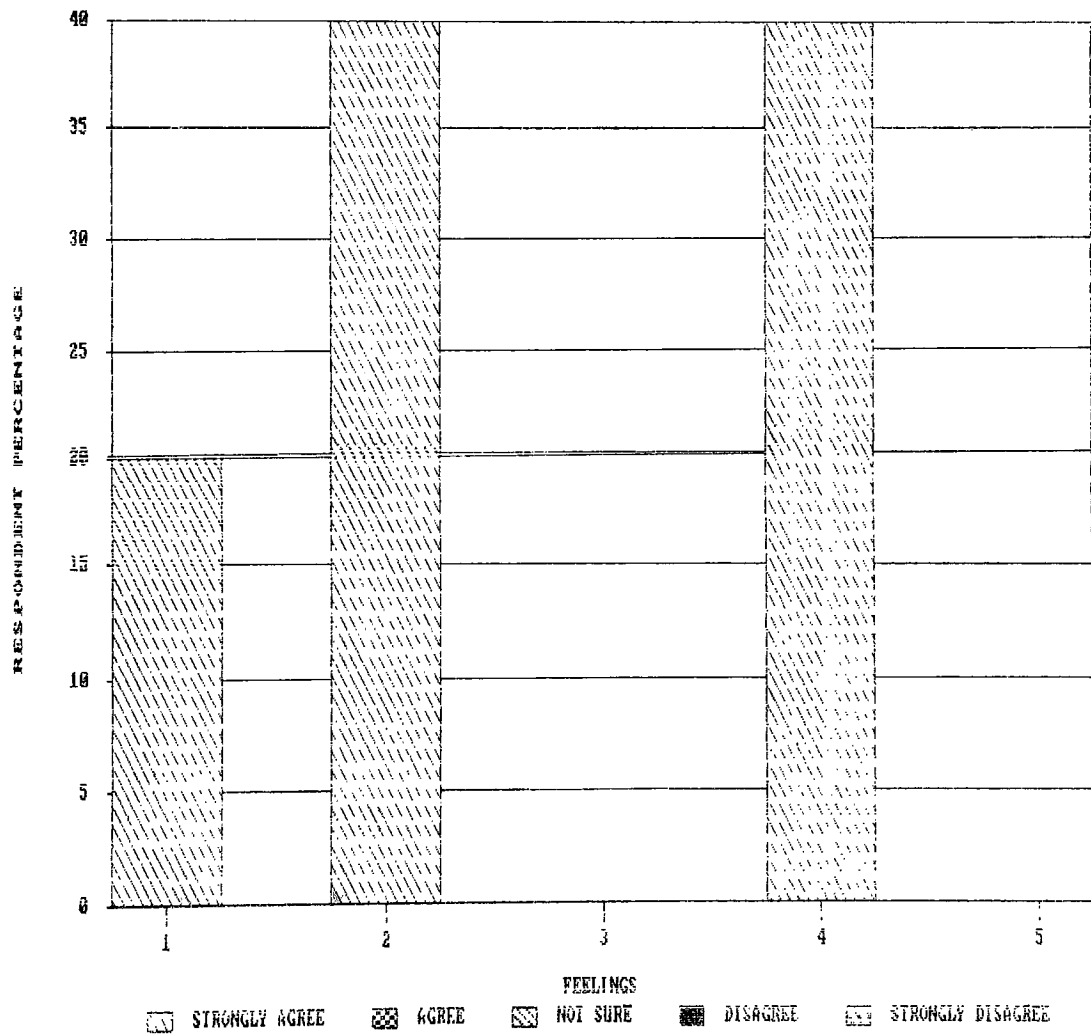
Looking at graph number one, sixty percent agree they received an orientation program while forty percent disagree. It should be noted that the employees are answering the question without a definition or description of what such a program consists of. The employees may believe an orientation program consists of being shown around the resort, being given a list of rules, and being told how they will be paid and when. If this is the case it can be concluded that since 40% did not feel they received even a minimal program such as this, that management is paying very little attention to orientation programs. Management may have spent considerable time and money to recruit the right people, yet they don't seem to want to invest more in successfully assimilating the individual into the organization. If the employees are fully aware of the importance of such a program this may reflect a higher commitment on the part of management. Some long term employees may have been in place before such programs were deemed important or necessary.

Since the orientation process results in fewer mistakes, improved customer service, higher levels of productivity and more harmonious employee relations it should be recommended as an area

management could look into to ensure they are getting the most from their valued employees.

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

QUESTION ONE



QUESTION NUMBER TWO

Your company provided you with an accurate job description when you were hired.

The primary reason I directed question number two towards job descriptions was that often companies see orientation programs, job descriptions, and training all in the same light. As an orientation program may explain areas such as accountability and responsibility and ensure they are understood, a job description is a precisely written document, delineating the exact areas each employee is responsible for, a detailed set of performance standards and as specifically as possible the behavior expected in all the elements of the job. (Desatnick, 1987) It could be asked is this necessary in the age of empowerment but I will leave that to question eleven.

Graph number two shows that while forty percent of the respondents agree that they received an accurate job description, fifty percent felt they did not, while ten percent were unsure. It is interesting to note twenty percent strongly disagreed. It appears by the percentages that approximately half the companies offer job descriptions, but on further investigation, the percentages were the same as graph question Two B shows.

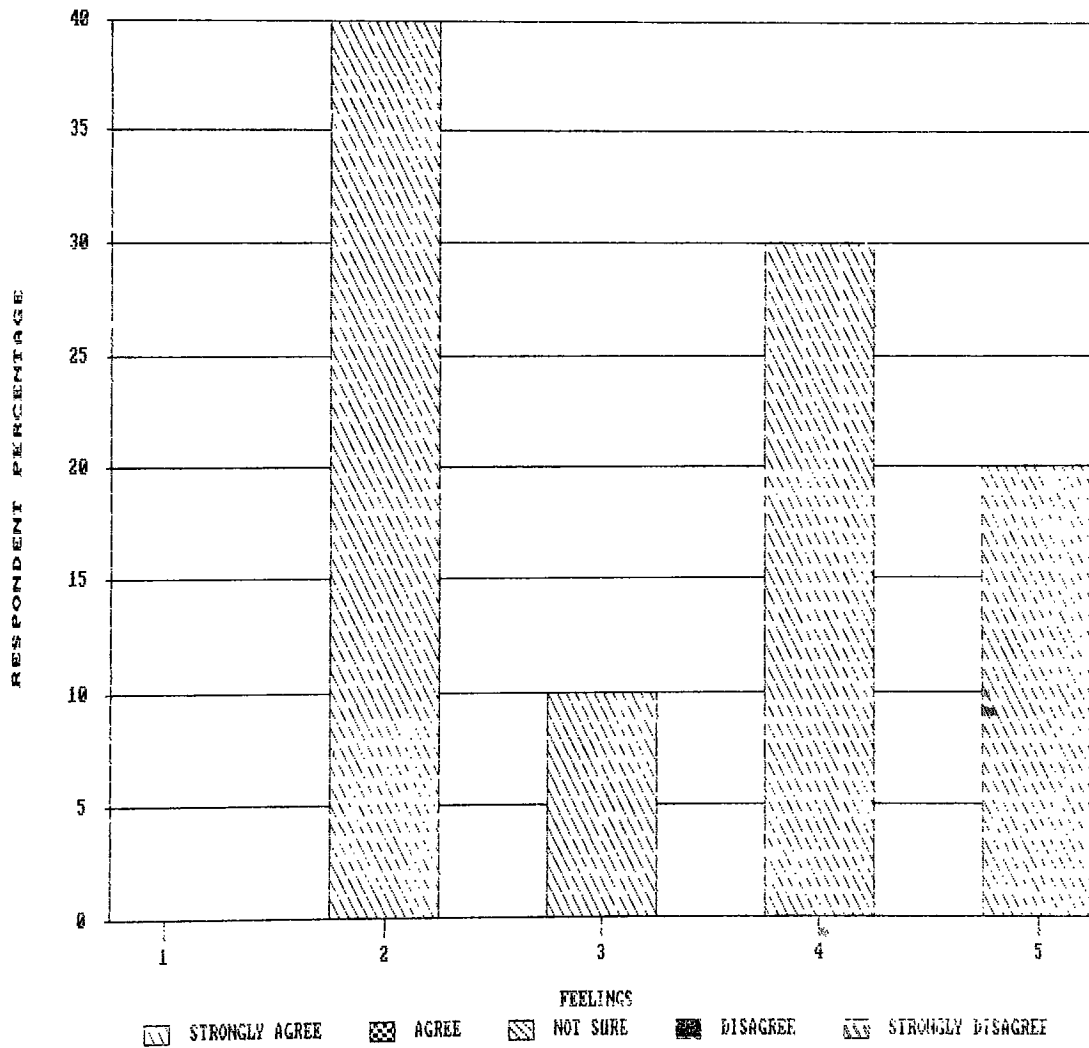
I would conclude therefore that there is an inconsistency within individual properties and generally, job descriptions are incorporated into training.

All too often management assumes front office employees know what, when and how to do their job but often personnel do not respond

well unless they 'see it in writing.' Why so many employees feel they did not receive an accurate job description while feeling it is important by their strong responses may indicate an area, management would want to study to strengthen employee relations.

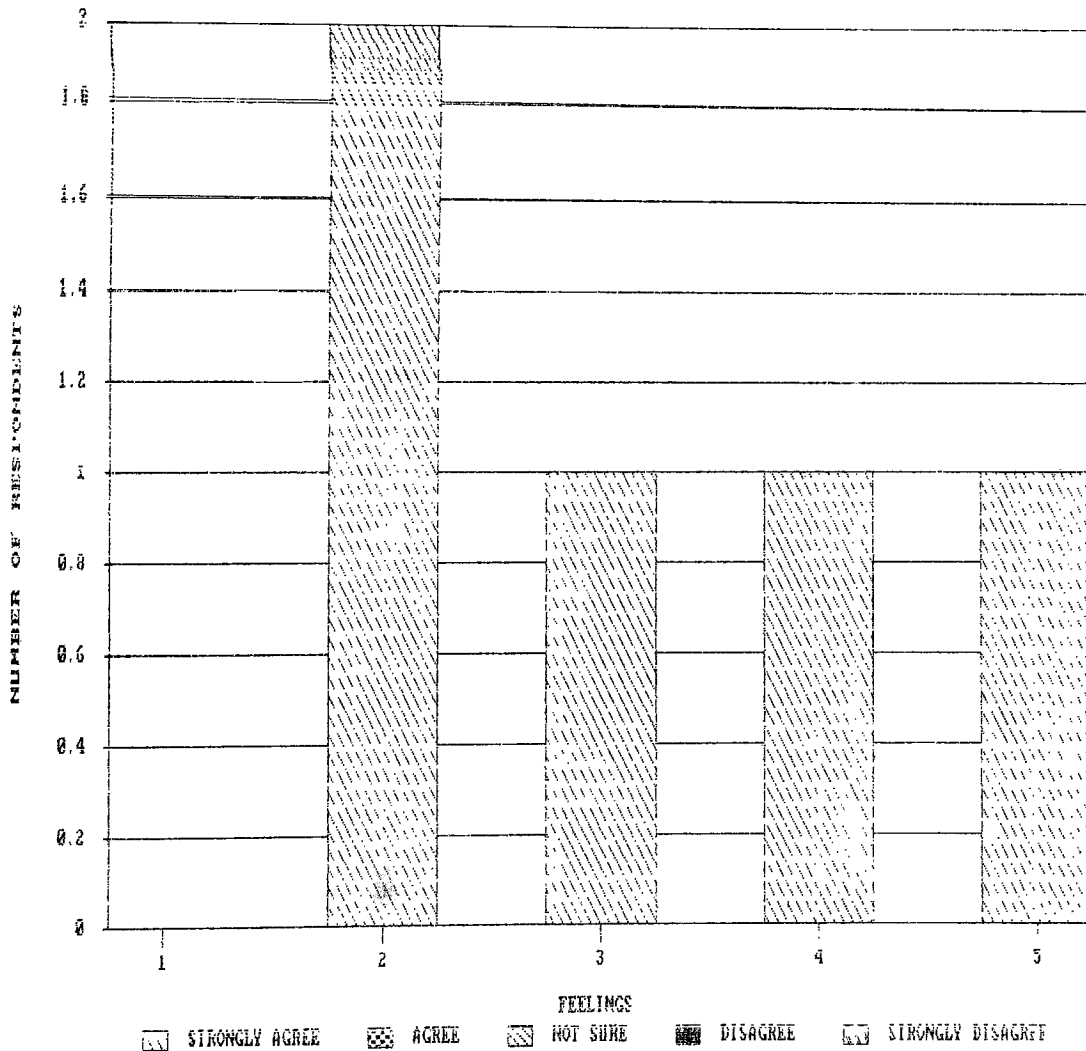
SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

QUESTION TWO



SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

QUESTION TWO B



QUESTION NUMBER THREE

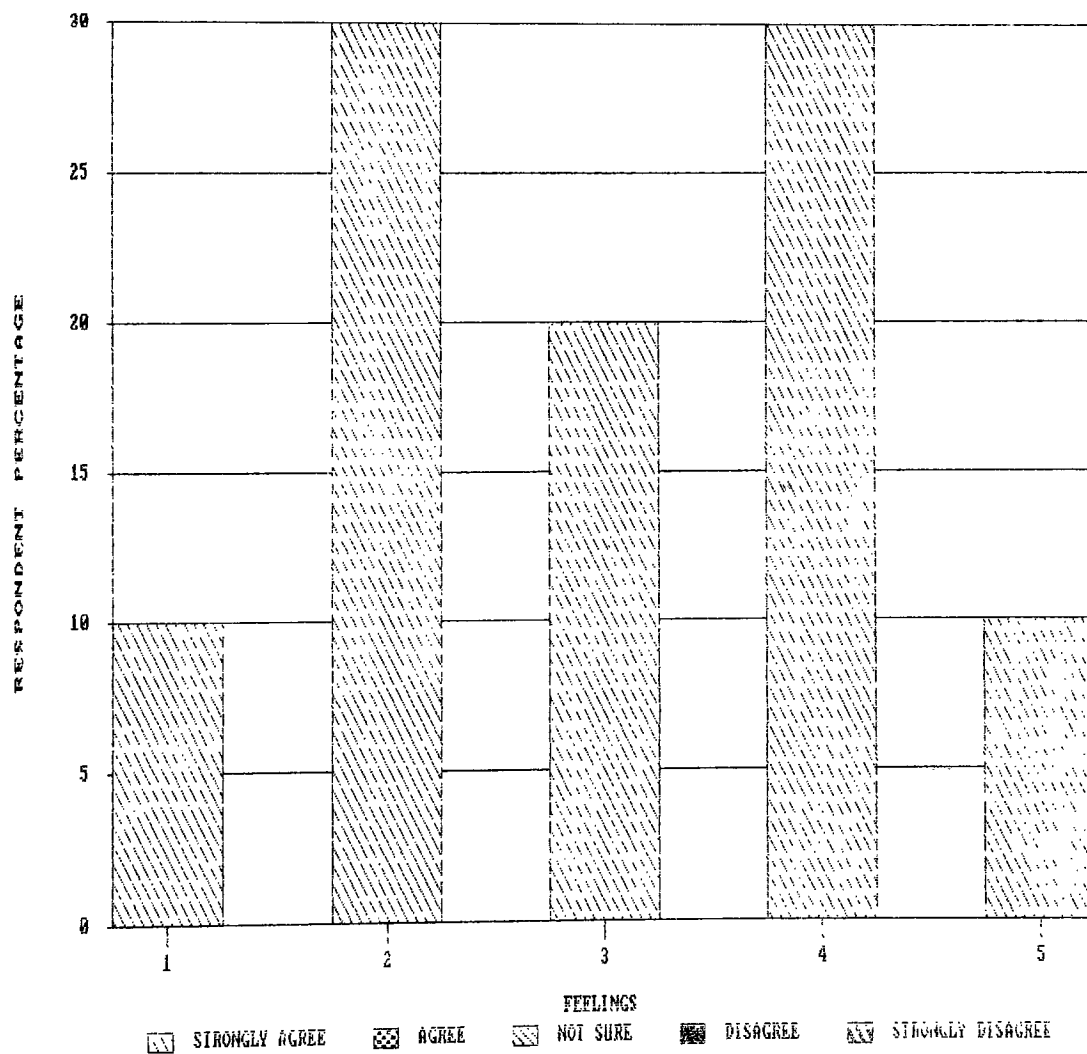
Management's expectations have been clear to you since you were hired.

Question three was included to see if there is a correlation between orientation programs and job descriptions and the proficiency of employees in comprehending management's expectations. Since a orientation program explains managements expectations and the job description puts these expectations in a precise written format, one should be able to conclude employees would have a clear understanding of what is expected of them.

Graph number three seems to reflect the respondent's feelings in questions one and two with forty percent agreeing, forty percent disagreeing with twenty percent uncertain. One might deduce from this that the employees who agreed with questions one and two are the same employees that are agreeing with question three. If this is true the ramifications would be significant. It would prove that there is a direct correlation between either orientation programs or job descriptions and the ability for employees to understand management's expectations. For a employee to do their job well and be committed to superior guest service they need to know exactly what is expected of them. Communication may be part of the predicament facing the respondents that disagreed but since the question is worded 'since you were hired' this would be unlikely. A negative attitude towards management in general for whatever reason certainly can never be entirely ruled out.

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

QUESTION THREE



QUESTION FOUR

Your company provides you with on-going training in order to meet management's expectations.

Question four was intended to measure the respondent's company's willingness to invest the time, money and provide the expertise to train their front office employees. Employees generally will meet management's expectations, and even exceed them in some cases if, they understand what these expectations are and if they are properly trained to do so. If management expects service superiority for example, than employees must receive precise instructions as to what that is and how they can achieve it.

There are many different types of training all serving different aspects of the front office operation. This question primarily asks 'if there is on-going training.' Emphasis on the 'on going' in order to determine how adequate the training was if the respondents replied positively. This follows the belief that training has to be continuous in order to be effective.

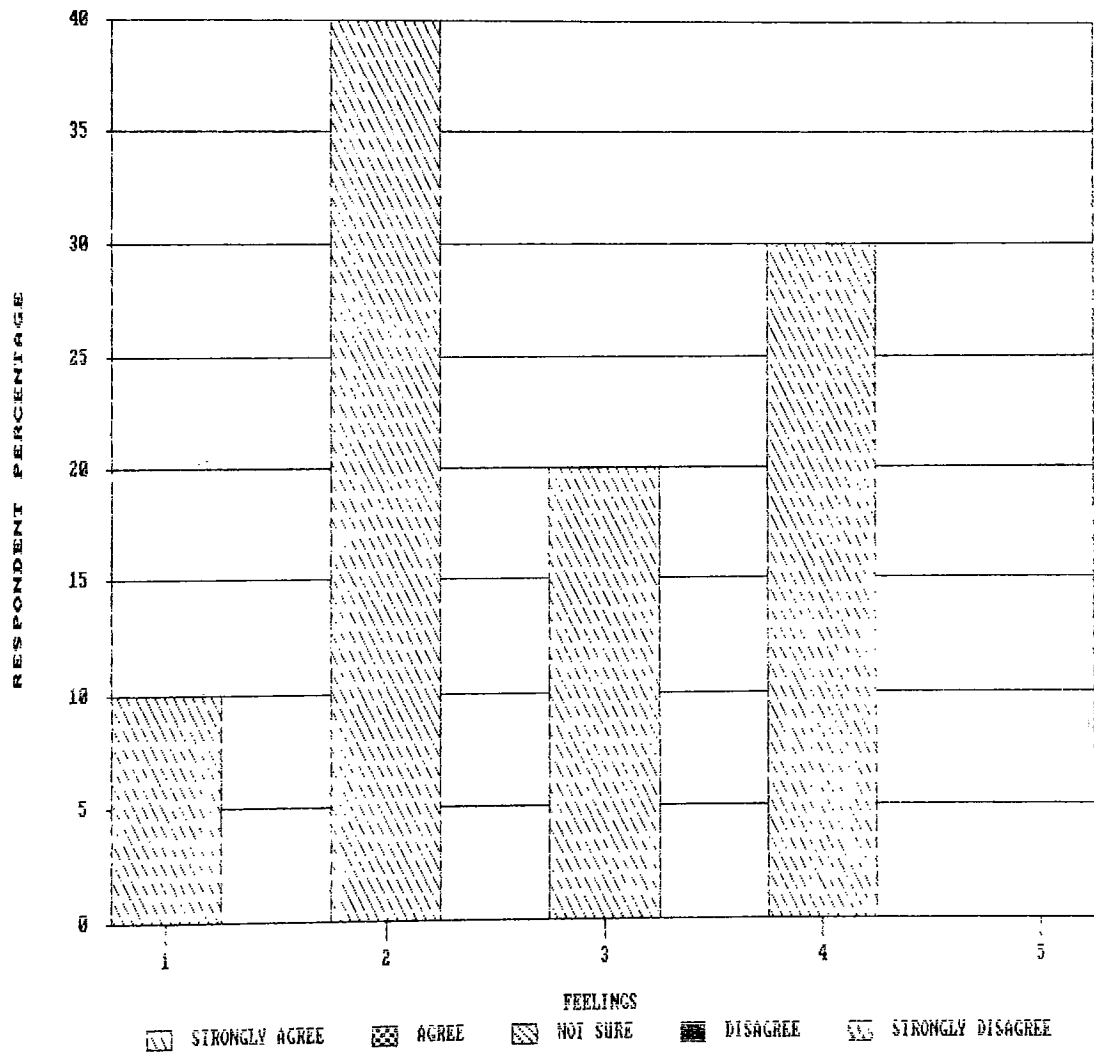
Graph four shows that fully fifty percent of the respondents feel they are receiving adequate training, while twenty percent are not sure and thirty percent disagree. A much lower percentage than fifty percent, was hyppotheised, leading to a conclusion management is taking training seriously. This may offer some explanation for their perceived lack of interest in job descriptions?

The respondents who were uncertain may not have understood what type of training was being referring to and thus may have been hesitant

to answer. With thirty percent of the respondents disagreeing it indicates that some properties have yet to realize the potential payoff in service performance from their employees when effective training programs are put in place.

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

QUESTION FOUR



QUESTION NUMBER FIVE

Your company provides up to date equipment allowing you to meet their expectations.

Question five was included to test the respondent's feelings about the equipment provided the front office personnel to complete their daily tasks. The equipment referred to would be the items that have a direct affect on the clerks ability to meet management's expectations for guest satisfaction. Items such as fire detection and location, although extremely important to the guest, would not affect the front office agent's daily capacity to meet both management's and guest expectations.

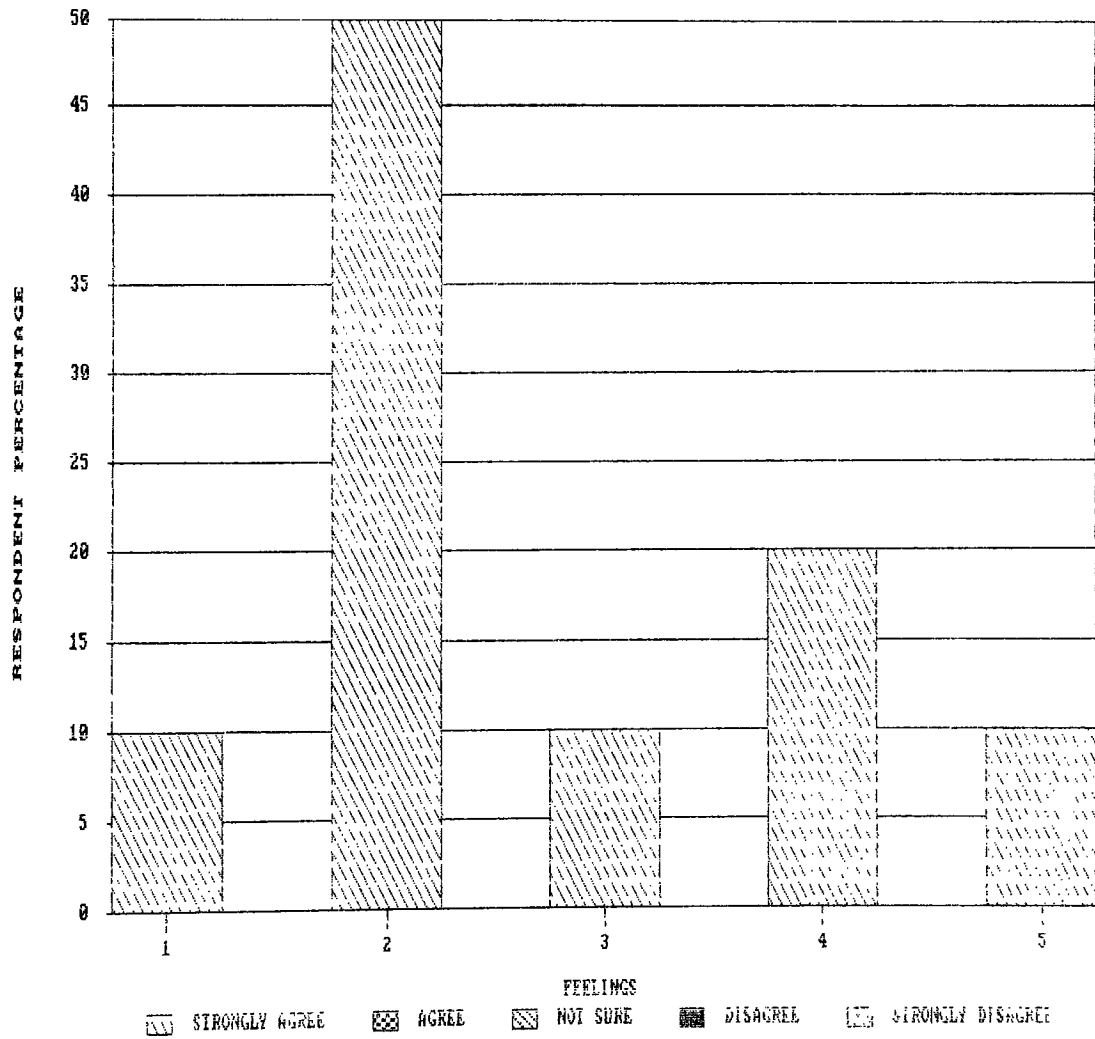
As little as five years ago, many resorts were having their employees completing tasks manually, even though computer technology had long developed systems that were far more efficient. An example of this would be the reservation department handwriting a reservation, posting it to a 'reservation board' and filing the reservation form in a cabinet for later reference. With more than one clerk taking reservations, this system was neither company or guest friendly as reservations were duplicated or missed.

Graph number five shows sixty percent of the respondents feel the company does provide up to date equipment to meet managements expectations, with ten percent uncertain and thirty percent disagreeing. The graph seems to indicate that resorts have been making a conscientious effort to keep the equipment used on the front desk up to date. The twenty percent who disagree may feel that an

important item is missing which prevents them from doing their job properly. Management may feel during times of fiscal restraint it is simply not within the properties budget. The conclusion drawn from the responses to question five that type or lack of equipment is not a factor that would contribute to a 'gap' being created between front office employees and management.

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

QUESTION FIVE



QUESTION NUMBER SIX

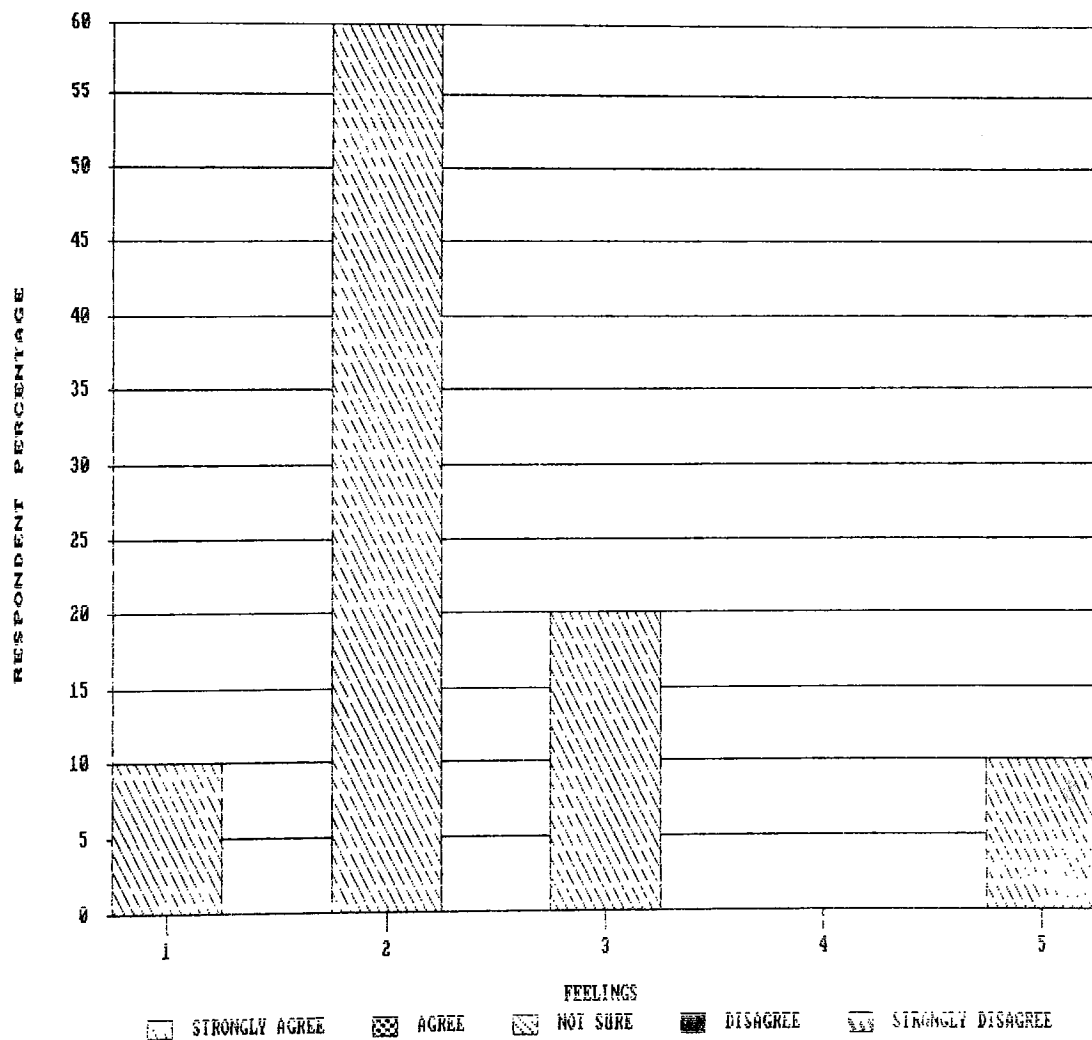
Company policies are a reflection of your concerns regarding the best interests of the guests.

The reason question six was asked was to investigate whether there was an awareness of the importance of customer service in the minds of the front office employees, from the employees perspective as well as managements. Often either management or the employees become introverted, that is preoccupied with inside concerns such as forms and reports, a company friendly system, while the other is a guest friendly system aimed at satisfying the concerns of the customer. (Albrecht, Bradford, 1990) The second area the question was intended to explore was that of the possibility that managements view of guest expectations and the view of the front office personnel were disparate. If either one of these situations existed then indeed a large gap could arise between management and the front office personnel in their approach to guest service.

Graph number six indicates that seventy percent of the respondents feel company policies are a reflection of the best interests of the guests, while twenty percent were uncertain and ten percent strongly disagreed. This conveys that the views of management equate to those of the front office employees in the area of guest relations. If the companies have thoroughly researched guest expectations and have a true picture of guest concerns there should be a positive internal climate for service within these properties.

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

QUESTION SIX



QUESTION NUMBER SEVEN

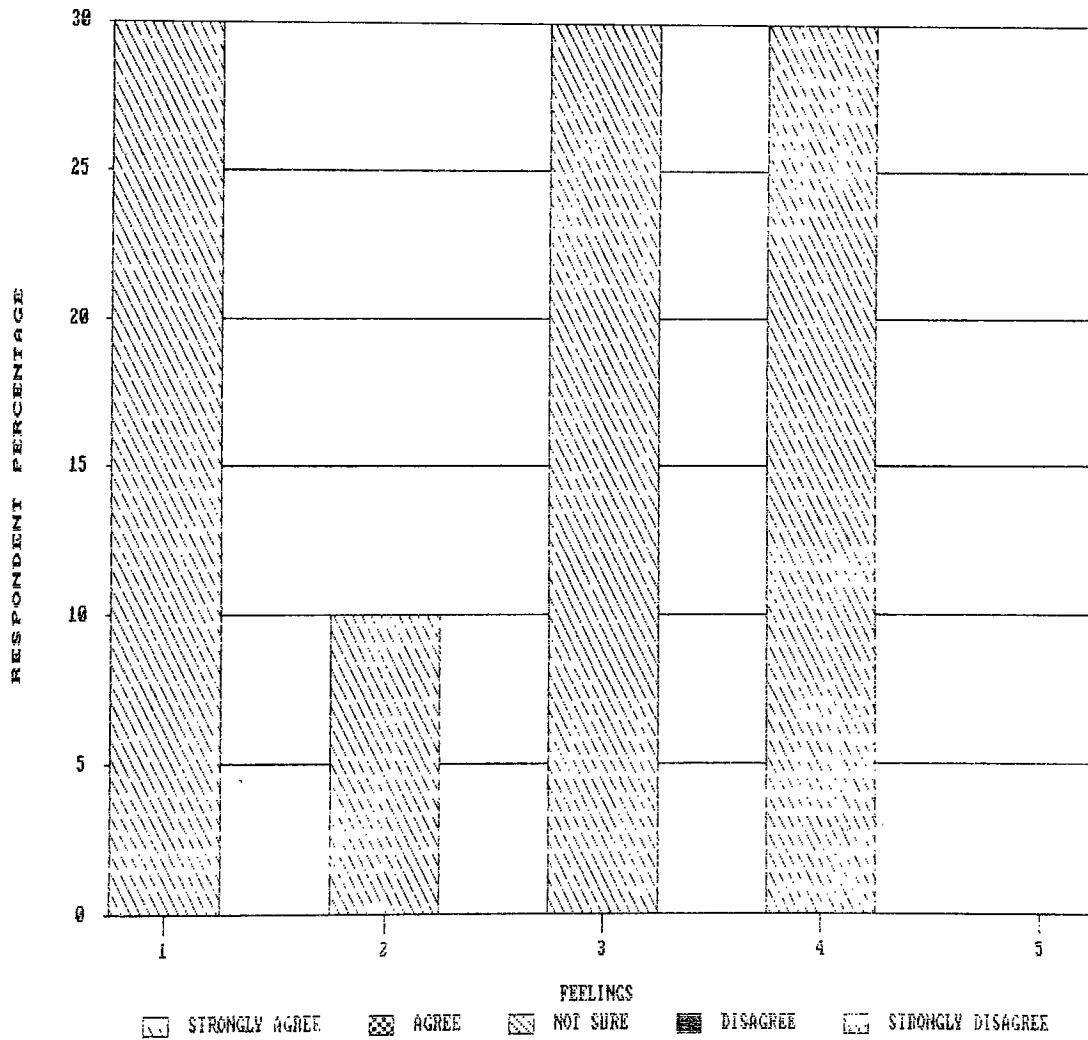
Management expectations are constantly changing.

Question seven was included to examine how the respondents felt about management's consistency of expectations of front office employees. If expectations are constantly changing in their nature, or if they are constantly rising and falling, employees can become frustrated and even despondent. Any sense of accomplishment is missed if a goal is changed before an employee has a chance to satisfy the expectation. Job satisfaction is often low, and with equally low morale, a gap in management-employee relations could easily exist. Some could argue that companies must always be willing to adjust in order to meet changing guest expectations. This may certainly be true in addressing long term company strategies while this question is aimed primarily at the daily or weekly aspect of operations.

The graph of question seven proves interesting in the fact that there is very little consensus. Thirty percent strongly agree that expectations are constantly changing, ten percent agree, with thirty percent being unsure and a full thirty percent disagreeing. Probing further by looking at the actual questionnaires I discovered that a consensus did not even exist within individual properties. Formulating a conclusion from graph seven would be an awkward one at best but if management was aware that this situation exists at least they may be in a better position to deal with some of the repercussions that may materialize from this situation.

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

QUESTION SEVEN



QUESTION NUMBER EIGHT

Your contributions in meeting management expectations is reflected in the pay scale.

People commit their energies to the extent that what they do, brings them what they want, which may be a feeling, a status, an experience, or something material, typically money. Question eight was intended to examine whether the pay scale was a factor in motivating employees to meet management's expectations.

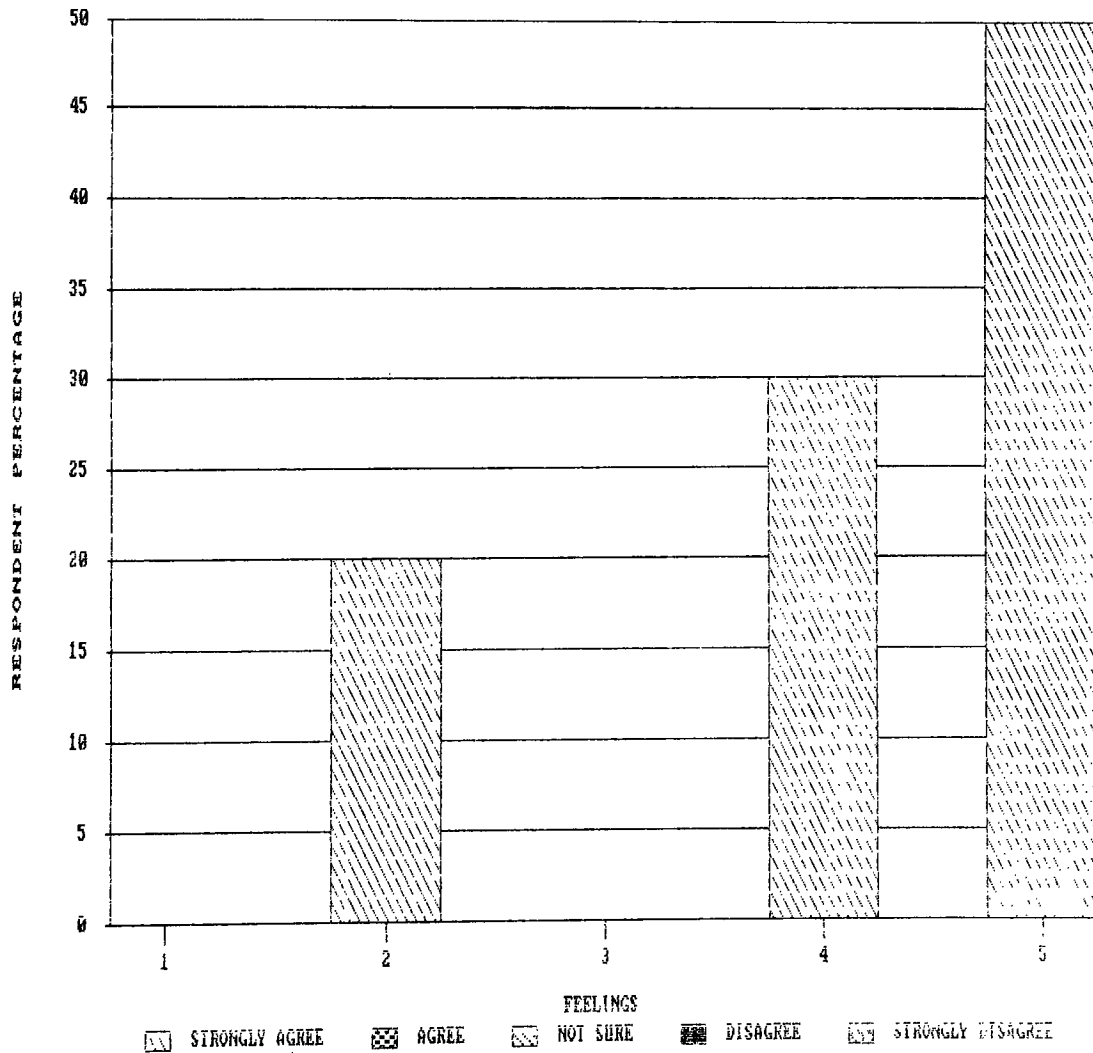
It should be noted here that pay and benefits if at a high level may not necessarily motivate employees, but if they are at a low level they certainly have a tendency to demotivate the staff. On the other hand studies have shown that money is rated as only the third or fourth reason people leave their jobs. (Desatnick, 1987) The dilemma many resorts face is finding a system of measuring performance and linking it to their reward system. The companies compensation plan must be both externally competitive as well as internally equitable. In other words people work for the highest paying organizations but measure their self worth in terms of what they earn versus what the market pays.

Graph number eight clearly shows that eighty percent of the respondents do not feel their contributions in meeting management's expectations is reflected in the pay scale. At least two conclusions could be drawn from this, one being that money is everything to employees and they can't get enough, or secondly, management does not feel compensation in the form of wages is a viable motivater.

in this case the wording of the question suggests the respondents do not feel they are properly compensated. This can lead to a feeling of being cheated and employees who feel this way will not fully support the organization's goals. The commitment to service superiority that many properties seek will not evolve if employees feel that management is exploiting them. Hopefully these properties have devised other methods of compensation and it is proposed that management allow the employees to participate in identifying the measures on which their pay is based.

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

QUESTION EIGHT



QUESTION NUMBER NINE

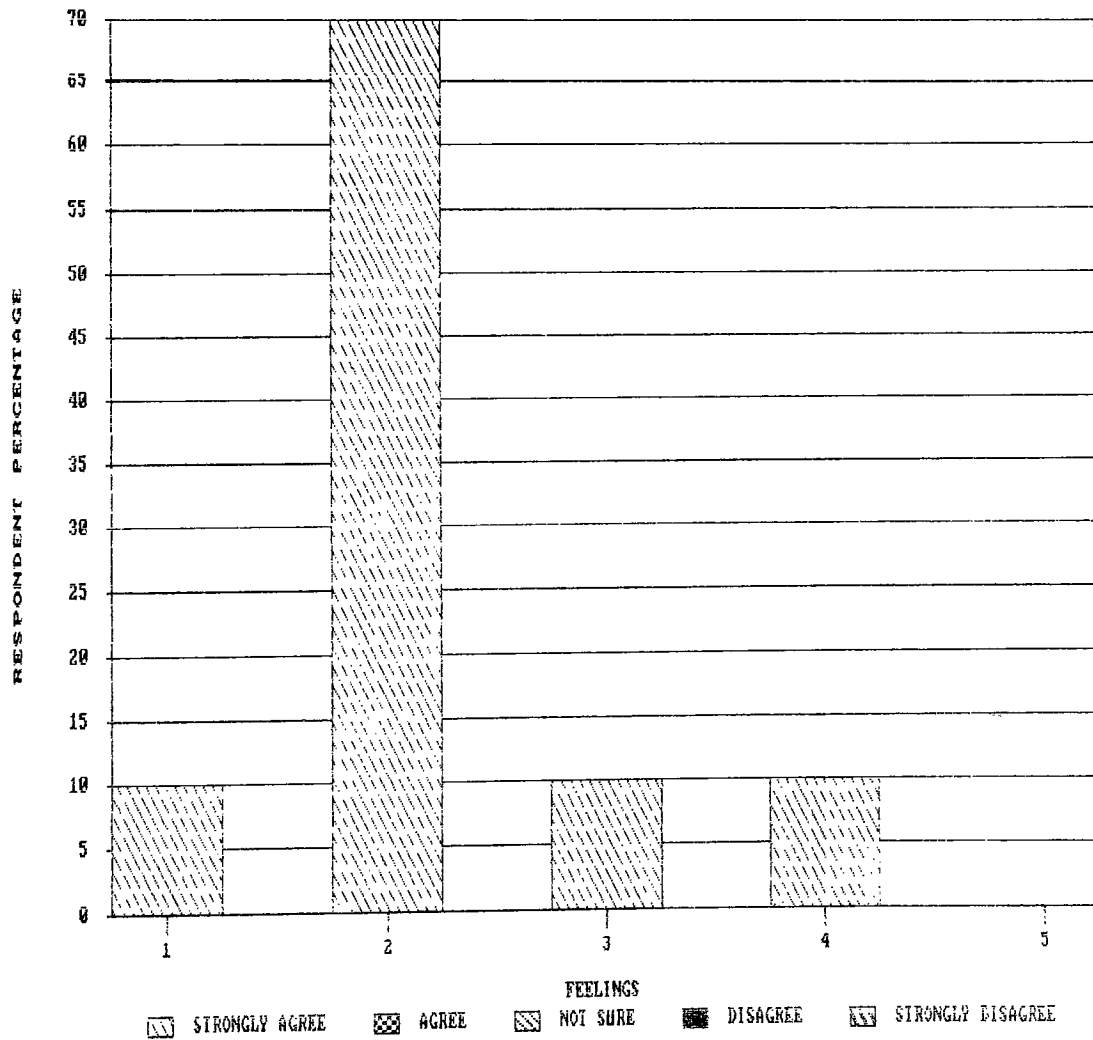
Your company allows you to make corrective decisions within guidelines without their involvement.

Question nine was included to try to get an idea of the level of trust between management and the front office employees in the area of decision making. Generally trust translates into empowerment which in turn translates into respect. A management that respects its employees usually has a higher level of guest service for the simple reason this respect is in turn reflected upon the customer. When empowered employees are allowed to work in advocacy rather than in opposition to customer interests and needs, higher morale and personal satisfaction seem to prevail. (Britton, Stallings, 1986) Conversely lack of respect manifests itself when management fails to recognize and acknowledge a job well done and also fails to understand the individual employee's point of view. This often results in apathy at the front desk and poor customer service.

Graph number nine reveals a very high level of empowerment. Eighty percent of the respondents claim they are allowed to make corrective decisions without management's involvement. How the respondents interpreted 'within guidelines' is unknown but probably because a light percent responded affirmatively and only ten percent uncertain, the guidelines are quite limited. With management showing this level of respect for their employees decision-making ability it can be surmised that the companies recruitment methods are on target and their training methods in this area quite successful.

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

QUESTION NINE



QUESTION NUMBER TEN

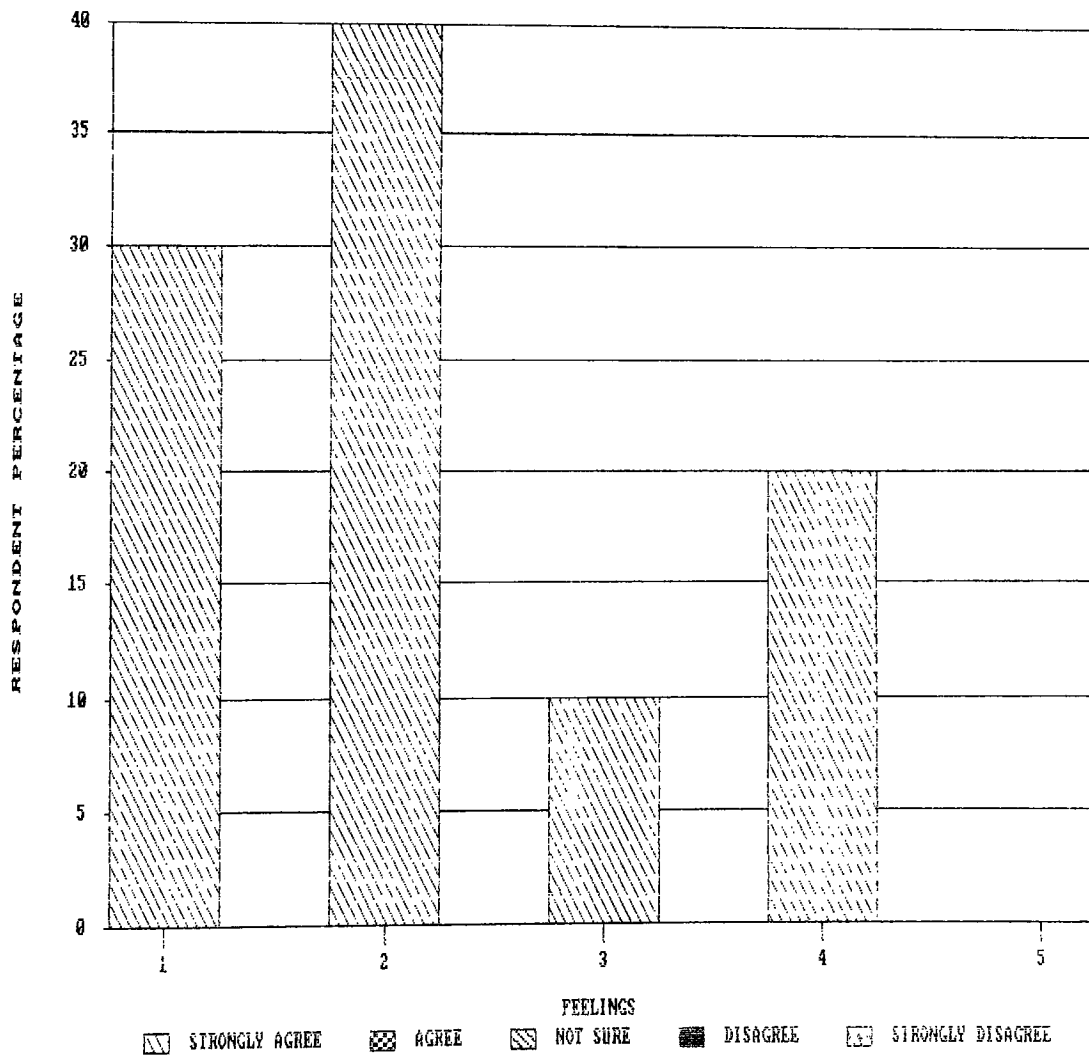
Your company has an open door management policy.

Question ten was included to establish if the communications within these companies between employees and management were always kept open. In other words, is management saying to their employees that everyone is accountable for what happens? Further that they are there to support and help employees solve their problems? An open door policy implies management is both empathetic and sensitive towards employee's needs. It also conveys to employees that management is willing to listen to their suggestions and adopt as many as possible.

Graph number ten shows seventy percent of the respondents feel the company does have a open door policy while twenty percent disagree. It is often customary for management in the hospitality business to spent part of their day mingling with both the guests and employees to get a feel for the days activities which would leave the door open for discussions. However this does not guarantee gaps will not arise as Liswood (1990) states that "when executives do get out and about, they should have a clear purpose. Rather than merely walking around or establishing a presence, they need to look and listen systematically and purposefully and not be shy about having their illusions shattered."

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

QUESTION TEN



QUESTION NUMBER ELEVEN

Your job description clearly defines your role as a representative of management.

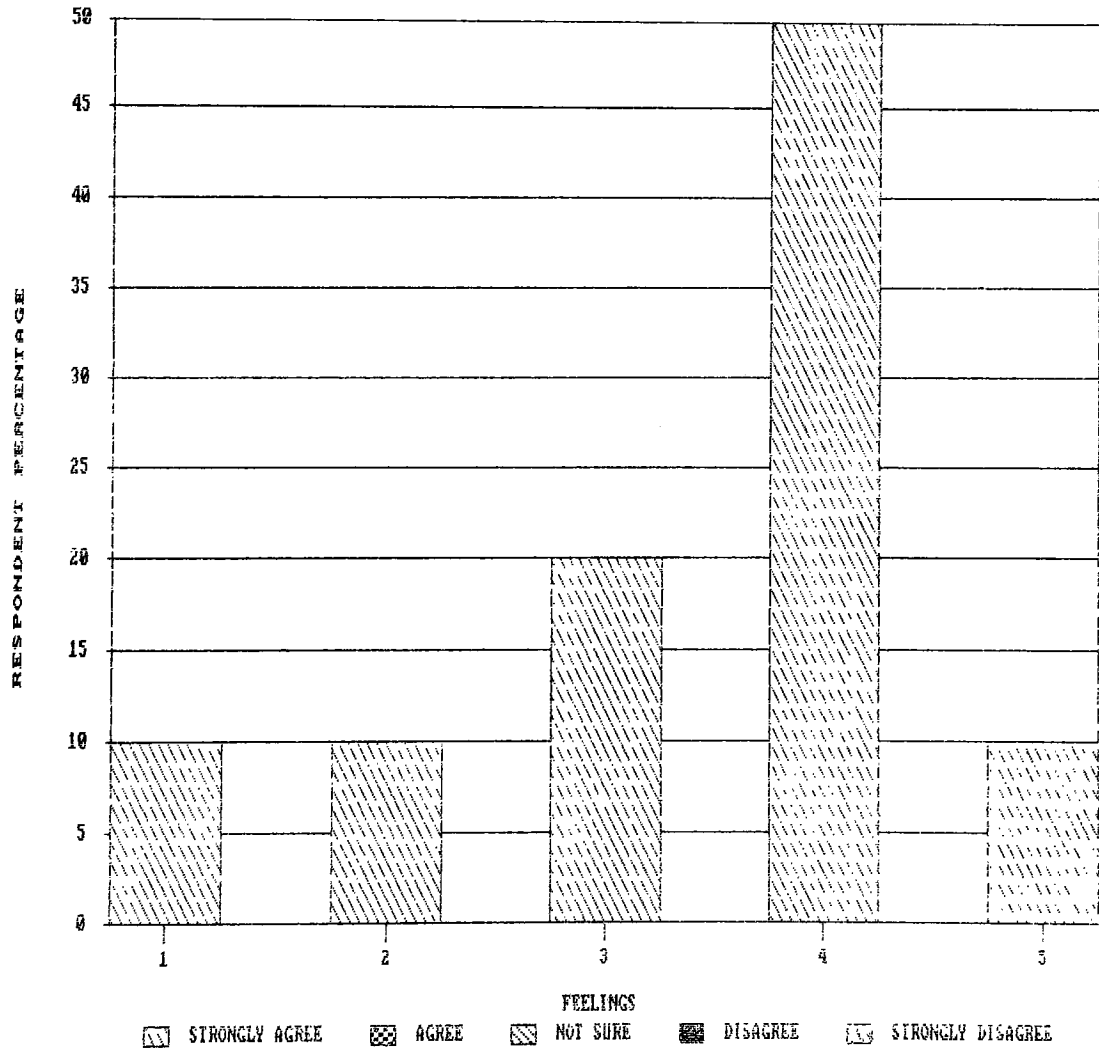
Question eleven was intended to illustrate employee perceptions on two factors; job descriptions and empowerment and the relationship between them. As stated in the comment section for question two, a job description is a precise written description, delineating the exact areas each employee is responsible for and as specifically as possible the behavior expected in all the elements of the job. Conversely empowerment frees the employee from managements autocratic rule, allowing them to make decisions as they see fit in order to meet the guest's needs. The two statements appear contradictory but in actuality if properly managed the two compliment one another. When management empowers employees with a job description, they are simply saying, "You know what we expect and we believe you have the competence, interest, and integrity to take it forward."

Graph eleven shows sixty percent of the respondents do not feel their job description adequately defines their role as a representative of management, while twenty percent were uncertain, and twenty percent felt it did. A strong correlation emerges when graph eleven is compared to graph two. Graph two indicates that sixty percent of the employees did not receive a job description, so this question isn't applicable. With forty percent receiving a job description, twenty percent are unsure and twenty percent agree with question eleven. The only conclusion that can be drawn is that of the

employees who received a job description and understood the question felt they could interpret their role as a representative of management from the job description. A more effective way of wording the question may have been "Your role as a representative has been clearly communicated to you," which may have avoided this complication.

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

QUESTION ELEVEN



QUESTION TWELVE

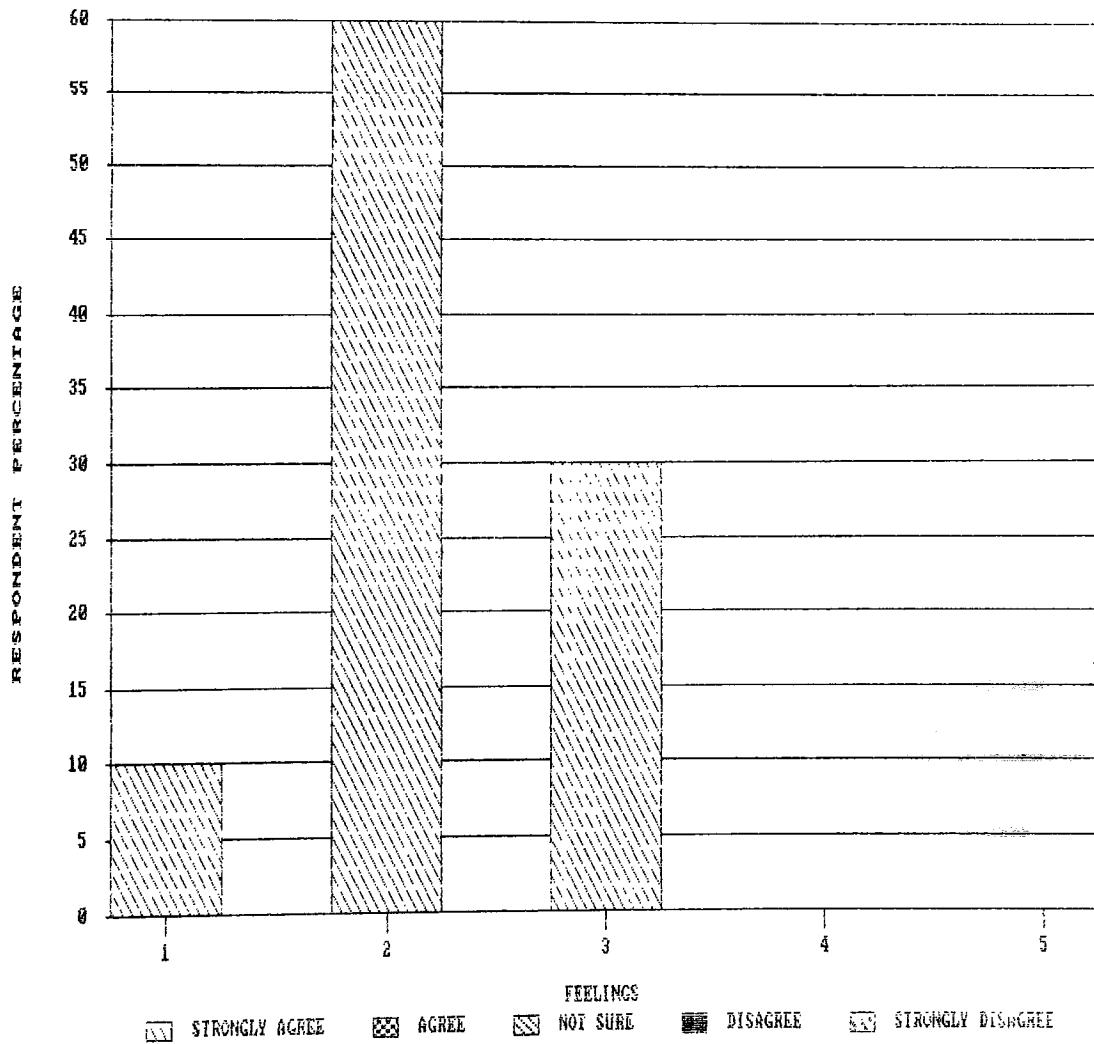
There is an understanding about the standards of service that have to be met in order for them to be considered acceptable.

The key words in question twelve are "understanding" and "acceptable." Job descriptions and training should explain the standards of service but do the employees understand why these standards have been set? Do they understand how to meet these standards? It was discovered in question six that the employees felt the company's policies were a reflection of the best interests of the guests, so one might assume they would feel the same way about the standards of service. However we also determined in question seven that management's expectations were constantly changing. Does this mean that the standards of service are constantly changing and if so then how could the front office personnel possibly understand something that is constantly fluctuating?

Graph twelve shows seventy percent of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the question, while thirty percent were uncertain. The conclusion that could be drawn from questions six, seven and twelve may be that even though management's expectations often change, employees primarily do understand what is expected of them in regards to customer service standards and feel these standards are in the best interest of the guest.

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

QUESTION TWELVE



QUESTION THIRTEEN

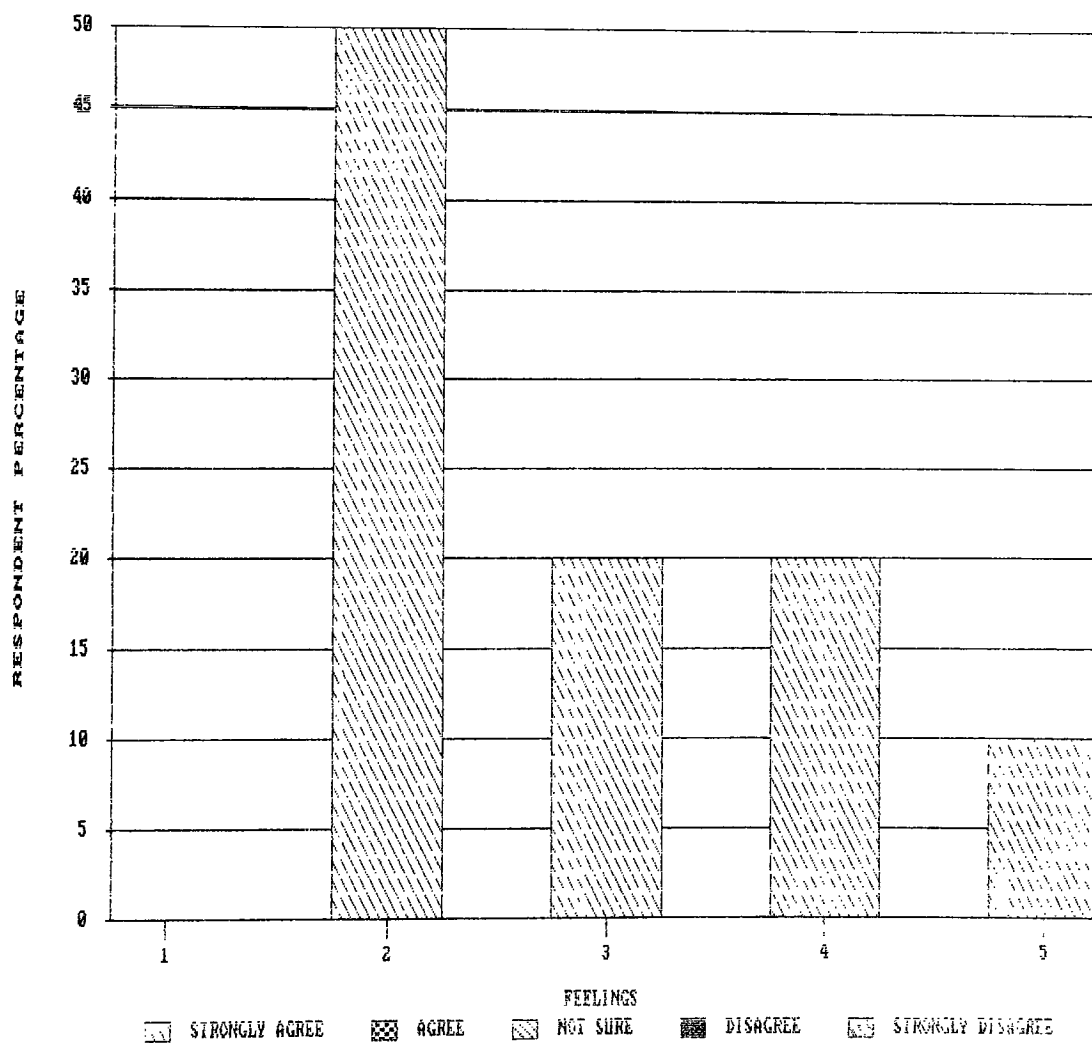
Management's concerns are clearly communicated throughout the organization.

Almost all the questions in the survey deal with communication between management and the front office personnel in one way or the other. Question thirteen was directed at the effectiveness of communication throughout the entire organization. In other words, how are messages passed through the organization from top management to the various departments? This internal communication process would exert a influence on customer service and thus would have an impact on front office operations. The front office employees would need to know how their job affects others within the organization and visa versa especially when mistakes occur.

Graph number thirteen shows fifty percent of the respondents feel management's concerns are clearly communicated throughout the organization. Twenty percent are uncertain while thirty percent feel the communication process is poor. The word 'concerns' is somewhat ambiguous, so it is understandable that twenty percent of the responses were in the "not sure" category. With the responses to questions six, seven and twelve being so positive, it is speculated that there would have been more agreement to this question. Judging from the responses, a 'gap' where communication either is lacking or ineffective with in some of the departments which in turn would have a negative influence on guest relations at the front office.

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

QUESTION THIRTEEN



QUESTION NUMBER FOURTEEN

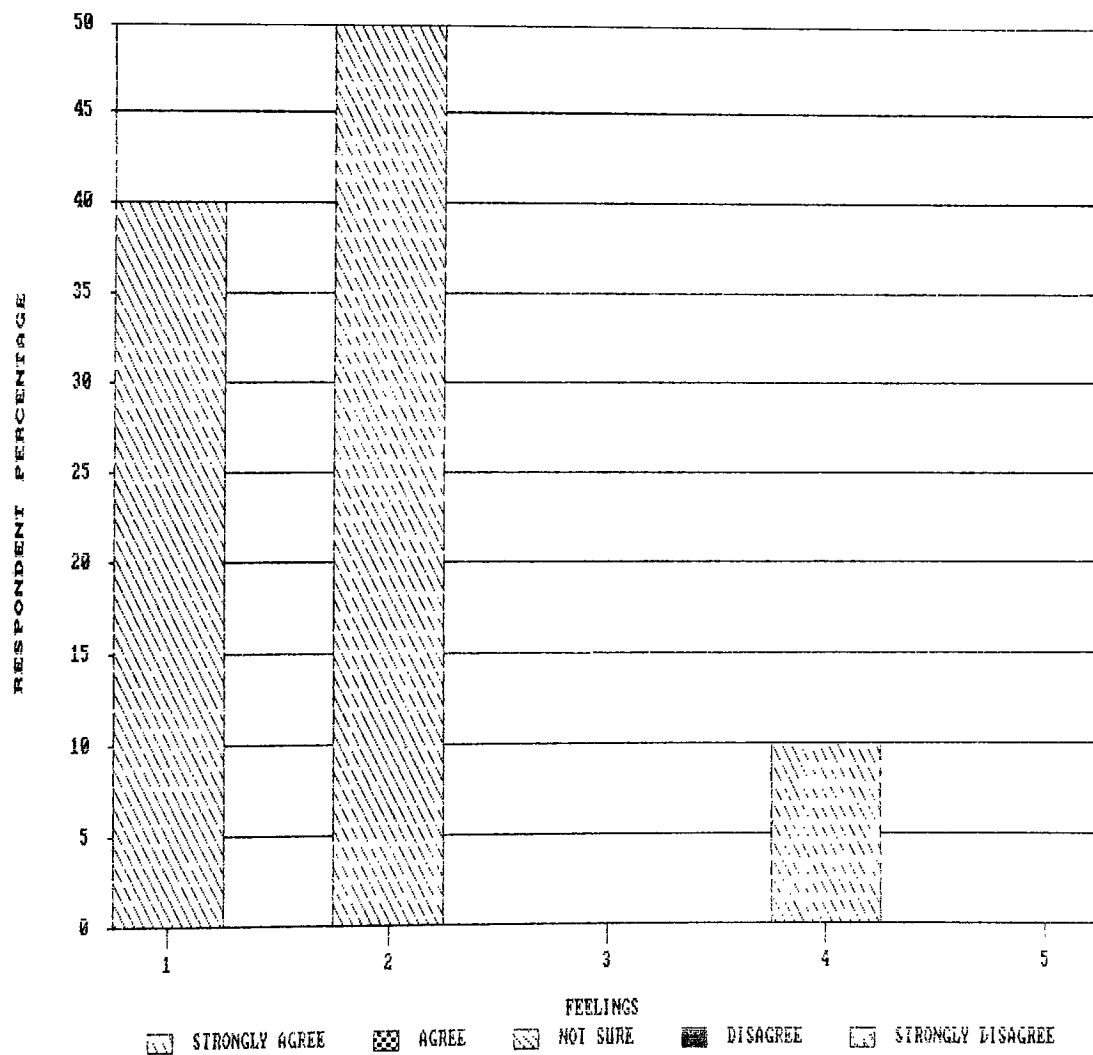
There are a lot of rules, policies and practices one has to know to get along in this organization.

Management consultants seem to agree that the best managed companies have simple, clear personnel policies and administer them consistently. These policies should be relatively few, thoroughly communicated and rigidly enforced. A striking feature of a well planned and executed service system is that service seems simple and uncomplicated. The system itself is almost invisible. (Davidow, Uttal, 1989) If it is true that most people like to work for a company that is well run and disciplined, where rules, policies and procedures are clear, uniformly and consistently applied, then it would seem to be very important that management thoroughly plans the system before implementing it. Conversely unplanned systems tend to be complex and operate solely for the convenience of the organization.

Graph fourteen shows a full ninety percent of the respondents feel there are a lot of rules, policies and practices that they need to know in order to get along within their organizations. The conclusion follows that these organizations have not thoroughly thought out their rules and policies before putting them into practice. The consequences of acting without due consideration could range from an air of uncertainty surrounding the front office to employees suffering 'burnout' coping with the situation. Whatever the case the goals set for guest services would be difficult to achieve.

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

QUESTION FOURTEEN



SECTION TWO

Section two will examine management's perspective of the issues and compare their responses to that of the front office employees. Again some recommendations that are relevant to the individual issues will be included for correlation purposes. It would be appropriate to state here that management either "strongly agree" or "agreed" with all thirteen questions, except for question five where two managers were not sure and question nine where in turn one manager was uncertain. (see exhibit six) Since management responded so positively, the reader can simply make this assumption when referring to the questionnaires. (see exhibits seven & eight)

Questions one and two were intended to directly correspond to their counterparts in the questionnaire designated for the front office employees. As indicated earlier part of the orientation program and job description was meant to explain the companies mission and expectations to all the new recruits before they actually began working. Sixty and forty percent of the respondents felt that the company did not provide the above mentioned to a degree with which they were comfortable. Management's responses contradict the employees which leads to the conclusion that either the company's mission statement and expectations were explained by some other means, or there is confusion over the definition of these terms.

MANAGEMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

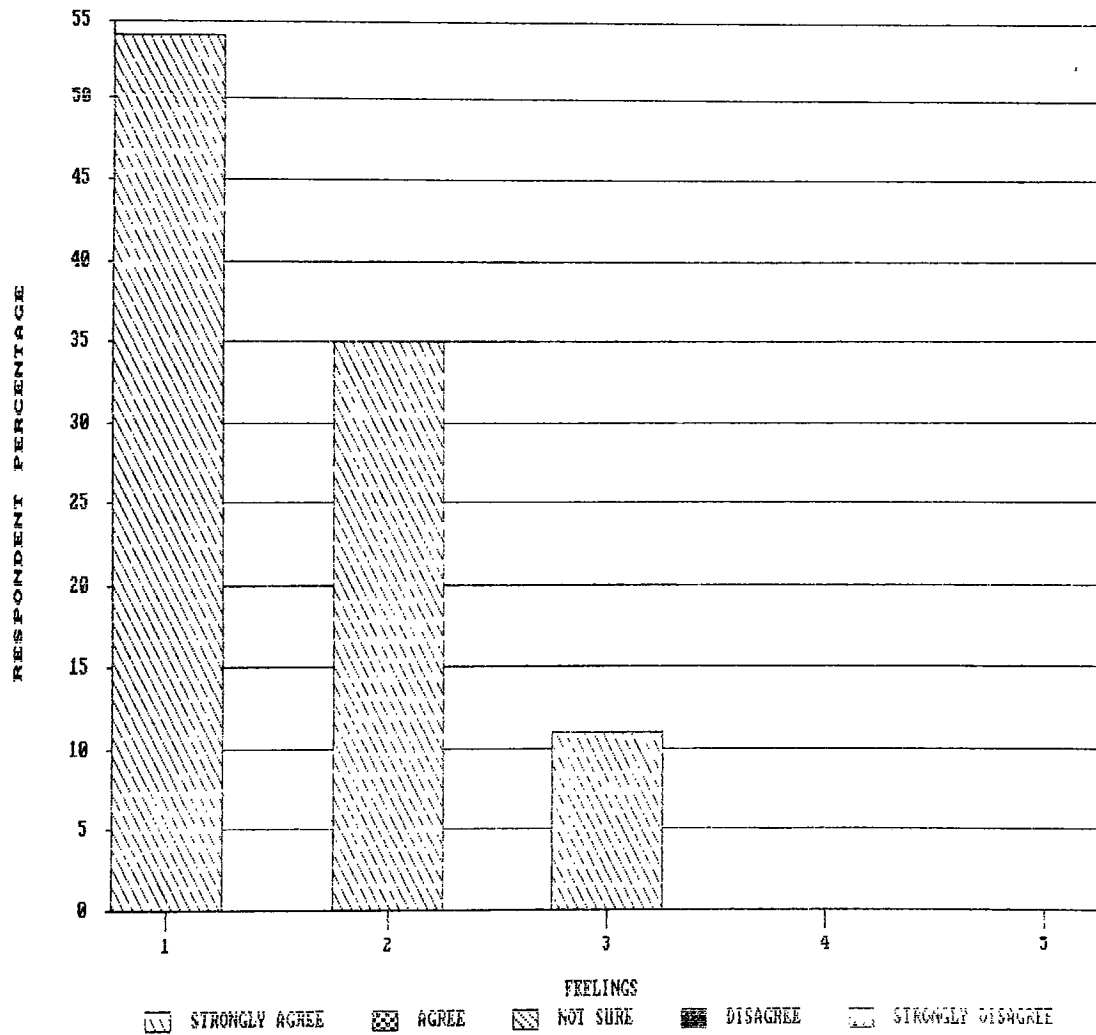


Exhibit Seven

MANAGEMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

PLEASE READ EACH QUESTION AND ANSWER BY PLACING A CIRCLE AROUND THE NUMBER THAT MOST CLOSELY REPRESENTS YOUR FEELINGS. NOTE: PERSONNEL OR EMPLOYEES REFERS ONLY TO THOSE WORKING AT THE FRONT OFFICE.

- | | STRONGLY
AGREE | AGREE | NOT
SURE | DISAGREE | STRONGLY
DISAGREE |
|--|-------------------|-------|-------------|----------|----------------------|
| 1. Personnel understand the mission statement of the organization. | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) |
| 2. Your company provides personnel with a job description which you feel is accurate for meeting managements expectations. | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) |
| 3. There are set procedures by which to convey the goals of the property to the front desk. | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) |
| 4. Managers encourage personnel to participate in making decisions. | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) |
| 5. Personnel are free to determine their own means to reach the goals of the property. | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) |

6. Management and personnel establish and document work methods and goals. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
7. The policies of the owner (or management company) are known throughout the organization. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
8. Personnel understand their responsibilities and what is expected of them. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
9. Management requires personnel to work with other departments on joint projects. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
10. Management consistently measures how well the property accomplishes its goals. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
11. The personnel communicates effectively with other departments. (1) (2) (3) (4)(5)
12. The owner (management company) will fund job training programs. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
13. The property consistently evaluates turnover, absenteeism, guest feedback and productivity. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

Exhibit Eight

FRONT OFFICE PERSONNEL QUESTIONNAIRE

PLEASE READ EACH QUESTION AND ANSWER BY PLACING A CIRCLE AROUND THE NUMBER THAT MOST CLOSELY REPRESENTS YOUR FEELINGS.

STRONGLY	AGREE	NOT	DISAGREE	STRONGLY
AGREE		SURE		DISAGREE

1. Your company provided you with an orientation (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
program so you felt comfortable when starting
your job.
2. Your company provided you with an accurate (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
job description when you were hired.
3. Management's expectations have been clear to (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
you since you were hired.
4. Your company provides you with on-going (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
training in order to meet managements
expectations.
5. Your company provides up to date equipment (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
allowing you to meet their expectations.

6. Company policies are a reflection of your (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
concerns regarding the best interests of
the guests.
7. Management expectations are constantly (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
changing.
8. Your contributions in meeting management (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
expectations is reflected in the pay scale.
9. Your company allows you to make corrective (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
decisions within guidelines without their
involvement.
10. Your company has a open door management (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
policy.
11. Your job description clearly defines your (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
role as a representative of management.
12. There is an understanding about the standards (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
of service that have to be met in order for
them to be considered acceptable.
13. Management's concerns are clearly (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
communicated throughout the organization.

STRONGLY	AGREE	NOT	DISAGREE	STRONGLY
AGREE		SURE		DISAGREE

14. There are a lot of rules, policies and practices one has to know to get along in this organization.

(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

If this is the case the repercussions would be limited but if it is not true a crucial element is missing in the company's strategy to produce effective, successful employees. Although questions three, seven and eight included in the management questionnaire may be part and parcel of questions one and two, they were sequestered in order to correlate them to questions three, seven, eleven, twelve and thirteen contained in the employee questionnaire. The theme of the questions was communication. Is it effective and are the messages sent by management consistent and being understood by the personnel? It appears by the employees responses to questions twelve and thirteen that managements concerns are clearly communicated and there is an understanding about the standards of service that have to be met in order to be acceptable. Again we come across the situation with job descriptions not being fully utilized as a method of communication which seems to exacerbate the problem by managements expectations constantly changing and being unclear to over half of the employees. (questions three, seven and eleven) With the exclusion of this issue of job descriptions, the companies seem to have cultivated fairly good employee relations through their communication processes which in turn should allow them to set reasonably high guest service standards.

Questions four, five and six were intended to coincide with questions six, nine ten and eleven on the employee questionnaire. The responses were meant to indicate the level to which front office personnel had been empowered by management and the degree to which the employees participated in the companies decision making process.

It was discovered earlier in the chapter that eighty percent of employees felt that management had empowered them to make corrective decisions within guidelines. Question five basically asked the same of management but without any limitations which resulted in the respondents being uncertain. With hindsight if the questions had been worded the same allowing management to feel a sense of control the responses may have been comparable. Since management was not adamant in their responses and the employees responded positively, speculation would have it that management does believe in the principles of empowerment which displays a fair amount of trust between the two parties.

Previously graphs six and ten showed an open door management policy and that the policies were a reflection of employees concerns regarding the best interests of the guests. The response to questions four and six reveals that management encourages personnel to participate in making the decisions which establish the work methods and goals for the company. It has been fairly well documented that as employee participation and empowerment increase, companies see the level of guest service rise proportionately. The reason for this may be that the employees would then feel as if they are truly part of the company and at least partially responsible for it's level of success. (Lovelock, 1988) Since management is willing to listen to employees concerns which are often closely related to guest concerns and communication is considered effective, I would contend that management has been successful in establishing a beneficial relationship between themselves, the employees and in turn the

guests.

A considerable amount of attention has been paid to managements effectiveness in the area of communication. Questions nine and eleven signify the importance of the employees ability to communicate. Effective communications would be fundamental for a successful liaison between the front office and the other departments within the resort. All the managers, except for one, felt their employees were effective when conferring with the other departments. The wording 'on joint projects' may be ambiguous which I would surmise was the reason the one manager was uncertain. This reemphasizes the conclusions drawn earlier that communications would not seem to be a root cause of any 'gaps' in management/personnel relations. In fact communications seems to play a supporting role in accomplishing the goals that would be achieved by a smooth running, efficient company. Questions ten and thirteen were included to determine managements feeling about the importance of measuring overall performance and evaluating individual employees contributions in meeting the companies goals. A performance appraisal to be effective should exist for both the managements and the employees benefit and assist both parties in building on their strengths and overcoming their weaknesses. Just as important, the evaluation system which should provide a fair and equitable system of compensation which rewards excellent performance. In short a service driven company would rely heavily on the results obtained from these systems and the managers in the survey all agreed. An achievement of this nature should produce a positive climate for management to communicate mutually

agreeable goals to their employees. It was noted in Chapter Three that the employee respondents felt managements policies were in the best interest of the guests and communication overall was quite effective. The 'gap' that did appear was in regards to compensation and it appears that the evaluation system has been unsuccessful in overcoming this difficulty.

The performance and evaluation systems should also provide specific guidance and training opportunities for employees to grow and develop. The conclusion drawn from the employee questionnaire was that some properties had yet to realize the benefits derived from training programs yet all the managers strongly agreed that their companies funded job training programs. This discrepancy may be in part that the employees read the question to mean off-site training courses at a college for example. There also may exist a 'gap' between what management feels is appropriate training and the training employees feel they need to meet managements expectations concerning guest service. If the latter is true, this could be an area where a reconciliation between the two parties would save the company considerable money and the participants some measure of anxiety.

Management was asked to rank problems areas on the front desk in regard to employee attitudes as shown in the format of question fourteen. (exhibit nine) Poor performance can be caused by many different factors. some of which may be; inadequate experience, inability, understaffing or ineffective supervision.

Exhibit Nine

14. What are your biggest problems concerning front office personnel with respect to their attitudes? please rank the following:

Lack of interest in work:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Big problem			Somewhat of a problem		Not a problem	

Consider hotel-resort work to be of low status:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Big problem			Somewhat of a problem		Not a problem	

Money is everything to employees:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Big problem			Somewhat of a problem		Not a problem	

Employees expect too much (short work hours, coffee breaks, long lunches, freedom to leave work, etc.).

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Big			Somewhat of			Not a
problem			a problem			problem

WHAT MATERIALS DO YOU CURRENTLY USE TO DEAL WITH THESE PROBLEMS AND CONCERNS?

- _____ Use my own resources*
- _____ Use resources provided by professional organizations
- _____ Private consultants
- _____ None

* If you use your own resources which have you found to be successful and why?

The common denominator of the above mentioned is that they can be corrected fairly easily by training and budgeting. Attitude training on the other hand is very difficult. Employee attitudes and beliefs have grown out of past job related experiences as well as all kinds of family and social programming. Formal training to eradicate bad attitudes and replace them with attitudes that improve employee efficiency often backfires leaving the employee with a negative impression of management. Outstanding service companies have found only informal, personal enrichment training to be effective but even this is very difficult to administer. (Davidow, Uttal, 1989)

Recruiting people with positive attitudes towards guest service in the first place and simply training them to be better at their jobs seems to be the key to success.

The response to question fourteen indicates management felt without a doubt that the four attitudes listed did not pose a problem at their front desks. One would have to at least conclude that recruitment and training methods are quite effective in this area and that management goes out of its way to prevent bad attitudes from developing.

The only contradiction seems to be wages. Management does not feel money is everything to employees which may be true, but question eight revealed that eighty percent of the respondents did not feel their contributions in meeting managements expectations was reflected in the pay scale. A gap may exist here between managements and employees view of the importance of financial compensation and again I would propose that management allow the employees to participate in

identifying the measures on which their pay is based:

Question fifteen was asked of the General Manager of the property and the front office personnel. (exhibit ten) It was intended to analyze both groups perception of what the appropriate allocation of job skills would be for maximizing efficiency within an organization.

Graphs one, two and three (exhibit eleven) have the following skills; technical, human and conceptual allocated by management and the front office personnel for the three employment levels within the company. Technical skills included the ability to use all the physical equipment and techniques that are utilized in producing the intended service. (employee question five) Human skills relate to the persons ability to interact with other employees and the guest. This would incorporate areas such as teamwork, cooperation, problem solving and dealing with conflict. Conceptual skills deal with making short and long term strategic decisions and the capability of implementing them.

Graphs one, two and three (exhibit eleven) indicate that both management and employees feel human skills are the most important for all personnel with the exception, management notes front office employee's technical skills should equal their human skills. The graphs also show that as seniority increases, the need for conceptual skills increase while technical skills decrease and visa versa with human skills remaining fairly constant. There are no real surprises here as the bars on the graphs are fairly even and one could surmise that management and the front office employees agree on job skill

allocation which would certainly enhance the relationship between the two parties. As one employee commented; "Everyone must be strong in human skills in this industry, most of all the front of the house employee. We depend on management for thinking of the future-ideas to keep us in business, and to have strong human skills in dealing with employees and guests. Supervisors, being the liaison between management and employees, making sure the systems are understood and are carried out by front desk staff."

Exhibit Ten

QUESTION NUMBER FIFTEEN

Shown below is a conceptual framework for thinking about the skills needed at various levels within an organization. The skills are divided into three categories: conceptual (devising new systems), technical (use of equipment) and human skills (communication etc.). Personnel are divided into management, supervisors and front office employees. Fill in the chart below with the percentage of each skill you feel is necessary at each of the three levels.

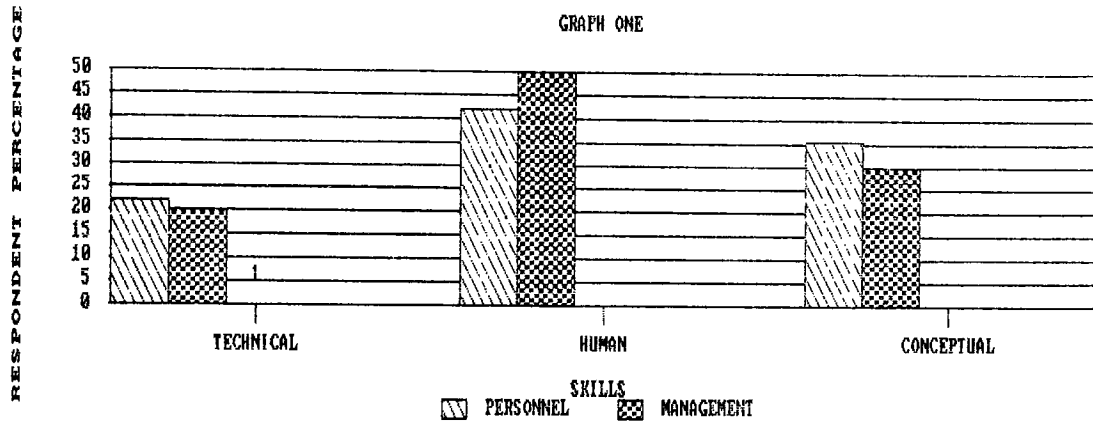
	Technical skills	Human skills	Conceptual skills	
Management		GRAPH NUMBER ONE		= 100%
Supervisors		GRAPH NUMBER TWO		= 100%
Front office personnel		GRAPH NUMBER THREE		= 100%

Comments on your rationale for choosing the percentages as you did.

Exhibit Eleven

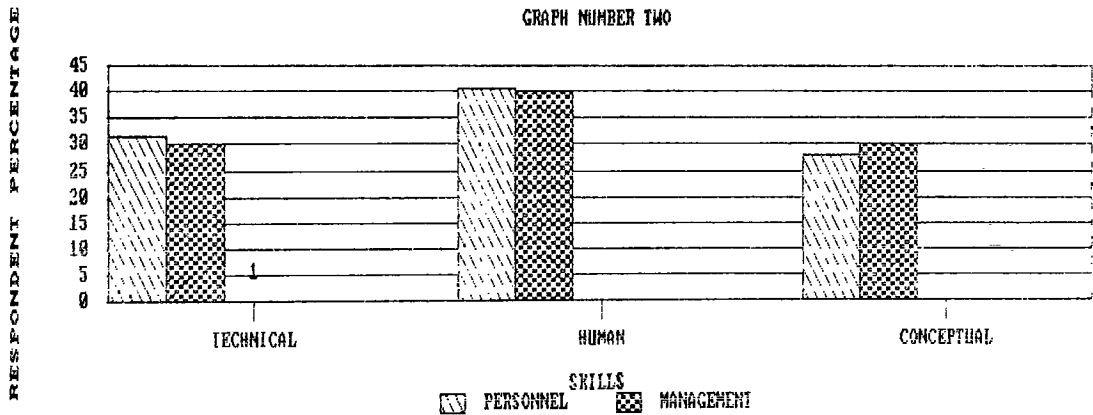
MANAGEMENT

GRAPH ONE



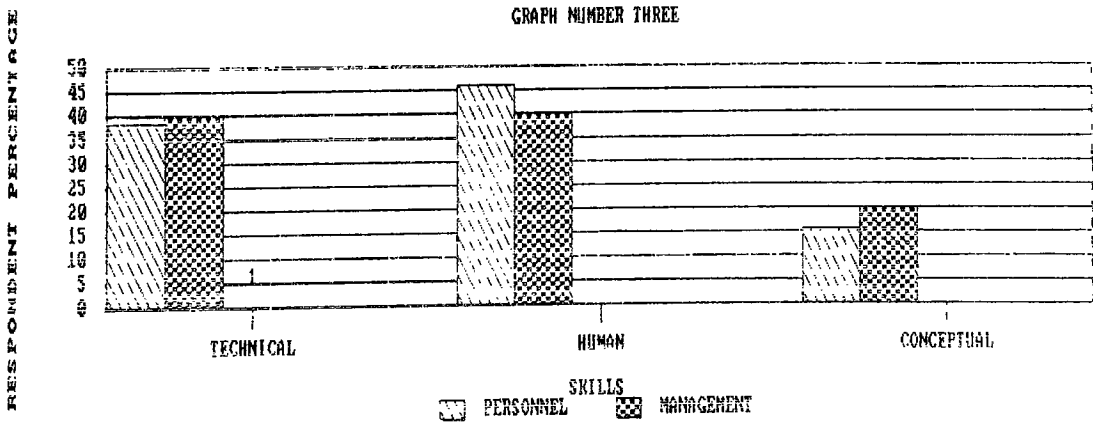
SUPERVISORS

GRAPH NUMBER TWO



FRONT OFFICE PERSONNEL

GRAPH NUMBER THREE



CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY

The most prevalent denouement of the study seems to be that this population of hotel-resort businesses is in a period of transition and is striving to close any gaps in management-employee relations in order to obtain the highest level of guest service possible.

These companies now realize the impact front office employees have in meeting and exceeding guest expectations. It has been recognized that the consequences of the ineffective handling of the 'moments of truth' and poor service recovery are far reaching and extremely difficult to correct when allowed to flourish. Management seems to have realized that there is no quick way to create a service-oriented climate and culture within their organization. There appears to be an understanding that any successful approach would have to be multifaceted concerning some basic responsibilities and actions both conceptually and in practice. This particular study detailed the most compelling points in order to determine if these companies were on the road to success during this critical period. This study contends that management should offer job descriptions that clearly specify the impact that each person's position can have on customer service. When a guest first enters a property they have had neither negative or positive experiences, they simply have

expectations. These expectations are fragile opportunities for the front office employees. If they are not met from the beginning, the all important first impression may be lost. It follows that employees must be well trained before being presented to guests. Hotel-resorts simply can no longer yield to budgetary restraint by using on-the-job training as an inexpensive way of breaking in new employees.

"Customers want to be served by knowledgeable personnel, not by somebody wearing an 'in-training' badge or hat. They want to get what they came for without having to stumble through a trail-and-error exercise with a poorly prepared trainee." (Lisewood, 1990) The study uncovered that within this transition there was a new emphasis on training within some of the companies. Mr. Unger, General Manager of Hidden Valley, Huntsville, Ontario wrote "communication is the key to success through team building and training." The reason why other companies failed to realize the benefits that can be derived from well thought out training programs was left to supposition and could be further studied in another paper.

The study also clearly shows that communication efforts alone have an immense impact on employee relations and guest service and that in fact employee and guest expectations are very closely related. Management must listen closely to the front office employees to determine their special needs to properly perform their roles. Along with listening closely, these employees should be encouraged to report problems and offer ideas for improvement. Identifying the companies awkward procedures and system restrictions that employees feel block them from delivering superior service allows management to

also verify the opinions obtained from the guests. The instruments the respondent companies use to determine customers reaction to service policies and procedures are very important and complex and could possibly warrant a study by itself.

Closely related to employee participation is the concept of empowerment in which management gives the front office employees the authority to do whatever is necessary to meet customer expectations. Empowering and having the employees participate in the decision making process ranked fairly high in importance with regard to management's move towards a service driven front desk operation. Highly successful service driven retail companies such as Nornstrom and L.L Bean certainly believe that customer discontent is usually related to either employee apathy or a lack of authority for the employee to correct problems as they occur. Hospitality service companies can apply the same principles with appropriate modifications to their service delivery systems and enjoy the benefits. Scaled down programs such as quality circles and performance teams could be utilized to enhance participation and empowerment.

Another area the project questioned but did not fully develop was motivation. It was determined that employees did not feel the pay scale was a source of motivation. We know that there are many ways successful managers motivate and reward employees and uncovering these methods might be an interesting project. The importance of these two areas in all businesses may be summed up by a quote from Lee Iacocca, Chief Executive Officer of Chrysler Corporation,

"management is quite simple" he says, "the job of a manager requires but two basic talents: being able to motivate and communicate."

Desatnick (1987)

SUMMARY

An area that produced some difficulty and uncertainty was that of the study's population. It was originally proposed that the front office employees of three resorts in central Ontario would be surveyed all being rated as four star resorts by the Ontario Hotel-Motel Association and all being within a three hour drive of Metropolitan Toronto. It was soon discovered that since the resorts were relatively small, approximately two-hundred rooms, and having an average of only seven employees it would be necessary to increase the sample population to six properties in order to buttress any conclusions that I might draw. It was found that although the companies were initially receptive to the concept of the study, management became reluctant upon receiving the questionnaire. The reason given for their concern was that they felt the information required was critical to their ability to compete with the neighboring resorts and thus wanted this information kept confidential. Another reason, although never put in actual words was that they simply felt they did not have the time. The energy and especially the time required to convince the individual properties's management to actually complete the questionnaire proved to be somewhat of a limiting factor. Changing the survey demographics to encompass a much larger area would have meant including properties with a lower status rating outside the travel time zone thus altering the basic proposition.

One area the study seemed to substantiate was that the concepts discussed were all interconnected and that it was essential that management not become obsessed with any individual aspect of service quality. It was found that this resulted in management constantly discovering new measures and adding them to the existing ones, Davidow and Utal (1989) found that over time when this occurs, the number and variety of quality measures tend to mushroom to the point of being unmanageable.

Building the infrastructure to interconnect these principles is a task that never ceases. Technological change constantly threatens to render existing infrastructures obsolete and inefficient. Competition is always on the prowl to out-service the properties who fail to meet and exceed the guests ever changing expectations. Even the world's economy has a severe impact on the mid-sized hotel-resorts ability to survive and meet it's goals . Most would agree that it is essential for these properties to move as quickly as possible in this transition phase. Only sheer determination will serve to eliminate any 'gaps' in management-employees relations that may hinder their progress in providing world class hospitality service to their customers, both internally and externally.

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