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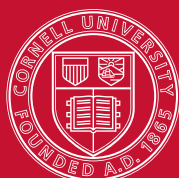


Cornell Hospitality Report

The Effects of Organizational Standards and Support Functions on Guest Service and Guest Satisfaction in Restaurants

by Alex M. Susskind, Ph.D., K. Michele Kacmar, Ph.D., and Carl P. Borchgrevink, Ph.D.

Vol. 7, No 8, May 2007



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CHR Reports,
Volume 7, No. 8 (May 2007)
Single copy price US\$50
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CHR Reports are produced for the benefit
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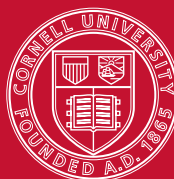
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The Effects of Organizational Standards and Support Functions on Guest Service and Guest Satisfaction in Restaurants

by Alex M. Susskind, K. Michele Kacmar, and Carl P. Borchgrevink

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A model examining the relationship between restaurant employees' reactions to their work environment and their jobs as service providers and guest satisfaction was tested among 25 restaurants from a casual dining restaurant chain. In the model, the relationship between guest service employees' work-related perceptions and attitudes is connected to guests' reported satisfaction. Results show that employees' perception of organizational standards for service delivery being present in their restaurants was strongly related to their perceptions of receiving adequate support from coworkers and supervisors to perform their jobs. Employees' perceived support from coworkers was significantly related to service providers' guest orientation (commitment to their guests), while perceived support from supervisors proved to be a weak influence on guest orientation. Ultimately service providers' guest orientation was strongly related to guests' satisfaction with their service experience in the restaurant.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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The Effects of Organizational Standards and Support Functions on Guest Service and Guest Satisfaction in Restaurants

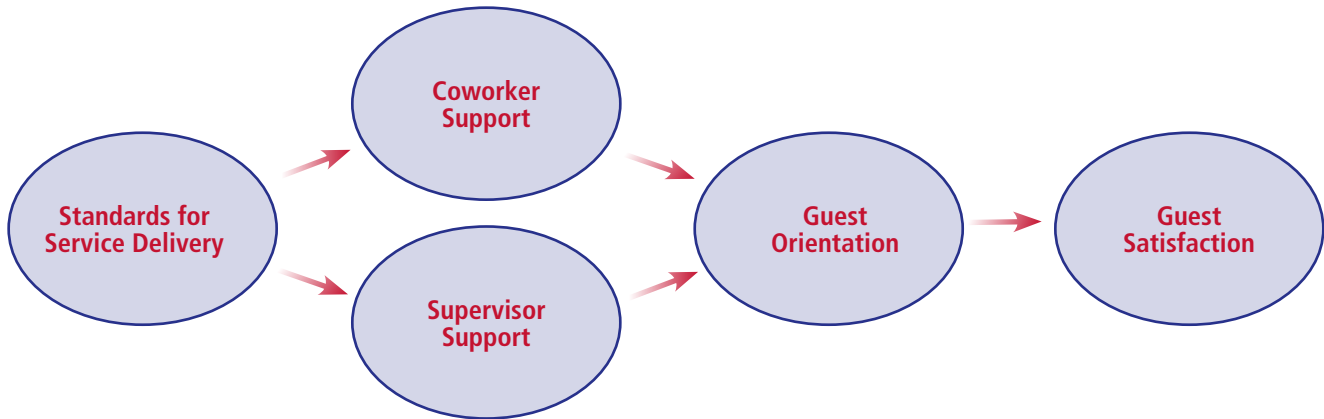
by Alex M. Susskind, K. Michele Kacmar, and Carl P. Borchgrevink

Menu innovation, product development, and product execution are all important to restaurant guests, but service may be the essential element for ensuring that a restaurant guest has a good experience. The complication that arises when restaurant managers focus on improving guest service is that a service transaction is created by at least three parties: namely, management or owners, coworkers, and the guests themselves.¹ As a consequence, the success of a service endeavor is influenced by factors relating to all three of those parties: (1) guest variables, such as demographics or behavior, (2) service-provider variables, such as demographics, behavior, mood, and attitudes, and (3) contextual variables, such as the organizational environment, structure, leadership, and coworkers.²

¹ A.M. Susskind, K.M. Kacmar, and C.P. Borchgrevink, "Customer Service Providers' Attitudes Relating to Customer Service and Customer Satisfaction in the Customer-Server Exchange (CSX)," *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 88, No. 1 (2003), pp. 179-187.

² W.S.Z. Ford and C.N. Etienne, "Can I Help You? A Framework for Interdisciplinary Research on Customer-service Encounters," *Management Communication Quarterly*, Vol. 7 (1994), pp. 413-441.

Model of guest service processes and organizational outcomes



Adapted from: A.M. Susskind, K.M. Kacmar, and C.P. Borchgrevink, "Customer Service Providers' Attitudes Relating to Customer Service and Customer Satisfaction in the Customer-Server Exchange (CSX)," *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 88, No. 1 (2003), pp. 179-187.

Hogan *et al.* applied the term service orientation to explain how the parties to a service transaction might react to that experience.³ Hogan and colleagues described service orientation as "a set of attitudes and behaviors that affects the staff of any organization and its guests."⁴ Likewise, service orientation has been described as service practices that assess "the degree to which an organization emphasizes, in multiple ways, meeting guest needs and expectations for service quality."⁵ Inherent in the definition of guest-service processes is the concept that line-level employees have a critical influence on guests' experience with services. While that idea is intellectually appealing, researchers have yet to specify exactly how service-oriented behavior and attitudes among line-level employees translate into guest satisfaction, particularly regarding restaurant experiences.

A Model of Guest Service

Seeking to fill that gap, we model the service-orientation framework in Exhibit 1.⁶ The model begins with employees' perceptions of organizational standards for service delivery. We see these standards for service delivery as an anteced-

ent to employees' perceptions of coworker and supervisory support. Employees' perceived coworker and supervisory support, in turn, are precursors to service workers' guest orientation. At the end of the service-orientation chain, we suggest that front-line service workers' guest orientation is an antecedent of guests' reported satisfaction with their service experience. In this report we present a test of this model, but first we further define and discuss the elements of the model in Exhibit 1.

Organizational standards. At the beginning of the model are organizational standards for service, which are a key influence on employees' behavior and service outcomes. Standards consist of: (a) organizational goals and objectives, (b) managerial expectations for job performance, and (c) the implicit importance placed on those goals, objectives, and performance expectations.⁷ Because line-level employees are responsible for the bulk of interaction with restaurant guests, those employees become the link between an organization's goals and its guests.⁸ By the same token, front-line service providers must have standards in place to guide, direct, and monitor their actions, as well as those of management.⁹

³ J. Hogan, R. Hogan, and C.M. Busch, "How to Measure Service Orientation," *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 69 (1984), pp. 167-173.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

⁵ B. Schneider, S.S. White, and M.C. Paul, "Linking Service Climate and Customer Perceptions of Service Quality: Test of a Causal Model," *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 83 (1998), pp. 150-163.

⁶ Adapted from: Susskind *et al.*, pp. 179-187.

⁷ G.H. Litwin and R.A. Stringer, Jr., *Motivation and Organizational Climate* (Boston: Harvard University Graduate School of Business, 1968).

⁸ D. Grisaffe, "Putting Customer Satisfaction in its Place: Broader Organizational Research Perspectives versus Measurement Myopia," *Journal of Consumer Satisfaction, Dissatisfaction, and Complaining Behavior*, Vol. 13 (2000), pp. 1-16.

⁹ Susskind *et al.*, pp. 179-187; and Susskind *et al.*, pp. 53-77.

EXHIBIT 2

Guest-service Attitude Questions

Standards for Service Delivery Items

1. The managers believe that well trained guest service employees are the key to providing excellent guest service in our restaurant.
2. In the restaurant I work for, we set very high standards for guest service.
3. Our management believes that no job is so well done that it couldn't be done better.
4. The managers believe that if we are happy, excellent guest service will result.

Coworker Support Items

1. I find my coworkers very helpful when performing my guest service duties.
2. When performing my service duties, I rely heavily on my coworkers.
3. My co-workers provide me with important work-related information and advice that make performing my job easier.

Supervisor Support Items

1. I find my supervisor very helpful in performing my guest service duties.
2. When performing my service duties, I rely heavily on my supervisor.
3. My supervisor provides me with important work-related information and advice that make performing my job easier.
4. I can count on my supervisor to do the "right thing" when serving guests.

Guest Orientation Items

1. When performing my job, the guest is most important to me.
2. It is best to ensure that our guests receive the best possible service available.
3. If possible, I meet all requests made by my guests.
4. As an employee responsible for providing service, guests are very important to me.
5. I believe that providing timely, efficient service to guests is a major function of my job.

Guest Satisfaction with Service Items

1. Overall, I am happy with the service I just received.
2. The employee(s) who assisted me seemed interested in providing excellent service.
3. The employee(s) who assisted me appeared happy to serve me.
4. The employee(s) performed their duties as I anticipated.
5. The employee(s) who assisted me appeared to be cold and distant.
6. This restaurant's employees really focus on guest service.

Adapted from: A.M. Susskind, K.M. Kacmar, and C.P. Borchgrevink, "Customer Service Providers' Attitudes Relating to Customer Service and Customer Satisfaction in the Customer-Server Exchange (CSX)," *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 88, No. 1 (2003), pp. 179-187.

Standards for service delivery are important because they provide the foundation on which products and services are produced, delivered, and evaluated. Research has shown that managerial philosophies and values behind an organization's internal business practices influence both service personnel and guests, and that promoting such values can improve employees' well being and performance.¹⁰ Moreover, employees' perceptions of organizational support are stronger when employees believe that they are being

¹⁰ Grisaffe, pp. 1-16; and M.J. Schmit and S.P. Allscheid, "Employee Attitudes and Customer Satisfaction: Making Theoretical and Empirical Connections," *Personnel Psychology*, Vol. 48 (1995), pp. 521-536.

guided by a strong set of standards.¹¹ Although the presence of strong standards promotes the guest-server exchange (GSX), standards alone do not guarantee excellent service. For that reason we propose that support at the line level is an outgrowth of standards, and that standards-based support influences the way service is perceived by and delivered to guests.

¹¹ S. Armeli, R. Eisenberger, P. Fasolo, and P. Lynch, "Perceived Organizational Support and Police Performance: The Moderating Influence of Socioemotional Needs," *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 83 (1998), pp. 288-297; R. Eisenberger, J. Cummings, S. Armeli, and P. Lynch, "Perceived Organizational Support, Discretionary Treatment, and Job Satisfaction," *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 82 (1997), pp. 812-820; Susskind *et al.*, pp. 179-187; and Susskind *et al.*, pp. 53-77.

Perceptions of support. With standards setting the stage, service personnel should use those standards as a guide to support their efforts to take appropriate service-related actions. Support in this effort comes from two levels, namely, coworkers and supervisors or managers.¹² This two-tier support framework has been tested in service-related organizations outside of the hospitality industry in a study that examined support functions coming from internal constituents (such as other departments or units) and general facilitative conditions (such as support from company leadership or management).¹³ Separating support functions into coworker and supervisory parts emphasizes the fact that line-level employees and their supervisors play distinct support roles in the GSX.

Coworker support is defined as the extent to which employees believe their coworkers provide them with work-related assistance to aid them in carrying out their service duties.¹⁴ Not only is support from coworkers a key to service success, but it typically influences other organizational elements such as morale.¹⁵ Likewise, supervisory support is defined as the extent to which employees believe that their supervisors offer them work-related help in performing their jobs.¹⁶ In the model we propose that standards promote support from both coworkers and supervisors to help ensure service quality, and we further suggest that standards motivate employees and supervisors to support one another in their work.

Guest orientation. For the purposes of this report, we use the following definition of guest orientation: the importance that service providers place on their guests' needs and the extent to which service providers are willing to put forth time and effort to satisfy their guests.¹⁷ Essential to guest service, guest orientation is influenced by employees' interaction with the other constituents who help provide a service (i.e., guests, coworkers, and superiors).¹⁸

Along this line, service providers who customize their service activities to enhance guests' service experiences would be described as guest oriented. For example, servers who are proactive, anticipate their guests' needs, and are willing to go the extra mile for their guests would be

considered guest-oriented. Service providers who receive support from their coworkers and superiors while performing their duties are likely to show a stronger commitment to the service process and their guests, particularly when the supportive actions of others are based on the organization's standards for service delivery.¹⁹

Guest satisfaction. Guest satisfaction is the desired outcome for this process, with the idea that satisfied guests will return, thereby improving profits. We don't test the connection between guest satisfaction and profitability, but it makes sense that a service operation that cannot satisfy its customers will not long be in business. With regard to the connection between servers' attitudes and guest satisfaction, we were surprised to find a limited number of research studies that have examined this connection.²⁰ This report examines the connection of service providers' attitudes and perceptions of their work-related duties with how those attitudes are connected to their guests' satisfaction. The key piece of this test is the concept that when service providers are committed to their role in the service process, they are more likely to consistently offer their guests excellent service.

Study Details

We surveyed a total of 324 service employees from twenty-five midwestern units of a restaurant chain for this investigation. The sample comprised an average of twelve employees from each of the twenty-five units, ranging from six to twenty-four employees per unit. Forty percent of the line-level participants were male, with an average age of 24 and a range of 17 through 45.²¹ The average length of service for these respondents at the time of survey administration was barely 19 months, with a range of one month to 10 years.²² To assess guest satisfaction in the restaurants, we surveyed an average of eleven guests from each of the twenty-five restaurant units, for a total of 271 usable responses from guests.

During a pre-shift meeting, line-level employees were asked to complete a brief questionnaire we developed (see Exhibit 2 for the items used). The questionnaire was designed to evaluate the line-level employees' perceptions of standards for service delivery, coworker support, supervisory support, and guest orientation. For each statement the participants were asked to indicate their agreement using a Likert-type scale, ranging from strongly agree = 5 to strongly disagree = 1. Individual employees' data were aggregated to the unit level.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ For research that has investigated the link, see, for example: Brady and Cronin, pp. 241-251; J. Johnson, "Linking Employee Perceptions to Customer Satisfaction," *Personnel Psychology*, Vol. 49 (1996), pp. 831-852; and Susskind *et al.*, pp. 179-187.

²¹ Mean age = 24.55; Median age = 22; Standard deviation = 5.14 years.

²² Mean tenure = 18.76; Median tenure = 12 months, Standard deviation = 20.32 months.

¹² Susskind *et al.*, pp. 179-187; and Susskind *et al.*, pp. 53-77.

¹³ Schneider *et al.*, pp. 150-163.

¹⁴ Susskind *et al.*, pp. 179-187; and Susskind *et al.*, pp. 53-77.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ S.W. Kelley, "Developing Customer Orientation among Service Employees," *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 20 (1992), pp. 27-36.

¹⁸ M.K. Brady and J.J. Cronin, "Customer Orientation: Effects on Customer-service Perceptions and Outcome Behavior," *Journal of Service Research*, Vol. 3 (2001), pp. 241-251.

EXHIBIT 3

Methodological and statistical details

Data Aggregation

To offer sufficient support to aggregate these variables to the organizational level we examined the $r_{WG(i)}$ statistic to determine within organization agreement.¹ This technique offers a measure of reliability within and across the units to ensure that aggregation of the data is possible and appropriate. The $r_{WG(i)}$ was computed for each scale, in each of the 25 units. The employees' responses from the 25 units aggregated to the organizational level exceed the recommended cutoff of .60,² as follows: $r_{WG(4)} = .78$ for standards for service delivery, $r_{WG(3)} = .77$ for coworker support, $r_{WG(4)} = .73$ for supervisor support, and $r_{WG(5)} = .92$ for guest orientation. Likewise, the guest satisfaction data yielded from the 271 guests from the 25 units were well suited to aggregation, indicating a high level of agreement ($r_{WG(6)} = .96$).

Path Analysis

The path model presented as Exhibit 2 was analyzed using least squares static path analysis to examine the modeled direct and indirect effects of relationships presented in the model.³ Path analysis does not establish causal relations with certainty, but helps with quantitative interpretations of potential causal relationships.⁴ In this case, "standards for service delivery" was treated as the exogenous variable in the model, while coworker support, supervisory support, guest orientation, and guest satisfaction were treated as the endogenous variables. The support functions were presented as mediators of the relationship between standards and guest orientation, and guest orientation was presented as a mediator between the support functions and guest satisfaction.

The path model was assessed for fit based on the recommendations that: **(a)** global chi-square tests for the sum of squared error for the model be non-significant; **(b)** each path linkage in the model be tested for significance at the $p < .05$ level by calculating a confidence interval around the observed path coefficient; and **(c)** sampling error analyses were conducted to examine each unspecified path in model to rule out any misspecifications in the model or a better fitting alternative moderating or nested model.⁵

¹ L.R. James, R.G. Demaree, and G. Wolf, "Estimating Within-group Interrater Reliability with and Without Response Bias," *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 69 (1984), pp. 85-98.

² See: L.R. James, "Aggregation-bias Estimates of Perceptual Agreement," *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 67 (1982), pp. 219-229.

³ J.E. Hunter and M.A. Hamilton, "PATH: A Program in BASICA," East Lansing: Michigan State University, 1995.

⁴ C.P. Borchgrevink and F.J. Boster, "Leader-Member Exchange and Interpersonal Relationships: Construct Validity and Path Model," *Journal of Hospitality & Leisure Marketing*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (1998), pp. 53-80.

⁵ *Ibid.*

Using a similar six-item questionnaire, we collected satisfaction data from the guests at each restaurant (again, see Exhibit 2). As with the employee data, we aggregated guests' responses to the unit level, with satisfaction means ranging from a low of 1.77 to the maximum of 5.00. The reason that we did not match specific guests' reactions to specific employees was that several employees served each party, especially when employee shifts changed during the meal. We should also point out that such a comparison was not the purpose of this study.

Study Results and Discussion

Our test of the proposed model essentially confirmed the importance of guest-oriented employees to ensuring guest satisfaction. As we explain below, the support of coworkers was more important than the support of administrators in establishing guest orientation, but supervisors also had a key role. With regard to the technical aspects of the model, we tested the model by analyzing our data using least squares

static path analysis. As explained in Exhibit 3, this procedure does not establish causality among the variables but does provide an explanation of the data sets. The test of the model revealed that the hypothesized model produced a very good fit to the data ($\chi^2 [5] = 1.55, p = .90$). The descriptive statistics and correlations of the variables presented in the model are reported in Exhibit 4.²³

This analysis suggests that employees and guests in the twenty-five restaurants reacted similarly to the service environment they created together. These results replicate those of a study in which we examined other service-based organizations (including restaurants, hotels, and a variety of retail stores).²⁴ Both studies show that employees who report high levels of standards for service delivery indicated a strong presence of coworker support, which was then re-

²³ The methodological and statistical detail regarding the unit level data aggregation and the path analyses are presented in Exhibit 3.

²⁴ Susskind *et al.*, pp. 179-187.

EXHIBIT 4

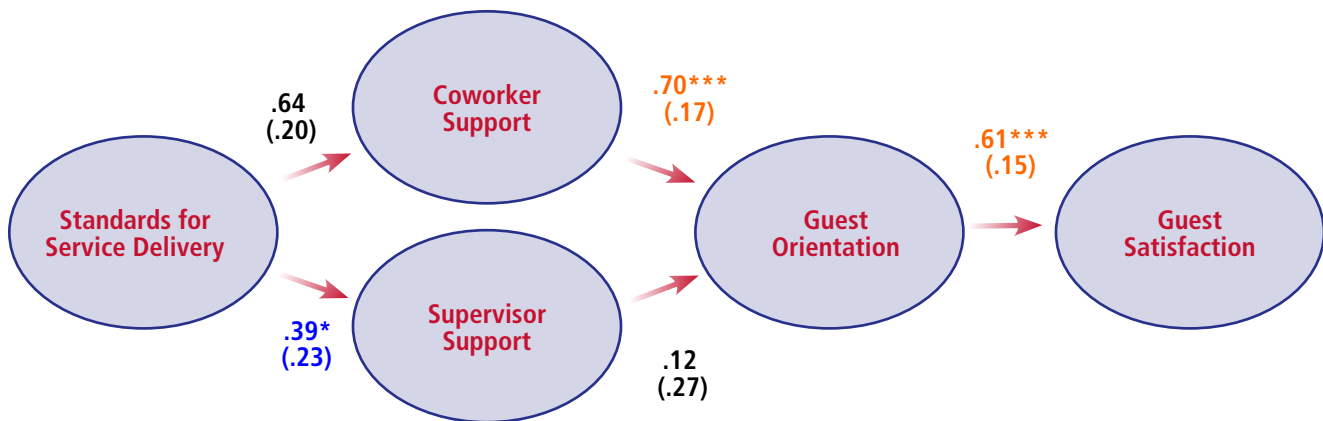
Descriptive statistics and correlations from the final aggregated scales at the organizational

Level	M	SD	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
(1) Standards for Service Delivery	3.64	.38	[.68]				
(2) Coworker Support	3.77	.43	.43*	[.74]			
(3) Supervisor Support	3.47	.47	.64**	.08	[.68]		
(4) Guest Orientation	4.23	.39	.49*	.63**	.24	[.91]	
(5) Guest Satisfaction	3.38	1.03	.48*	.59**	.30	.62**	[.96]

Note: $N = 25$. The aggregation statistic $r_{WG(j)}$ (from James *et al.*, 1984) is presented in [brackets] and represents the average across the 25 units in the company; ** = $p < .01$ * = $p < .05$.

EXHIBIT 5

Relationships in the model of the guest service processes and organizational outcomes



Notes: This model was test at the unit level. Figures in (parentheses) represent standard errors for the path coefficients; * significant at $p < .05$; *** significant at $p < .001$.

lated to their perceptions of a guest orientation. At the same time, those employees reported a weaker level of supervisor support. In the restaurants where employees reported a high level of guest orientation, the guests reported a higher level of guest satisfaction with service.

Three Points of Interest

A clear set of relationships emerged from the analyses. Guest satisfaction was related directly and indirectly to the service-related factors shown in Exhibit 5. Some of these factors are under management’s control (i.e., standards for service de-

livery and supervisor support), while others rest solely with the front-line service providers (i.e., coworker support and guest orientation). The test of the model presented in Exhibit 4 revealed three notable findings, which we discuss next.

Standards count. First, employees’ perceptions of standards for service lay the foundation for how they view their jobs as service providers. When employees are aware of the organization’s goals for service and how the company’s standards play a role in that process, employees are better equipped to meet those goals. Despite the importance of standards, support functions are mediators of the relationship

between standards for service and employees' guest orientation. Thus, standards alone are not sufficient to foster employees' guest orientation. Nevertheless, the support and direction that emerge from standards are important to building a guest orientation among staff members. Our study found that when perceived standards for service delivery were high, employees reported higher levels of support from both coworkers and supervisors. Of those two sources of support, however, the influence of standards on supervisor support was weaker than the influence on coworker support.²⁵ What this suggests is that standards for service are fostered among coworkers more notably than with supervisors or managers. This is consistent with how the front line of a restaurant works, as staff members work hard together, with managers monitoring the situation but (usually) not working in the same way as the front-line employees. Finally, even though weaker than coworker support in the model, the support from managers was not insignificant and therefore represents an important piece in the GSX.

Coworker support. Second, we found that coworker support was significantly related to guest orientation, while supervisor support was not so related.²⁶ These findings suggest that the perceived presence of supportive coworkers in a service environment led employees to a higher level of commitment to their guests. While having a supportive group of peers by an employee's side promotes guest orientation, the presence of supervisory support doesn't have the same effect. Our data cannot say why that might be true, but coworker support clearly contains elements that do not exist in relationships between supervisors and subordinates. Certainly, this finding supports the important role of line-level employees' interaction with guests, as compared to the lesser interaction

²⁵ $\beta = .64, p < .001, R^2 = .38$ for the path between standards and coworker support and $\beta = .39, p < .05, R^2 = .11$ for the path between standards and supervisory support.

²⁶ $\beta = .70, p < .001$, for the path between coworker support and customer orientation and $\beta = .12$ (non-significant), for the path between supervisory support and customer orientation with a combined $R^2 = .50$ on customer orientation.

of managers with guests. It's clear that employees view support from coworkers differently than they view support from their managers and supervisors, but support from both sources remain necessary in service delivery.²⁷

Guest satisfaction. Third, guest satisfaction with service was strongly related to high levels of guest orientation, as reported by both the restaurants' servers and guests.²⁸ All restaurateurs would like to believe this to be true: service providers who demonstrate a strong commitment to their guests will make their guests happier than those servers who are less guest focused. These findings suggest that when guest-oriented employees fulfill their roles as service providers, they deliver the kind of service that boosts guests' satisfaction.

The variables that we just discussed explain up to half of the variance in the model's relationships. For instance, standards account for about 38 percent of the variance in coworker support and 11 percent of the variance in supervisor support, or about half of the influence in that relationship. Operators should be pleased to know about the importance of standards in supporting service excellence. A similarly strong relationship is found between support functions and guest orientation. In the model 50 percent of the variance in guest orientation is attributed to support functions, the majority of which comes from coworkers. This suggests that camaraderie and support among the service staff are key influences for employees' commitment to guest service. In this case, managerial and supervisory support is viewed as a peripheral element. Lastly, over one-third of the variance in guest satisfaction could be accounted for by the level of servers' guest orientation. This finding suggests that restaurateurs cannot count out food, comfort, ambience, and the like as contributors to guest satisfaction, but employees' service attitude remains a solid contributor to that satisfaction. The levels of variance explained indicate that this

²⁷ See: Susskind *et al.*, pp. 179-187.

²⁸ $\beta = .61, p < .001$, for the path between customer orientation and customer satisfaction, with an $R^2 = .35$.

Restaurant managers should note the strong relationship between employees' guest orientation and guests' satisfaction.

model provides a useful framework for operators to focus on elements in the GSX that lead to enhanced guest satisfaction.

Managerial Implications

All of these findings should be useful to restaurant managers, but we believe that our finding of the strong relationship between employees' guest orientation and guests' reporting satisfaction with service is particularly important. This is, after all, a relationship that provides a bottom-line-oriented rationale for operators to act, because of the well established link of guest satisfaction with repeat-purchase intentions, favorable word-of-mouth, and, to some extent, guest loyalty.²⁹ Consequently, we advise hospitality managers to engage in activities that will increase their employees' guest orientation. This research suggests that employees' guest orientation can be influenced by training initiatives that focus (among other things) on service standards, team building, and commitment. By implication, we believe that guest orientation can also be improved through training in understanding guests' needs and through careful employee selection and orientation.

Training issues. We did not ask our respondents any questions about the nature of their existing training, but it seems worthwhile here to touch on what other studies have to say regarding training employees. For service standards to guide and direct employees those standards need to be developed and articulated in a way that is generally accepted, clear, and understandable. Training should emphasize the specific goals, objectives, expectations, and importance of

the standards, as well as their underlying rationale.³⁰ Beyond management's role, employees' participation in developing and implementing the standards will lead to greater understanding and acceptance. This is shown, for example, in the cases of The Boulders and the Cincinnati Marriott Northeast, both of which were identified as having best practices in service quality.³¹ At The Boulders owners and managers developed ten so-called cornerstone principles that promote desired service quality standards. Using a coworker-support mechanism, these service standards were communicated by dedicated long-term employees who explicitly prepared and continuously trained to deliver the desired service message. Employees who were particularly good at adhering to the standards were recognized in an employee recognition program. The Cincinnati Marriott Northeast secured commitment and adherence to its service standards through pledge cards, daily meetings, hotel-specific cheers, and other activities focused on creating the desired service spirit. Here too, employee recognition was incorporated as an incentive for exceptional service quality.

The model suggests that, just as occurred in those two cases, increased articulation and acceptance of service standards lead to higher degrees of coworker support, which, in turn, leads to increased guest orientation. This suggests that team building focusing on clearly articulated shared standards should create among employees a cohesive group that supports each other's guest orientation and guest focused activities. We see this cohesive staff, for instance, at The Inn at Little Washington, where all employees share guest mood ratings and desired guest mood rating standards.³² If guests are seen as not having the desired mood quotient, all of the

²⁹ E.W. Anderson and M.W. Sullivan, "The Antecedents and Consequences of Customer Satisfaction for Firms," *Marketing Science*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (1993), pp. 125-143; M. Davidow, "The Bottom Line Impact of Organizational Responses to Customer Complaints," *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (2000), pp. 473-490; I. Skogland and J.A. Siguaw, "Are Your Satisfied Customers Loyal?," *Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly*, Vol. 45, No. 3 (2004), pp. 221-234; and J. Tam, "The Effects of Service Quality, Perceived Value, and Customer Satisfaction on Behavioral Intentions," *Journal of Hospitality & Leisure Marketing*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (2000), pp. 31-43.

³⁰ Litwin and Stringer, *op.cit.*

³¹ C.E. Enz and J.A. Siguaw, "Best Practices in Service Quality," *Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 5 (2000), pp. 20-29.

³² V.J. Wildes, "Unique Training: The Mood Indicator Is an Employee Tool," *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (2002), pp. 193-196.

employees, whether in the front or back of the house, focus their attention on behaving in ways that will improve guests' attitudes. This is consistent with internal marketing suggestions that support from co-workers is essential for guest-contact employees to be able to consistently deliver desired levels service.³³

Considering further the importance of coworker support for developing employees' guest orientation, it would be beneficial to engage in team-building activities that help develop a sense of commitment. We have seen research that links team-building efforts to such actions as coworker support.³⁴ Moreover, organizational citizenship (including coworker support) leads to closer adherence to service standards and increases restaurant guests' perceptions of receiving quality service.³⁵

The role that the standards for service delivery play in building coworker and supervisor support suggests that all training, development, and control efforts must emphasize the service standards. A relentless pursuit of attaining and maintaining desired service standards is essential. In a recent study of service employees in thirty-one food-service establishments, service climate was found to be a strong predictor of guest orientation.³⁶ When service standards were unclear, however, guest orientation suffered. This study also found a strong link between guest orientation and coworker support. Thus, we conclude that the importance of a relentless pursuit of service standards cannot be overemphasized!

Supervisory support. Another implication of our study is that supervisors should focus on delineating standards and encouraging workers' cooperation. Our study found that while supervisors provided more support in restaurants that had clear and explicit service standards, this support from the supervisor was not directly linked to employees'

guest orientation. While the supervisor has an important role to play in clarifying and specifying service standards and building team cohesion, at the same time the supervisor should avoid interfering with the employees' interactions. To do so might interfere with coworkers' support efforts, with the potential cost in employees' guest orientation. Thus, our recommendation is that the supervisor should maintain the focus on the service standards, but step out of the way when service occurs.

One thing that supervisors and operators can do to promote service employees' guest orientation is to train employees to spot and anticipate guests' needs and desires. For example, Restaurants Unlimited and the Left Bank Restaurant Group are two companies that train their servers to seek out and heed the many cues that guests typically display, or even just to ask the guests what they need.³⁷ An obvious cue, for instance, is gifts on the table, which indicates special occasion. The training also points out that nonverbal cues do not always translate across cultures.³⁸

Next Steps

The findings of this study highlight several directions for future research. First, it would be useful to test this model using additional guest-outcome measures such as repeat-patronage intentions, value perceptions, and satisfaction with other dimensions of the restaurant experience, such as food, comfort, or ambience. Additionally, using measures of performance beyond guest satisfaction such as employee performance or firm performance could also shed more light on the pieces of the model presented here. Second, while difficult to do, it would be prudent to secure a matched sample of employee, managerial, and guest responses to test this model entirely for individuals.

In conclusion, this research shows the strong connection between employees' behavior and attitudes and guest satisfaction. Given the dynamic nature of restaurant experiences, developing a better understanding of the elements that can be controlled and managed to improve the service process and perceived outcomes for guests is a key to improving restaurant performance. ■

³³ W.R. George and C. Grönroos, "Developing Customer-conscious Employees at Every Level—Internal Marketing," in *Marketing of Services*, ed. C.A. Congram and M.L. Friedman (Chicago: American Marketing Association, 2002), pp. 236-238; and W.R. George, "Internal Marketing and Organizational Behavior: A Partnership in Developing Customer-conscious Employees at Every Level," *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (1990), pp. 63-70.

³⁴ M. Paulin, R.J. Ferguson, and J. Bergeron, "Service Climate and Organizational Commitment: The Importance of Customer Linkages," *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 59, No. 8 (2006), pp. 906-915.

³⁵ C.C. Bienstock, C.W. DeMoranville, and R.K. Smith, "Organizational-citizenship Behavior and Service Quality," *Journal of Services Marketing*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (2003), pp. 357-378.

³⁶ J. Cha, "Effects of Perceived Service Climate and Service Role Ambiguity on Frontline Employees' Service Orientation in Food-service Establishments" (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University, 2005).

³⁷ A.J. Liddle, "Survey: Devil's in the Details When Pace of Service Is Tweaked," *Nations Restaurant News*, Vol. 39, No. 38 (2005), pp. 140-142.

³⁸ D.R. Carney, J.A. Hall, and L.S. LeBeau, "Beliefs about the Nonverbal Expression of Social Power," *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (2005), pp. 105-123; and A. Furnham, "Actions Speak Louder than Words: Management Body Language: Our Backgrounds and Emotions Are Apparent Before We Say a Word," *Financial Times*, Inside Track, April 12, 1999, p. 13.

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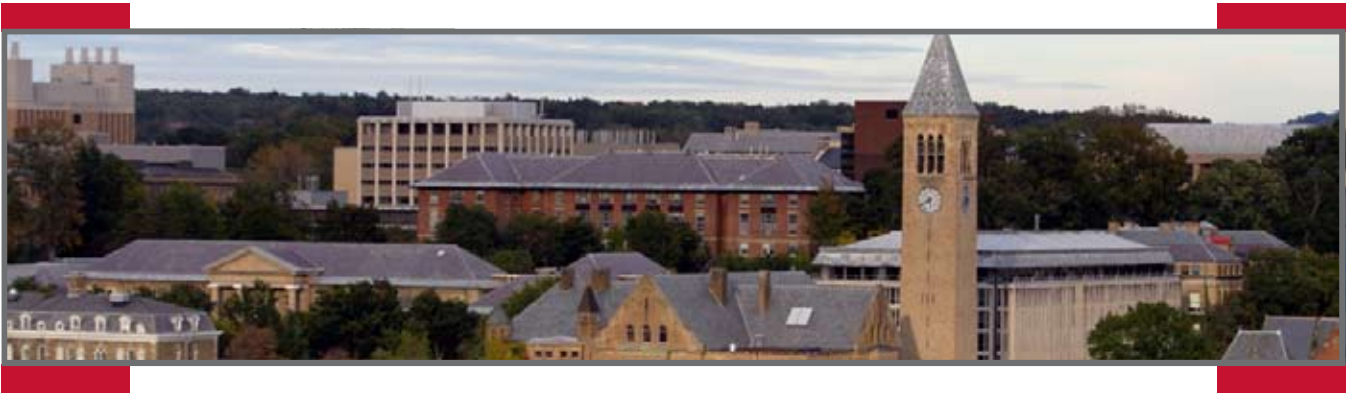
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