

PERCEPTIONS & REALITIES

Peephole-Challenged

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If you design a feedback form based strictly on what *you* think is important to customers, you might misinterpret their feedback to mean they're satisfied when they're not. In the process, you might fail to find out what *is* important.

I came to appreciate this potential for misinterpretation firsthand. While visiting a client, I stayed at a hotel where all the items on the feedback form earned my top ratings. Check-in was swift, the room was spotless, the restaurant was delightful, and so on. Was I a satisfied customer? Absolutely. Until, that is, I heard the chilling sound of someone trying to open the door to my room.

When I went to look out the peephole, I discovered that it was over my head. *Way* over my head. Granted, I'm something less than the tallest person in the world. Still, lots of people who tower over me also wouldn't have been at eye level with it either.

As a frequent traveler, I sometimes forget which room I'm in and absentmindedly try to open the door to the wrong room. Probably the person outside my door was similarly confused, but I wanted to see for myself. And I *didn't* want the person to know that inside the room was a woman traveling alone — and a short one at that.

I thought, I'll just pull over a chair, stand on it, and look through the peephole. But the smallest piece of furniture in the room was a gargantuan arm chair, perfect for curling up in after a long day, but of limited use as a stepstool. I suppose I could have turned over the wastebasket and stood on it to reach the peephole, but it looked flimsy and I wasn't sure it would hold me.

Fortunately, after several tries, the person outside my room left. But I was now something less than a satisfied customer. Yet, nowhere on the feedback form was I asked to rate my



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satisfaction with the location of the peephole. No surprise there. But there was also no space on the form in which I could express my concern.

It's not that I expected an immediate "fix." (Fantasy: I call the Front Desk to complain and moments later, Mr. Maintenance Guy races to my room with a peephole drill and asks me where I'd like my personalized peephole!) But giving guests space on the form to describe their grievances makes it more likely you'll *learn* about those grievances. And if several guests have the same problem, you'll know that it's not an isolated gripe and requires attention.

Not that all complaints are easily resolved. For example, should there be a Tall Person Peephole and a Short Person Peephole? Should it be a sliding peephole? (A peep slit???) How about a cell phone feature enabling us to see who's out there?

As a professional speaker, I've told numerous audiences about this experience and discovered that many hundreds of women are similarly peephole-dissatisfied. But this is not an issue unique to hotels. Part of an effective feedback process for any business and any industry is finding out what's important to your customers and how well you are doing on the things they identify.

In fact, I've evaluated a vast number of surveys for my own research and for clients, and one of the best surveys I've seen focuses on two specific questions:

- ✓ What's important to you in how we deliver our services?
- ✓ With respect to what's important to you, how are we doing?

Give it a try. And when you're the customer, don't let yourself be limited by the feedback form they give you. Keep in mind that you can indicate what's important to you, whether or not they ask. That's something I now do. When I fill out a hotel feedback form, I use any blank space in it to emphasize the importance of providing wastebaskets capable of supporting the weight of one short woman traveling alone. ☺

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