



*We exist to serve others so they may better serve the world. <sup>SM</sup>*

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### *Delivering World-Class Service: Function vs. Purpose*

What is the difference between the doorman opening the hotel's door and the doorman providing a welcoming experience? Or what is the difference between the housekeeper changing the bed sheets and the housekeeper ensuring that the guest has a clean, comfortable bed to sleep in? Some people may say they are actually the same thing, but others would say that one drives the other. One is the function and the other is the purpose. It is one of the simplest, yet most powerful ways to explain service excellence and how to deliver exceptional service at the same time. Understanding the purpose affects "how" the function is performed. The purpose brings deeper meaning to the function. The person delivering the service is not just robotically serving but understands how he/she is contributing to the company's overall purpose.

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For those of us who are in the business of taking care of others, this function vs. purpose concept makes a difference on how we are perceived. As a restaurant server, am I just taking menu orders or am I there to help create an exceptional dining experience? This may sound simple, but you can easily tell which service workers understand their purpose and those who are merely fulfilling functions. In the service business, our fundamental and primary purpose is to provide a memorable experience for our guests, customers, clients, patients, and residents. This concept is applicable from the taxi driver to the registered nurse and from the travel agent to the receptionist.

On a recent flight, I witnessed a truly great flight attendant, who clearly understood his purpose. He even announced the purpose to the passengers before the flight took off. "Ladies and Gentlemen, I thank you very much for allowing me to serve you today. My purpose on this flight is to ensure your safety and to ensure you are well served." And he said it with a huge smile on his face. He proceeded to explain the details of the plane, a little aviation history, and even commented on the manufacturer of the airplane stairs for goodness sake! He seemed genuinely concerned about passengers not being hit with the beverage cart. After serving the initial round of drinks, he even offered to refill drinks on his way back down the aisle. This man clearly loves his job. I actually told him that I noticed his zest for work. He looked up, smiled, and said, "Well, everyday isn't Christmas!" He also said that being a professional is not about the job, but the attitude one brings to the job. It is performing with excellence regardless of personal circumstances or moods for the day. Surely he was working on a big, luxury plane with ample teammates. Nope, a tiny regional jet...by himself (and the pilots of course).

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Contrast that with the gift shop attendant recently at a very upscale hotel. I asked the attendant about the hours of operation for a hotel restaurant, and he told me "I don't know...I just do my time here and go home". He clearly does not understand his purpose.

Those who understand their service purpose believe that going above and beyond is not a chore, but a way of life. So how can companies find these types of people? First, companies don't "create" them, they simply provide a work environment where those types of employees would want to work. Next they go out and hire friendly, professional people. These companies would rather go without the ideal number of staff than having the wrong staff. Why? Star employees don't like working with employees who don't take pride in their work. They get even more peeved when their managers tolerate mediocre performance from the team's under performers. Regardless of how some staff may moan and give excuses of why they "can't do something", they secretly want to know that you, as the manager, absolutely refuse to compromise. Whether it's cleanliness or taking ownership or greeting every customer, employees are happier and more engaged when they know clearly what is expected of them. They want to work for the best.

*...excellence always requires lots of effort.*

They want to go home and tell their family and friends how much they enjoy their workplace. Will this require effort on the part of the company? Yes...lots of it. But excellence always requires lots of effort. Otherwise, every business would be doing it.

As a manager, when you hire someone, should you only talk about the job's function (tasks) or the job's purpose? Is the hostess told that her job is to greet people or to make every guest feel like royalty? Every customer should feel like the hostess has been waiting just for them all day. Are the housekeepers told that their job is to clean rooms, or are they told to make every guest happy by providing a very clean and inviting room?

The point here is to explain the purpose from the very beginning. Then articulate how their specific role is crucial to fulfilling that purpose. Truth be told, even the gardener should know that their primary purpose is to make guests happy. The specific functions are to plant, seed, mow, etc. If you'd like to take it a step further, each department has a purpose. For the gardener, their landscaping department's purpose is to provide a beautiful scenery for the guests. This, of course, supports everyone's collective purpose of making every guest happy.

What if you already have a team in place? Then, this is the perfect time to re-orient them with the company's purpose. Some will love it and some won't. The one's who love it will more than likely be your best employees, and the rest will either shape up or ship out (the latter may not be a bad option anyway). But once you make your declaration that excellence is non-negotiable and every customer will receive the very best, DO NOT compromise.

Help each employee understand not only the purpose of their roles, but the purpose of each function within their role. Then stand back, and watch how even the simplest functions will be performed with more vigor. The trick is to involve each employee in articulating their purpose...don't just give it to them. There can be multiple purposes for one function; and all may be correct.

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So the next time you catch your employees performing their functions with a sense of purpose, thank them, and use them as examples for everyone to see. If everyone on your team clearly understands their purpose, the main beneficiaries will be your guest...which is always a great thing.

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