

# Book review

## **Hospitality Experience: An Introduction to Hospitality Management**

*Frans Melissen, Jean-Pierre van der Rest,  
Stan Josphehi and Rob Blomme,  
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This is a first rate introductory text to hospitality, and the management of hospitality experiences. Indeed it is, in my view, the best book to be published aimed at providing an introduction to the sector and the management issues relevant to it. The content of the book is well informed and informing. It is academic in tone and thought, yet presented in a way that never loses sight of the needs of its target readership. This review first comments on the overall layout and presentation of the book, and then goes on to explore the contents of the text.

The layout of each chapter is interesting and visually engaging – appropriate as an introductory text. Key points opposite sections of text aid easy discovery, lists of sections in each chapter, a brief overview of each chapter, helpful diagrams and pictures where appropriate, case studies give concrete examples, and a chapter summary, all aid student comprehension. The “Food for thought” sections, concluding each chapter, assist with revision and review, as do the suggestions for discussion/presentation topics that both students and lecturers can employ. Most importantly, this edited text is delivered in a clear and consistent style appropriate for an introductory level.

The concept of hospitality and hospitableness is well handled.

It addresses the contemporary debates that hospitality is used as a word to describe a variety of sectors initially motivated by a public relations need to cloud over the commercial nature of hotels, restaurants, and bars. That said, it is a little vague about the nature of genuine hospitality and the potential array of motives for offering hospitality to others. This really has to be at the heart of an understanding of hospitality experiences and the recruitment, retention, and rewarding of those who create the guest experiences that are the foundation of any competitive advantage. This aside, I particularly like the anonymous quote (p. 12) that says, “Hospitality is about making your guests feel at home, even though you wish they were.”

Adding value to the customer experience introduces some useful insights into the basic concepts associated with service presentation and delivery. It is a worthy introduction for students in that it helps to develop an understanding of some of the difficulties associated with defining the nature of the guest experience that are essentially intangible, and dependent on a “unique” encounter for each guest. A potential flaw in this chapter is that it tends to consider all host/guest as uniform when the occasions that guest use any one facility may change their expectations and assessment of what has been successful or not.

The chapter describing the hospitality experience is first rate and comprehensive in that it explores the delivery of host/guest experiences that extend beyond obvious sectors where provision of accommodation and/or food and/or drink is the primary business activity. The definition of the sector needs also to consider some of the small firm providers operating bed and breakfast accommodation, or a guest house, where the domestic and commercial aspects of hospitality and

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hospitalableness overlap. Also, we must not forget that there are considerable career opportunities for graduates in sectors such as, industrial catering, school meals services, and hospital catering; to name but a few.

The chapter recognizes hospitality as a metaphor for receiving people into non-hospitality industry spaces. Table 4.1 provides a really good example of the extensiveness of the application of the guest/host metaphor. One shortcoming is that it misses hospitality where it is secondary activity in the public sector and the workplace. Perhaps it needs an appreciation of the metaphor being essentially about hosts welcoming guest into their space; whatever that might be?

The future of hospitality needs to be considered both in the immediate and in its metaphorical setting. The immediate industry has been undergoing a worldwide trend of McDonaldization, whereby, labor cost reduction through the increased use of technology, decreasing service levels, and increasing customer self-service are applied across all sectors of the immediate hospitality industry. More recently, however, there have been some adverse customer reactions to this trend that has resulted in some organizations returning to service personalization as a way of gaining competitive advantage. On the more metaphorical level, it is debatable whether the wider application of hospitality experiences as a service strategy will survive beyond the life of a short-term fad. It is highly likely, in my view, to be yet another “flash in panaceas” – a good idea, suggesting some genuine benefits but which will not survive short-termism and the predominant drive for profit.

Designing the guest experience is interesting and comprehensive in content. I particularly like the section on segmentation because it does touch base with differentiation formats and dimensions. It might perhaps have provided a few more concrete examples of occasionality segmentation so as to reinforce what is

a powerful concept for hospitality management teams, and their definitions of the customer experiences.

Service quality management is a key issue for all those being developed to work as managers in the sector. This chapter sets out a valuable introduction to the issues and is appropriate for the students at an introductory level. It could be a little more analytical about the difficulties facing managers in a context where the guest encounter is intangible, though also involving tangible physical items such as room decor, food and drink quality, and facilities function. While the tangibles can be subject to tight specifications, the intangibles present some genuine difficulties. At root there has to be an active concern by business owners to operate with accountabilities that actively audit customer satisfaction/dissatisfaction.

Competencies and leadership, interesting chapter well written and provides a nice discussion of different theories of leadership and the variety of models to explain leadership styles and approaches. That said, the chapter does not make much of the potential overlap between management fit with service styles. The nature of the guest encounter requires different performance from employees and thereby differences in the style that best fits with the management of staff. For example, the uniformity required of McDonalds Restaurants allows less scope for participative management than in a more relationship dependent service offer, say as in a Sheraton hotel.

While the forgoing has made some critical comments, these do not detract from my overall assessment that this is a first-rate book, well written, and presented in a manner that is highly appropriate as an introductory text.

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