

Start 2011 With a Systems and Services Checkup

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By Ernie Wilder, Vice President

For many of us, the start of a new year is an opportunity to “clean the slate” – throw out old clothing and household items, resolve to lose that holiday weight and exercise more, and do those things that organize, simplify and improve our lives for the coming year.

Why not apply this same thinking to your conference center, catering and other hospitality-related services and start the New Year with a careful review of business objectives and work processes?

What are your 2011 goals: increased revenue, improved customer satisfaction, more special event support? Begin with a self-assessment and the willingness to act where change is needed.

In hospitality services, well-defined workflows and processes should be the result of understanding your customer’s needs, reinforced with procedures and policies that make sense. All it takes is a few misfires – repeated late deliveries, mistakes in the delivered food and beverage order, followed up with billing errors. These are symptoms; now seek the diagnosis before sales, revenue and credibility slip.

So, how do I start?

If you consider your business review on par with your personal wellness, this is where to start.

- Interview managers and customers to determine the exact nature of the problems. Focus groups also are very helpful.
- Meet with persons responsible for conference, catering and other hospitality functions, principally those who have ownership of the current process steps. Assess the competencies of all involved.
- Carefully review current procedure and policy documents and the operation’s financial statements.
- Create workflow diagrams that illustrate how the current processes are constructed.
- Review preliminary findings; recommend any “quick fixes” for immediate program benefit.
- Develop recommendations with a timeline for roll-out.

When will things begin to improve?

Every situation is different, but with a careful and detailed plan of action, process re-visitation can yield substantial results in just a few months; possibly longer if wholesale changes in the supply chain are needed.

What about early detection?

Customer satisfaction surveys are always helpful, but is the one you’re using developed in a way that yields useful data? Is the survey outcome interpreted in a way that produces actionable results?

Feedback is important at the time of service delivery and over a period of time – say, once or twice a year. Instant feedback has been found to be some of the best preventive medicine; serious problems can be addressed immediately, and before they become life threatening.

If you’re contemplating an independent review of your catering and other hospitality-related services, contact Ernie Wilder, vice president, 904/940-1208 • EWW@clariongp.com or Tom Mac Dermott, president, 603/642-8011 • TWM@clariongp.com