

## **Hotel Guest and Casino Guest: Who Has Priority?**

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### **Abstract**

A Macao casino guest approached the Concierge Counter asking for a ferry ticket in order to go back to Hong Kong. However, there was only one staff member working at the Concierge Counter and the concierge was busy dealing with a hotel guest at that moment. Therefore, the casino guest had to wait for his turn for the concierge to issue a ferry ticket. This casino guest wanted to catch the next ferry to Hong Kong. The next ferry was scheduled to leave Macao in a very short time. By the time the concierge came to talk to the casino guest, and tried to serve the casino guest's request, the ferry had left Macao harbor for Hong Kong. Therefore, this casino guest was upset about missing the next ferry to Hong Kong. The casino guest complained to the Concierge Service Manager about the concierge's inadequate service.

*Key words:* casino guest; hotel guest; concierge service

*JEL classification:*

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### **The Story**

As a Guest Relations Officer of the Concierge Department, I worked in the Holiday Inn Concierge Department, Cotai Central, Macao. Since there are usually only a few guests that would request our Concierge Department services during the dawn period, our department usually assigns only one employee to attend the Concierge Counter during this down time. Early one morning, around dawn, a hotel guest approached our Concierge Counter when I was there alone assisting a hotel guest who arrived earlier than the casino guest. The first hotel guest had requested some nursing bottle cleaning solution. I called housekeeping to check if they could

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\* The article consists of two parts. The authors of the case study, Rachel Minqi Ruan, the Editorial Commentary at the end of this case was written by Po-Ju Chen. Send correspondence to Rachel Minqi Ruan, City University of Macau, Golden Dragon Campus: Avenida Padre Tomás Pereira Taipa, Macau, telephone: + 853 635878561 email: minqiruan@gmail.com.

provide this kind of solution. However, the answer was negative. The hotel guest acknowledged that with a disappointed tone, and asked me to search for a place which might sell such a bottle of cleaning solution. Meanwhile, a second guest, a casino guest, approached our counter and rudely requested a ferry ticket from Macao to Hong Kong. Because I was serving the hotel guest, I responded to the second guest by politely asking him to please wait for his turn for services. "Please wait just a moment. It will be your turn when I finish serving this hotel guest." Immediately, I called our office and asked them to send another member of staff to help the casino guest. However, the Concierge Manager responded by saying that she could not direct anyone to help me at that moment. I therefore told the casino guest that he had to wait until I had served the hotel guest. The casino guest lost his temper. He started banging on the counter and yelled at me. "Your major job here is issuing ferry tickets for casino guests, not solving other issues unrelated to ferry ticketing problems." I answered this casino guest by saying: "Sir, this guest came first, so could you please wait a minute?" Then he yelled loudly, adding some curse words, wrote down my staff number and continued his tirade of complaints and insults. Of course, at that time, my manager came out to check what was happening at the Concierge Counter. My duty manager tried to calm down the casino guest. She explained that our policy was "First Come, First Served", similar to the policy of most other hotel/casino organizations. This policy would apply to everyone and anyone, hotel guest, casino guest, or people from the street who may seek help at our Concierge Counter. She repeated that our "daily services are available on a first-come, first-served basis." She then explained to the casino guest that our Concierge Counter does provide the service to issue ferry tickets for casino guests, but "it is only one of many services we provide." The casino guest yelled at the manager "I am in a hurry! You need to serve me first. Otherwise, I cannot catch the next ferry back to Hong Kong." By the time the manager issued his ferry ticket, the ferry had left the harbor for Hong Kong. Unfortunately, by then, despite the manager's best effort, the angry casino guest had missed his ferry to Hong Kong. In order to make good of a bad situation, the hotel offered a complimentary ferry ticket, on behalf of the casino, to the angry casino guest.

This incident caused our Concierge Counter management to reexamine the "First Come, First Served" policy. Of course, we have to focus on "emergencies" (such as calling for an ambulance for a very sick person) first. The question that arose from this case study is: circumstances, should the Concierge Counter staff, who is serving a guest at that moment, under non-emergency circumstances be allowed to interrupt the process to serve another casino or hotel guest? How can we determine if his/her personal matter is of great or extreme importance needing our immediate response or action? Hence, we have a dilemma. How do we go about determining (in principle and for this case) which inquiry or request should receive the higher or first priority? For this case study, who should be served: the hotel guest who came first, or the casino guest who arrived later in a hurry?

### **Possible Solution Options**

Select (circle) one of the following alternative solutions:

- A. The manager and the concierge should have offered the casino guest an apology on behalf of their casino and hotel, because the casino guest missed the next ferry back to Hong Kong due to waiting for his turn in order to get a ferry ticket.
- B. The Concierge Manager should have issued the casino guest a complimentary ferry ticket. Both the manager and the concierge should have apologized to the casino guest for his unhappiness about missing the ferry back to Hong Kong.
- C. The manager should explain to this casino guest the hotel/casino's poor staff scheduling, which caused the casino guest to miss his ferry back to Hong Kong. The manager should promise that there will be more than one staff member available in future to attend to guests' needs at any hour of the day (or night). Furthermore, the manager should assure the casino guest that this type of unfortunate event will never happen again in the future.
- D. After issuing a complimentary ferry ticket to the casino guest, the concierge or manager should have sought the casino guest's suggestions as to what he would suggest the concierge (or hotel) should do under similar conditions in order to avoid guests' complaints and potential misery.
- E. The casino guest should be happy with a complimentary ticket. Since the casino guest had missed the ferry, which he had planned to board for Hong Kong, there was nothing the concierge could do or could overcome to compensate the casino guest for his loss.

### **Assessments**

#### **Surface Assessment**

The manager should apologize to the casino guest and issue the ticket in time. He just wanted to catch the next ferry back to Hong Kong. The guest also deserved to be compensated for missing the ferry as well, because he approached the Concierge Counter on time, since the concierge could have given the casino guest priority, but did not.

#### **Deep Assessment**

The voices of customers should be considered as actionable insights in order to gain customer satisfaction. After all, customer satisfaction is an important concept "... to practitioners as a means of creating competitive advantages and customer loyalty" (Iacobucci et al., 1995, p.277). Therefore, the Concierge Counter Manager and staff should always try to avoid creating any "aloof service images" in order to prevent customers from spreading harmful negative word of mouth (Bolfing, 1989).

The casino guest should not wish for any casino or hotel in Macao to offer "a round-the-clock staff of seven attachés (separate from the concierge Counter)

that do nothing but fulfill guests' wishes and type their preferences into a computer for future reference" (Barnett, 2003).

Since the casino guest had missed the ferry which he has planned to board for Hong Kong, there was nothing the concierge could do or could overcome to compensate the casino guest for his loss.

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### **Appendix: Multiple Choice Solution Points Awarded**

- A. The Concierge Desk employee should have offered the casino guest an apology on behalf of their department because the casino guest had to wait for his turn to be served and, as a result, he missed the ferry. 1 point. The apology from the employee and the manager are a good strategy to address the mistake by the Concierge Desk.
- B. The Concierge Manager should have issued the casino guest a complimentary ferry ticket. Both the manager and the staff should have apologized to the casino guest for his misery as a result of missing the ferry back to Hong Kong. 2 points. The conveying of sincere apologies from both managers to the guest and issuing a complimentary ticket is a better solution. The guest deserves to be compensated for missing the ferry as well because he approached the Concierge Counter on time but the Concierge staff could have given the casino guest priority but did not.
- C. The manager should explain to this casino guest about the hotel/casino's poor staff scheduling, which caused the casino guest to miss his ferry back to Hong Kong, and should point out that, following this unfortunate incident, there will be more than one staff member available to attend to guests' needs at any hour of the day. 2 points. This solution includes providing what the guest wants, the ferry tickets, as well as a sincere apology that includes sharing the cause of the issues with the guest.
- D. The employee should ask the hotel guest to suggest whether the concierge should have more than one staff member available for inquiries and requests at all times. 5 points. This approach would make the casino guest happy knowing that he was valued for his suggestions. The casino guest's loyalty to the casino/hotel would be maintained. and we would try our best to serve him better.

- E. The casino guest should be happy with a complimentary ticket. No apology nor explanation should be offered to the guest. 0 points. This is not a happy service experience for this casino guest. A complimentary ferry ticket would not make him feel better about his complete meltdown after he missed the ferry from Macau to Hong Kong.

### **Editorial Commentary**

Understanding customers' situations, interests, dilemmas and needs is one of the critical dimensions for securing and maintaining customer satisfaction and loyalty. The Concierge Department, due to poor or inadequate scheduling (with only one employee on duty at the Concierge Desk), was the reason for this service failure. An intensive review of the "First-Come, First-Serve" policy is necessary.

Choice C provides the customer with comfort and a free ferry ticket, which may make him happy. We could assume that the rude casino guest's loyalty had been maintained with this approach. Casino guests, like all other hotel guests, are paying clients and thus deserve good service. Therefore, choice D may have been the best choice among all the alternative options from a deep assessment. Choice D would demonstrate to casino guests that the hotel/casino is willing to serve him well and he would feel valued. In addition, the Concierge Department, serving both hotel guests and casino guests, is operated under the hotel's administration.

Although this casino guest was rude and lost his temper, the Concierge Counter Manager and employee had maintained a professional service attitude. The casino guest's behavior was apparently caused by the lack of the immediate service that he expected, and the consequences of missing the ferry to Hong Kong. However, the concierge could have asked the first customer he/she was serving for a few minutes to inquire into the needs of the casino guest and could have attended to the rude casino guest's urgent service request. If the service requested by the casino guest had been considered to be a type of emergency, the concierge would have felt empowered to find an excuse for serving the rude casino guest immediately, before finalizing the service for the first hotel guest. That is, the concierge might have considered issuing the ferry ticket to the rude casino guest first, after which he could have continued to serve the hotel guest whom he had already helped (although admittedly only in part). Furthermore, it is entirely possible that the casino guest had unreasonable expectations to begin with.

The understaffing of the Concierge Desk was the main reason for the poor service in this situation. Even though it was a time of day when there was little demand for their services, the Concierge Department manager should have been alert and ready to communicate with another department to support the Concierge Desk when necessary. This could have been achieved by engaging in job rotation, in order to ensure cross-training for employees in other departments. This is especially efficient when additional services or manpower is needed. With only one employee scheduled, a similar situation is very likely to reoccur. Thus, both the concierge and the manager on duty should have the authority to call upon any cross-trained

employee from another department during unexpected increases in demands or inquiries.