

Opinion: Tahoe's abysmal service is inexcusable



What piece of this economic pie could be Tahoe's if people were treated better? Photo/LTN

By Kathryn Reed

"Do unto others as you would want done to you."

"If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all."

"You can never have too many friends."

Those are just some of the words of wisdom from my mom that still resonate with me today. Sometimes I hear her screaming the phrases when I'm doing the opposite of what I was taught.

Who cares? – you ask.

Mom, like others of her generation who embraced the above quotes, knows how to get along with people. That is the first step to being good in the hospitality industry.

Mom was not a marketing person, though she could have been.

She didn't work in the tourism industry, but could have. But she did study hotel and restaurant management, so she knows something about the hospitality industry.

What if the frontline staff of every business in Tahoe took to heart those first three sentences?

Do you really want to be treated like crap? With disrespect? Like you don't matter?

Those are the experiences Denise Pirrotti Hummel had in the past couple days. She is CEO and founder of Universal Consensus. She was one of the speakers of the 2013 Trends in Tourism forum at Harveys on April 18. She relayed a story of how she asked the concierge at her hotel where to go running. She was given a map that wasn't accurate and told the concierge when she got back. The concierge's response was she wasn't responsible for the map. Hummel told the employee she might want to tell the mapmaker. "She looked at me like 'whatever'," Hummel said to the crowd full of Tahoe tourism gurus.

The lack of quality guest services is astounding here – especially on the South Shore. It starts with managers and owners, and quickly goes down the ranks.

I don't know if these people all just go to other bad Tahoe businesses so they think lousy service is the norm or maybe they really don't care.

I go to a handful of places in town because I know I will be treated well. Everyone at Blue Angel Café is outstanding. Rosie knows how to train her people. Bri at Pearl Izumi is so helpful. The staff at Les Schwab always seems to be running and smiling.

"It's Tahoe, so they will come" doesn't work anymore. Customers actually want to be treated with respect.

Locals often point to our dismal infrastructure for why people don't come back. But I've had fun in funky towns with little or no infrastructure. Occidental in Sonoma County comes to mind. I love this little hotel, which is a true old-school motel. But it's clean and the people are friendly. I would never go into the equivalent looking place here.

Across the street is a great breakfast spot and yummy Italian place.

People recommend places to go. I'm treated like they care if I have a good experience. (See quote No. 1 above.) They tell me to have a good time. (See quote No. 2.) They ask me how my day was when I return – as if we are friends. (See quote No. 3.)

It really isn't hard to be nice. To be nice or mean – both a choice. To keep lousy employees – that's a choice, too. To not train them – another choice.

We can build pretty buildings – hotels, restaurants, retail – but if the experience once inside is horrible, well, all the window coverings in the world can't erase a bad experience.

Just look at Heavenly and Squaw. What were the first things the new owners did at the respective ski resorts? Work on guest relations. Look at their skier visits – yes, it's the mountains they both have, but it's the entire experience that makes you want to go back.

Tahoe – wake up. People want to be treated with respect and you are doing the opposite.

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Tips for those involved in Tahoe tourism: