

Tahoe lodging officials ramp up guest services

By Kathryn Reed

Walking in they didn't say much. They were timid, shy and apprehensive. They didn't want to say the wrong thing.

When English isn't your first language it's easy to feel intimidated about speaking to others who have spoken it their entire lives. But not communicating can be detrimental in the work environment for the employee, consumer and business owner.

Communication with hotel staff can make the difference between having an experience worth writing a good or bad review. Interaction with staff, especially bosses, can be the difference between becoming a supervisor or staying in a dead-end job.



Housekeeping staff on the South Shore are better equipped to communicate with guests after a three-day course. Photo/Pat Leonard-Heffner

Twenty-four housekeepers from four South Lake Tahoe properties

last week were immersed in a three-day session at Lake Tahoe Community College to become more proficient at English.

“We got to take them from zero to 100. We got to gain their trust and get them excited about learning English, to feel valued, important and smart,” instructor Ronna Timpa told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Timpa, who is based in Las Vegas, has been doing this type of work for 24 years.

“When employees feel valued by their company, they are more likely to give better guest service and give better service over all,” Timpa said. “It’s likely the room is going to be little bit cleaner, they are going to go out of the way to help guests.”

The 24 hours of instruction came about from the South Lake Tahoe Lodging Association wanting to do something so frontline staff could better interact with guests and staff. Conversations with Lake Tahoe Community College started. Coursework for credit would take too long to put together, so that’s how it became a community education offering.

The lodging association and individual properties paid for the training.

“It helps me as a property by helping the consumer. If the consumer, our guests can communicate with our staff, if they are able to say ‘Hi, how are you?’, make good eye contact, that is good service and that is what puts hotels above other hotels,” Jerry Bindel, who runs Lakeland Village, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “A guest doesn’t want to have to fight to communicate the things they need. They want to say they need this and we give them what they like.”

Internally, Bindel knows better communication will come from housekeeping being able to tell maintenance what is needed and to hear what the front desk has to say.

The lodging group has been talking for a few years about doing something like this, but knew it would take an outside entity. The college was the logical party to take this on.

Guest services had been taught before through LTCC, but that was to people who spoke English as their first language. This is the first time to teach front line staff whose native tongue is Spanish. They were taught phrases pertinent to the industry – how to understand basic requests and what possible responses could be.

It was also an opportunity to learn how to interact with people, to be more outgoing. What they learned are life skills, not just work skills.

“This was training that they need for life. They learned how to communicate with customers, co-workers and bosses,” Timpa said. “We talked about their job now, their job in the future and how to get there.”

Another component of this training that is still to be developed is to have supervisors be taught some basic business skills like writing appropriate emails and how to deal with problems involving guests and co-workers.

Ultimately, Bindel foresees about the half the staffs of most lodging properties going through these trainings.