

# CHAPTER 8

## Involving the Guest: The Co-Creation of Value

**HOSPITALITY PRINCIPLE:  
EMPOWER GUESTS  
TO CO-CREATE THEIR EXPERIENCES**

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*If you can't get it for yourself, who's going to get it for you?*

—Fritz Perls, father of gestalt psychology

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### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, you should understand:

- How, when, and why hospitality organizations encourage or empower guests to help provide their own guest experiences.
- Which strategies most effectively involve the guest in co-creating the experience.
- What the advantages and disadvantages of guest involvement are for the organization and guest.
- Why hospitality organizations must sometimes “fire the guest” and how to do it.

## KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS

co-creating  
co-production

guest participation  
fire the guest

## GUESTS CO-CREATE VALUE

In the traditional firm-centric view of organizations, management decides what the guests want and designs a delivery system to provide it. The guest-centric view is that the guestologist seeks to identify what the customers want and involves them in the co-creation of the experience, before, during, or after the actual experience itself. Guest involvement leads to their **co-creating** the value and quality of that experience. If guests are involved in the design of the experience, through focus groups or by providing feedback on their prior experiences, they have the opportunity to co-create the experience before it happens. For example, a prepare-a-meal franchise will offer busy people the opportunity to come to a location where ingredients, recipes, utensils, and expertise are available for customers to co-create a week's worth of meals to take home and freeze. They cook their own meals. On a more complex level, guestologists at Disney use guest feedback to determine what aspects of the Disney experience are working well and which need to be redesigned. In today's instant-access-to-information environment, the hospitality organization can access guest comments via a designated complaint Web page, blogs (e.g., Marriot's [blogs.marriott](http://blogs.marriott.com) Web site), or social networking sites to find out what its guests are saying about things that make them satisfied and dissatisfied even by tweeting their opinions while they are still co-creating the service. Table 8.1 lists some popular social networking and blog Web sites. Guests can also co-create knowledge by posting reviews about their travel experiences, on sites like those listed in Table 8.2.

During the hospitality experience, management can use a variety of strategies to engage the guests in the **co-production** of that experience so that they co-create quality and value. This chapter focuses on these strategies. A later chapter will present strategies that management can use to engage its guests in co-creating value *after* the experience, for example, customer satisfaction surveys to pinpoint service failures and follow up on errors.

Noted management strategists Prahalad and Ramaswamy suggested that a customer co-creation of value is predicated on the rapid change in technology that allows today's customers to know more, share more, and compare more about their experiences than ever before. As a result, customers can learn what organizations are really doing in dealing with their guests by talking to others, on social networks or information-sharing Web sites (e.g., [TripAdvisor](http://TripAdvisor.com)); what they should pay, by visiting auction Web sites; and what the quality and value of the service product is.<sup>1</sup> The Web gives the guest the opportunity to interact directly with the hospitality organization and tell it what that guest really wants. It is up to the organization to find ways to listen, and guestologists always find ways. The point is that today's guest expects to co-produce the experience and co-create its value and quality in some way, and hospitality organizations need to find the means to fulfill that expectation.

There are several processes that can be used to engage the guest with the organization before, during, and after the hospitality experience. Some writers categorize the types of guest engagement into marketers, information providers, and co-producers. The discussion below will use a more elaborate categorization.

**TABLE 8.1 Popular Social Networking and Blog Sites**

WEB SITE	WHAT IT IS OR DOES
BlackCareerZone	A career and job search site for black professionals
Doostang	By invitation only, chiefly for financial services
85Broads	For female professionals and executives
Facebook	A social networking giant
GoogleGroups	A wide array of easily created shared interest groups
Jigsaw	A social network for business contacts with profiles
LatPro	For bilingual or Hispanic professionals
LinkedIn	A social network targeting professionals
Meetup	Helps groups of people with shared interests plan meetings and form off-line clubs in local communities around the world
CareerBuilder.com	One of the largest online job sites in the United States
My.Monster.com	Networks of Monster help-wanted opportunities
MySpace.com	A social network pioneer; social network and content sharing site for the jobs market
MyWorkster.com	Connects students, alumni, employers, companies, and the university community to foster professional growth and interconnectivity for college communities
Plaxo.com	A business and professional network; tailored to family, friends, or business
QuintCareers.com	Job search site with expert advice
Ryze.com	Business networking; member-created, themed networks
Saludos.com	Hispanic employment service for jobs promotes work force diversity and offers free résumé postings to qualified bilingual and college-trained professionals
Vault.com	A career information Web site, providing employee surveys of top employers, career advice, job listings, and career guides to individual industries; networks allowing anonymity
Windows Live Groups	A service that allows users to form their own community groups; an online service provided by Microsoft as part of its Windows Live services
Youtube.com	Site to watch, share, upload, and discover videos
Ziggs.com	White pages and free people search for professionals; for job data and profile sharing

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**TABLE 8.2 Web Sites for Finding and Posting Reviews Related to Travel and Hospitality Services**

WEB SITE	WHAT IT IS OR DOES
Consumersearch	Reviews mostly consumer goods, but also includes reviews related to travel.
Epinions	Reviews mostly consumer goods, but also includes reviews related to travel.
Fodors	Allows members to read and write reviews about travel experiences, share tips, and ask travel-related questions.
IgoUgo	A web site that allows users to plan trips, read and write reviews, create travel journals, and share photos.
TripAdvisor	Offers advice from travelers and a variety of travel planning tools.
Virtualtourist	Provides user-generated travel content from around the world. Includes tips, reviews, and photos from travelers sharing their experiences.
Yelp	A social networking site that provides reviews of businesses and services. Includes travel-related reviews, such as for hotels and restaurants, but also of other businesses and non-business locations.

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## THE GUEST CAN HELP!

In the traditional manufacturing organization, the people involved in the core production tasks are insulated from external interruptions by layers of strategic planners and middle managers. The people providing many hospitality services, in contrast, are right out in the open where the guests can see and even interact with them. In many circumstances, the guests will take the primary role in co-producing the service themselves. Obvious examples are salad bars in restaurants and self-service check-ins at airports. Other obvious examples are the growing number of self-service technologies like Web-based restaurant, airline, and hotel reservations sites.

A crucial implication for hospitality organizations when they involve guests in co-producing the guest experience, either indirectly as observers or directly as participants, is that they must remain constantly aware that a server or a Web screen is likely to be the point of contact between the organization and the guest. Instead of relying on highly paid, experienced, and loyal executives or well-trained sales representatives serving as the point of contact with customers and the outside world, the hospitality organization must rely on its frontline servers or a Web page to represent the company. Both the server and the Web site represent the initial moments of truth for creating the guest's first impression of the organization. Each year, for millions of Disney park visitors, Southwest Airlines passengers, Olive Garden restaurant diners, and Marriott hotel guests, the visible, front-line employees answer questions, solve problems, provide services, and keep their organizations operating smoothly and efficiently. These employees not only produce the magic that guests expect, but they do it while the guests are watching, participating, and asking a million questions about everything. Unlike the automobile assembly-line production employee who can work undistracted in a controlled and structured environment, these employees must produce the guest experience consistently and flawlessly while coping with the many uncertainties that interacting constantly with guests can create.

### Guests as Quasi-Employees

Hospitality organizations know they must help manage the confusion, stress, and uncertainty guests can create for their employees while on their jobs. One way is by training the employees in both job skills and the management of guest co-production. Another effective strategy for managing this confusion is to think of guests as quasi-employees and “manage” them accordingly.<sup>2</sup>

These unpaid “employees” must have the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) to successfully co-produce the service experience. This means organizations need to design a service product, an environment, and a delivery system that match the KSAs the customers bring to the experience. It may also mean that companies need to “train” the customers on how to take advantage of the service product. If it is to the advantage of both guests and organization to involve guests in the experience, the organization must take on the responsibility of figuring out how best to enable these quasi-employees to succeed in doing their tasks within the experience. Unlike customers of the typical manufacturing organization, guests are actually paying the hospitality organization to be successfully managed—putting an extra burden on management to manage them effectively.

Benjamin Schneider and David Bowen recommend a three-step strategy for managing these quasi-employees<sup>3</sup>:

1. Carefully and completely define the roles you want guests to play. In effect, do a job analysis, similar to that developed in Chapter 5 for employees. Define the knowledge, skills, and abilities required to perform the jobs identified as desirable and appropriate for guests.

2. Make sure that guests know exactly what you expect them to do and that they are physically able, mentally prepared, and sufficiently skilled to do those tasks. Show guests that performing the tasks is to their benefit. Give them a reason to do the tasks well.
3. Once task performance is underway, evaluate the guest's ability and willingness to perform well. In effect, conduct a performance appraisal on the guest to ensure that the experience being co-produced is meeting the guest's expectations. If it is not, identify what needs to be fixed. Does the guest need further training? Is something about the setting or delivery system impeding the guest's success?

Of course, the customers should not co-produce those parts of the experience where their performance may be too dangerous for them, time consuming, or when it would be too difficult for the customer to master the necessary skills. Airline passengers don't help fly the plane, although they may be asked to make sure they pick up their trash so that the plane can be prepared for its next flight more quickly. By assessing each component of the entire guest experience carefully, the hospitality provider can identify those parts of it that might be designed to discourage, encourage, or even require guest co-production. A restaurant could offer a low-price self-service buffet to *discourage* patrons requesting expensive waitstaff, a hotel might provide self-service check-in kiosks to *encourage* its guests to avoid waiting for an available front desk agent, or an airline might *require* self-check-ins with a kiosk assistant available only to help when guests have computer problems. In each of these instances, customers can choose to have an employee serve them (and wait for service) or they can produce their own service product: go get their salads, access their hotel rooms, or print their own boarding passes.

### The Organization Decides

Some hospitality organizations do not offer the guest any choice; they either design parts of the experience in ways that make **guest participation** impossible or structure it so that the guest must participate to some extent. A quick-serve restaurant is quick-serve and inexpensive because it requires customers to serve as their own order-takers, servers, and table clearers. Without the cost of servers bustling about taking a variety of customized orders, filling glasses, and picking up dirty dishes, McDonald's and Burger King can save money and offer a quick, less expensive food product than a fine-dining restaurant can. In the fast-food service setting, the customer must participate somewhat but cannot be allowed to take over completely. The efficiency of the quick-serve process is based on a carefully engineered food-production system that ensures a consistent quality and safe food product. Allowing customers to cook their own burgers and fries would significantly interfere with production efficiency while creating substantial food safety and sanitation problems. The quick-serve restaurant gains efficiency by letting the customers serve themselves in the part of the service delivery system that takes place in front of the counter. They do not allow customers behind the counter, where they can slow down the production process or jeopardize food safety.

Organizations need to think through when and where to let guests co-produce their own experience and how much co-production there should be. Sometimes guest participation makes sense for the organization and the guest, and sometimes it does not. The challenge is to identify which situation is best regarding the amount of co-production that leads to the greatest value for the guest.<sup>4</sup>

## STRATEGIES FOR INVOLVING THE GUEST

A guest can be involved with a hospitality organization in several ways: as a consultant or source of expertise and quality information, as a marketer, as part of the environment for other guests, as co-producer of the experience, or as a manager of the service providers and systems. Some of these involvements may sound unlikely, but they are all common.

### Guests as Unpaid Consultants

When the hospitality organization asks its guests what they like or dislike about the guest experience, they become unpaid consultants and act as quality control inspectors. Since their input regarding their experiences will become part of the information that management uses to review and adjust the service product, environment, and delivery system, the guests are acting as expert consultants in giving this important feedback to the organization. Using outsiders in this way is not unique to hospitality firms; many other types of organizations systematically invite their suppliers, customers, and even communities to provide feedback about how they are doing. Southwest Airlines extended the consulting role to include the hiring process. It invited its frequent flyers to participate in interviewing prospective flight attendants.<sup>5</sup> Companies are also employing new technologies to gain feedback. Intercontinental Hotel Group launched an initiative to create an online community that allows members in its loyalty program to share feedback on their hotel experiences. After all, who is better to judge whether a person has the qualifications to be an effective flight attendant or if a hotel stay was up to expectations than the most valuable customers of the company?

Organizations also frequently invite customers to participate as members of focus groups. As discussed in a later chapter on assessing service quality, these groups are designed to give expert feedback about the service experience to the service provider, and no one can be more expert on that experience or its quality and value than the customers themselves.

### Guests as Marketers

Everyone has asked a friend or colleague about a hospitality experience. The person who just came back from a terrific meal, a resort stay that was beyond expectations, or an amazing cruise is eager to talk about it. Likewise, the person who just returned from a ruined dining experience, terrible hotel stay, or the cruise with bad food and service is equally eager to talk about it—perhaps more so. Guests are excellent marketers for good or bad service. They are asked by their friends and acquaintances for their opinion in both face-to-face communications and through Web-based social networking media, and this “word of mouth” can make or break a hospitality organization. Recognizing the power of this marketing medium—the customer—especially when the service experience is bad, is an important part of the manager’s responsibility and will be covered in greater detail in the chapter on fixing service failures (Chapter 13).

A more recent development in using guests to co-produce marketing is the group coupon sites. The basic idea is to get people to organize into large enough groups so that they can qualify for a discount or special rate on a service. Web sites like Groupon and LivingSocial negotiate with retailers for a special price on items like spa services, paintball, or specialty restaurants. The Groupon site lists one retailer a day but the deal becomes official only when a fixed number of people sign up for it. These sites reward people for marketing. With LivingSocial, a person can get a specific deal free if he or she gets three others to sign up for it. Both sites give dollar rewards to users who recruit friends. In other words, these sites use guests to market to other guests using their social networks in a powerful way. The communications technology used today in combination with the existing social networking sites offer amazing opportunities to use guests as active marketers for a wide variety of hospitality organizations.

## Guests as Part of Each Other's Experience

If you enjoy simply watching other guests, you may think of them as part of the service environment. If other guests are especially important to your enjoyment of your experience, you might even consider them a part of the service product itself. The line is not always clear. For example, most people don't like to go to an empty restaurant or movie theatre; enjoying the experience along with other people, even strangers, is part of the package. Going to a water park when it is comfortably full and when it is almost empty are very different experiences. Water parks, like many other service situations where the emphasis is on "having fun," rely to some extent on other customers being part of the fun. Thus, many people get great enjoyment out of watching other people, ordinary folks just like themselves, act as bit players in a Universal or Disney Hollywood Studios film-making demonstration. For those doing the acting, the guest experience obviously includes the opportunity to participate in the movie simulation. For observers, however, those customers doing something unusual are perhaps best considered as part of the service environment. Though interesting, unusual, or amusing, watching them is not really the reason why you came to the amusement park, water park, or gaming casino.

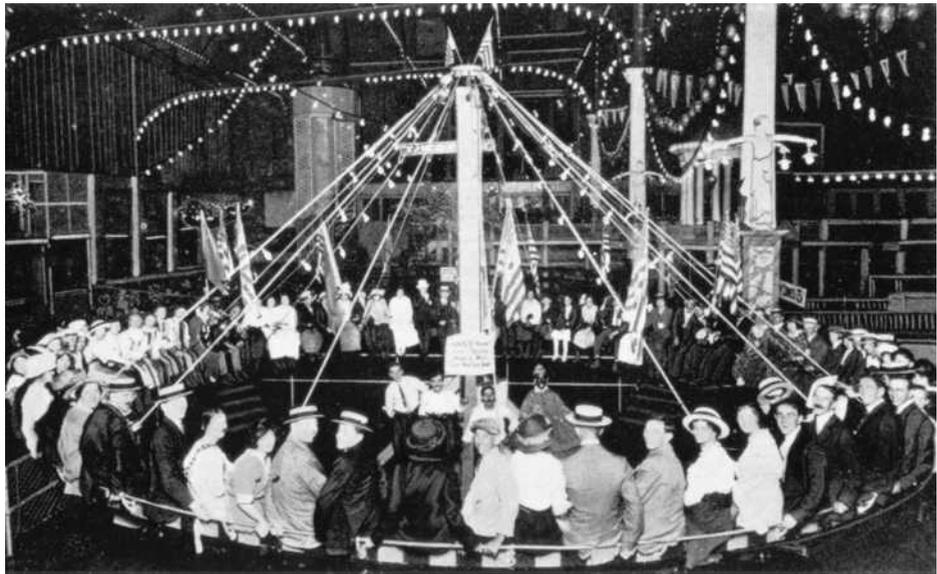
This principle of encouraging customers to be either directly or indirectly part of other guests' experiences is evident in new Web-sharing technologies—for example, video clips on YouTube—but it has been a practice in hospitality for quite a while. For example, at one of Coney Island's earliest amusement parks, Steeplechase, there was a stadium set up next to a rotating Barrel of Love so that the customers could watch others fall down in a tangle with complete strangers and look foolish. For them, the opportunity to watch other people falling down awkwardly was an important part of the amusement experience. Indeed, the founder of Steeplechase Park early in the twentieth century, George Tilyou, was one of the first to recognize that a successful amusement park provided its customers the opportunity to observe the most entertaining experience of all: other people. In his park, the visitors were the main show. According to amusement parks authority Gary Kyriazi, "Tilyou felt that people will pay any price in order to provide their own entertainment."<sup>6</sup>

After couples had finished the Steeplechase ride, they would walk down a corridor and then find themselves on a brightly lit stage called the Insanitarium. Unknown to them, crowds of people would be sitting in bleachers watching them. As Kyriazi describes the scene, "Suddenly, strong air jets would lift the women's dresses (exposed ankles were rare at the time) and blow the men's hats off. A clown would prod the men with an electric stinger. When they tried to escape, piles of barrels on either side of the exit gangway would begin to sway and appear to tumble down on them as they made their escape." They could then join the crowd beyond the glare of the stage lights and laugh at others going through what Kyriazi calls "the same light, humorous torment."<sup>7</sup>

Although standards have changed, and modern hospitality organizations do not see torment, even if "light and humorous," as a service they want to provide outside of Halloween "fright nights," the principle that guests enjoy watching guests is as true today as it was then. Successful operators make sure to offer plenty of opportunities for guests to observe other guests.

Although a case can be made for considering other guests as part of the service product itself or as supervisors under certain circumstances, they are most often a part of the service environment. Like any other environmental element, they can be a neutral influence, they can damage the experience for others, or they can enhance it. Movies, concerts, and Broadway plays all rely on the audience to help create the mood. All these entertainments are more enjoyable with a full house than they are when empty. The laughter and other reactions of people surrounding the customer become an important part of the customer's

Guests observing guests at George Tilyou's Steeplechase Park, Coney Island. The Human Roulette Wheel (top). The Hoop-La (bottom).



Courtesy of Seth Kaufman. Whirl-gig. Used with permission.

environment. Indeed, some attractions rely on paid professionals or electronically created cues to generate applause, laughter, or other emotional responses that create the right setting for the service experience. At the other extreme, everyone has had an experience ruined by a crying baby, a public family squabble, or a thoughtless bunch of loud talkers on cell phones. For better or worse, other guests are part of the hospitality servicescape and, therefore, need to be managed like any other environmental element.

### Guests as Co-producers

Perhaps the most important way in which guests can participate, other than simply being there, is as active co-producers of the guest experience. During all or parts of the service experience, they can actually become participants in the production and delivery system. This participation can be as simple as having guests serve themselves at a fast-food restaurant, preparing their own salads at the salad bar, or carrying their own bags at the golf course to



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Guests are often part of each other's experience in casino gaming.

substitute for the job of a paid employee. The value of guest co-production can be substantial for the organization. While this may be a more costly strategy under some circumstances, in general, every time guests co-produce at least some of their own experiences, they are replacing some or all of the labor that the organization would otherwise have to pay to do the same thing, while often improving the quality and value of their own experience.

Starwood has created the Make a Green Choice program as a way to encourage its guests to co-produce some of their hotel experience by opting out of its daily room service. If guests make no effort to co-produce the hotel's environmental experience, linens and towels are cleaned as usual; however, if the guests indicate that they do not need the room cleaned, Starwood gives them a \$5 gift card and loyalty points to reward their participation. Starwood reports that they have had an 8 to 12 percent participation rate and that it is growing. At one hotel, the co-production initiative amounted to 188 rooms that did not need to be cleaned per night.<sup>8</sup> Assuming a housekeeper cleans fifteen rooms a day, that equates to 12.5 fewer housekeepers being needed. But there is more. Hotels that encourage customer participation reduce not only labor costs but also water, sewer, energy, chemical, and linen expenses—a win for the environment as well. Starwood's Sheraton Seattle, for example, used 900,000 fewer gallons of water and 9000 fewer gallons of chemicals in one year.

### *Advantages of Co-production for the Organization*

The organization gains several advantages by having the guests co-produce their experience. First, co-production may reduce employee costs.<sup>9</sup> Generally, the more guests do for themselves, the fewer employees the organization needs to employ. In addition to being an obvious labor-saving strategy, co-production allows the organization to use the talents of its employees better. If guests are allowed, encouraged, or required to take care of some of their own basic requirements or perform routine tasks, employees are freed up to do more elaborate or complicated tasks that the guests would not enjoy or do successfully, and tasks that would simply not be suitable for guests. For example, at some restaurants, patrons are allowed to make their own reservations on the Web. Maitre d's take fewer reservation phone calls, which permits them to spend more time responding to guests who need information or advice. In effect, by letting the guests schedule themselves through the Web, the quality of the restaurant service goes up with no increase in costs.

A buffet is a common method of co-production, allowing guests to select what and how much they want, but also allowing the company to hire fewer service personnel, thereby saving money.



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In a similar fashion, the strategy of offering buffets at lunch is an effective way for restaurants to stay open at lunch time without overextending their waitstaff. Many servers are unhappy working at lunch time, because the check sizes (and tips) are lower. People tired out from working at lunch cannot work as efficiently at the dinner hour. A buffet provides meals with a minimal use of waitstaff, the diner gets a good price on the meal, the restaurant gets more utilization of its physical plant, increases total revenue by being open more hours and serving more diners, and the restaurant provides a better work situation for its servers.

### *Advantages of Co-production for the Guest*

For the guest, co-production has a number of advantages. First, it can decrease the opportunity for service failure while increasing the perception, and perhaps the actuality, of service quality. Since the guests themselves define value and quality, handling production themselves means they can produce exactly what they want. If guests fix their own salads at the salad bar in exactly the way they want them, how can they complain if the salads aren't perfect? Guests can pile on their favorite salad items in their favorite quantities and avoid the items they dislike. They end up feeling they got the very salad they wanted. This opportunity creates the perception of real value.

Second, the opportunity for self-service typically reduces the time required for service. A simple example is the customer at the airport who chooses to use the self-check-in kiosk instead of standing in line to wait for a counter clerk. Fast-food restaurants make their reputation and define their market niche on the basis of saving time for their customers who are too busy to eat in a full-service restaurant.

Third, self-service reduces the risk of unpleasant surprises for guests. If diners walk through a cafeteria's buffet line, they can see exactly what the food products are, instead of ordering off a menu and hoping for the best. While not everything tastes as good as it looks, choosing one's own meal from a cafeteria line or buffet can reduce the perception of risk in comparison with ordering meals unseen, from a menu.

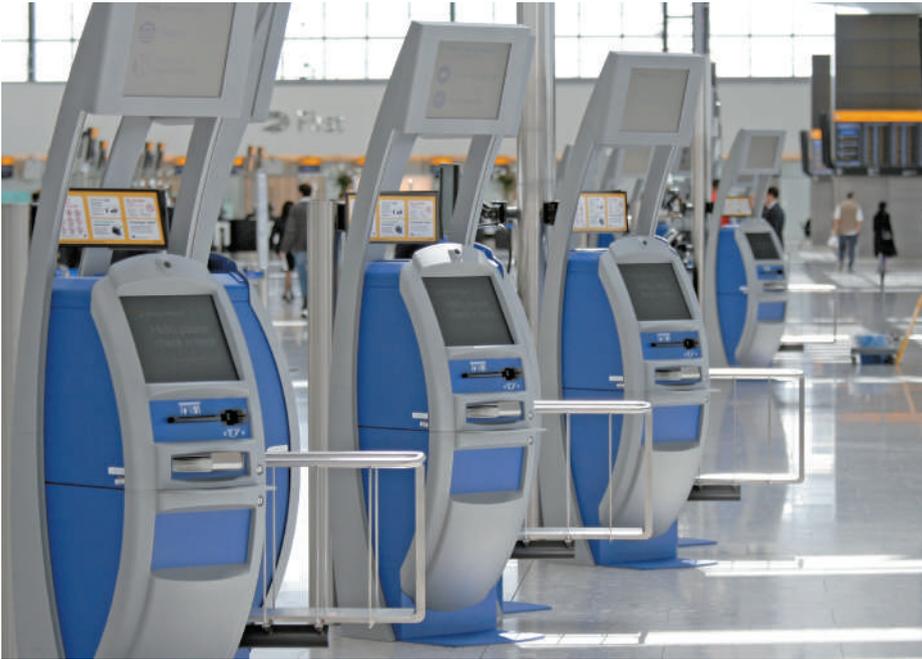


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Self-serve kiosks at airports allow guests who want to use them to save time.

### *Disadvantages of Co-production for the Organization*

Permitting or requiring guest participation may also have disadvantages for the organization. First, in this litigious society, participation exposes the organization to legal risk. Having a guest handle a hot pot in a cook-your-own fondue restaurant could lead to a major burn and lawsuit. Second, the organization may have to spend extra money to train the customer contact employees so that they can add to their usual serving jobs the task of both recognizing when guests are ready to co-produce and when they are not and, then, communicating effectively and easily about what guests are supposed to do. These employees are responsible for instructing the guests in how to provide the service for themselves and for monitoring the experience to prevent the guests from creating any disasters. Every guest is different and comes to the guest experience with different skills, knowledge, abilities, and expectations for the service itself. Servers who train and oversee guests must be alert, observant, and well trained in recognizing guests' capabilities to co-produce and in how to coach all types of guests through the experience. This training cost increases as guest use of self-service technologies increases. Hiring and training people to perform the necessary job skills at, say, a modern copy center is one thing, but to allow or encourage self-service, the organization must go beyond basic job skills to hire and train people who can successfully teach customers to use computers, scanners, and copy machines. One of the most interesting challenges of self-service technologies is to ensure that customers do not fail while using the technologies or get confused and discouraged to the point they abandon the use of the technology and the company offering it.<sup>10</sup>

This means that successful hospitality organizations must not only train their guest-contact employees to recognize when guests are ready, willing, and able to participate in the co-production of their experiences but also carefully design their service systems and service setting to accommodate the variations in guest capabilities. Teaching employees to recognize the difference between customers who are able to co-produce and those who are not is important.<sup>11</sup>

If guests co-produce their experience, the service delivery system and the service environment must be user friendly. If the organization wants the guest to follow a predetermined sequence of operations to create the desired experience, it must have people to guide them, excellent directional signs, or, for on-line services, a Web layout that is intuitively obvious to people from varied cultures. Only then can the organization be reasonably sure that all types of guests will do what they are supposed to do when and where they are supposed to do it. Signs in a self-serve cafeteria must indicate clearly where the entry point is, where the trays, silverware, and napkins are, and how the diner is supposed to proceed through the food selection and payment procedure. Someone unfamiliar with a cafeteria restaurant might have no idea how to navigate this service delivery process. The cafeteria workers must be alert to confused-looking people wandering around looking for signs, directions, and instructions on how to participate successfully in this food delivery process.

Involving guests in the service delivery system also has an impact on the cost and layout of the environment. Most hospitality organizations already spend time and energy ensuring that the traditional front-of-the-house areas meet guests' expectations in terms of appearance and quality, but those organizations that involve guests in the service delivery system spend the money to ensure that back-of-the-house areas meet their expectations as well. Making the back of the house a part of the "show" has an obvious impact on how the equipment is laid out, what it looks like, how shiny and clean it is kept, how the personnel are dressed, and what skills they must have to work alongside the guests in service co-production. Instead of having not particularly articulate cooks in greasy aprons

At 'Let's Dish!', guests create their own meals, which they then take home to eat later. Although the service product is all about the guest participating and enjoying the cooking of the product, employees must be ready to step in and assist those guests who need help.



Photo courtesy of Let's Dish!/Slate LD, LLC.

producing meals in an out-of-sight kitchen, involvement of the guest in a food-production system means that the organization must hire employees who can communicate easily with diners, maintain a neat appearance, and ensure that the kitchen and other visible food preparation areas are always clean and healthy looking to meet the guest's expectations. All this is expensive because the costs of the uniforms, the extra interpersonal skills required of the employees, and the rearrangement of the food-production area to allow the guest to be involved in the food-production process will add to the costs of the production system.

Guest involvement expands the role of the guest-contact employee. Now the employee must have the skills and abilities to be a coach, trainer, teacher, standard setter, fixer of problems, and manager of the guest flow through the delivery system. Hospitality employees must know how to get guests engaged in co-production and also how to get them to disengage. If guests enjoy co-production and are reluctant to disengage, the organization that does not want to hurry its guests may have to add extra capacity.

Clearly, when guests become co-producers, the traditional role of server in the guest experience requires redefinition, and servers need additional training in the new roles they must play if co-production is to work to the organization's advantage.

### *Disadvantages of Co-production for the Guest*

From the guest's perspective, co-production can have disadvantages.<sup>12</sup> The most obvious one is that paying guests may resent having to produce any part of that for which they are paying. Some task-oriented guests don't particularly want much guest-server interaction; they just want, for example, a quick meal. A production-line approach suits them just fine. Other guests insist and thrive on close personal attention and are willing to pay for it, or they may be uncomfortable with the technology used in place of the personal service. If shifting part of the guest-experience production to guests themselves results in a perception of less TLC, some guests will be dissatisfied.

Another possible disadvantage is that guests may fail to co-produce the service properly. If you find that the items you assembled from the salad bar don't taste as good as you thought they would, or if your experiment with some new food selections from the buffet was not a success, you will not have co-produced a wow for yourself. Similarly, a customer may mistakenly select the wrong option when using an automated kiosk, be frustrated by the experience, and perhaps may not be able to figure out how to fix the error. While hospitality organizations that seek to provide excellent service may want to utilize the advantages of guest co-production, when problems occur, they can't blame the guest for the unsatisfactory experience. Hospitality organizations know that people tend to take credit for their successes and attribute failures to someone else—usually the company.<sup>13</sup> Excellent providers of customer service try to protect guests against self-service failures and create opportunities for their success. They want you to have the satisfying experience you expected when you chose them rather than a competitor. They may let you try again or offer to help. The risk is nonetheless present that the guest may co-produce an unsatisfactory experience.

### *The High Cost of Failure*

While unsatisfactory or unsuccessful co-production can be a minor annoyance to a restaurant patron, it can be disastrous if the cost of failure is great. If you run a dude ranch and let inexperienced riders go off alone on horseback, the result may be humiliation, broken bones, or worse—plus a law suit. Or imagine a situation in which you co-produce a fondue meal with a peer, boss, or significant other—and fail. The best hospitality organizations make every effort to ensure that guests succeed as co-producers, but the risk of

failure is always there. If the costs of failure are too high, the organization must tactfully intervene to keep the guest from failing. The server must be sensitive and aware enough to recognize when a guest is about to fail, must take over before the failure occurs, or fix the failure, and be able to do all these things with sufficient grace that the guest is not embarrassed by failing when others all around are succeeding. These requirements add up to high expectations for a low paid, entry-level employee.

### *Motivating Guests to Co-produce*

Guests can safely participate when they have the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities to create the service product, but guests must be motivated to participate in the process. Like employees, guests will be motivated to “perform” when they can see some economic, psychological, or social benefits in participation.<sup>14</sup> Some experiences can be completed only if co-produced. Psychiatric treatment will fail if the patient refuses to be involved. In any large geographically spread service setting—like a zoo, museum, food court, cruise ship, or national park—customers who want a particular array of experiences must schedule them for themselves. If customers don’t plan out their time and physically move themselves around, they are unlikely to enjoy the experience.

Many guests are motivated to participate because of the economic incentives available to those who take a role in their own guest experience. Others are motivated by their personalities or their familiarity with the experience being offered, or they are simply looking for something to do while waiting for the other parts of the guest experience to take place. Some guests just want to be a part of whatever it is they’re involved in at the moment, no matter what, and constantly look for such opportunities. Some people always park their own cars, carry their own luggage, or walk up the stairs for the benefit of the exercise, or because they like to demonstrate for themselves (and anyone else who may watch) that they are physically fit enough to do these things. Others like to show how mentally fit or technically adept they are by doing things for themselves—whether it be by making their own online travel reservations or baiting their own hooks on a deep-sea fishing trip. Of course, some people also think they do a better job than an employee could do.

Finally, some people just like to be the center of attention and seek opportunities to be “on stage.” In a simple situation, Joe wants to show his friends how well known he is at Ralph’s Restaurant, so he goes and gets his own coffee or refills his partner’s ice water instead of waiting for the server. Even more on stage is the person who volunteers to sing in a karaoke bar or be drenched by Shamu in the SeaWorld demonstration. Many people enjoy showing off, and hospitality organizations should try to provide appropriate opportunities for them somewhere in the service delivery system.

## **The Guest as a Substitute for Management**

Guests can serve in a quasi-managerial role as unofficial supervisors and motivators of employees; they can even supervise and train other guests.

### *Guests as Supervisors*

Guests have more contact with the service personnel, speak with them more often, and see more of their job performance than the organization’s supervisors do. Guests have the opportunity and the motivation to act as supervisors and provide immediate feedback as to whether an employee is making them happy or unhappy. After all, the guest is paying for the service and is, therefore, motivated to tell the server (who to the guest receiving the service is the organization) what the guest thinks about the service, the server, and the organization.

Hospitality employees are trying to produce memorable guest experiences; the guests themselves will let the employees know how well they have succeeded. The more familiar guests are with the organization, the more they know about what level of service should be provided and the more qualified they are to provide technical feedback. All these guest activities and functions are in a sense supervisory because the guests are observing, guiding, and motivating employees and, in many cases, “paying” them for good or poor service with a large or small tip.

Everyone has watched an unhappy guest tell an employee that the employee is not providing the service properly. That guest is in effect performing a supervisory function: providing feedback to the employee. Anyone watching characters in the Magic Kingdom interact with the children will soon see that the children are supervising the actions and behavior of the characters better than any supervisor ever could. The children will immediately respond to any deviation from character or any flaw in the character performance. They give constant feedback to cast members to let them know if they are not doing something right. Although supervisors also monitor the behavior of cast members as they perform their character roles, their job is, in a sense, much simpler than that of supervisors in the manufacturing sector. The typical auto assembly-line worker never has a car talk to him, smile at him when he installs the brakes correctly, participate in the production, or complain when he doesn't. The hospitality supervisor must worry about guests doing all these things. In the hospitality organization, guests talk, smile, co-produce, give directions, and complain. They assess the performance of servers and, through tips, compensate certain employees for the services they provide. Having guests constantly monitoring and responding to the employee's job performance is a substantial aid to the supervisory responsibility.

### *Guests as Motivators*

Having guests participate in supervision can be highly motivating to employees when guests tell them in both verbal and nonverbal ways what a good job they are doing. Most hospitality employees find great enjoyment in meeting and exceeding the expectations of guests. Chefs love to be challenged by guests who are knowledgeable about the culinary arts. Hospitality employees usually enjoy the opportunity to be challenged by a guest who shares an interest or expertise in the subject of the experience. College professors often find the students who ask the most difficult questions to be the most fun to have in class. Most hospitality employees are constantly tested by the variety in guest expectations and ability to perform their responsibilities in the service delivery process. In the Magic Kingdom, the challenge of making all children happy by responding to their unique needs and personalities makes the job of playing a Disney character a high-status and highly sought-after job. It's fun to show off what you can really do when you have an appreciative audience.

### *Guests as Supervisors and Trainers for Other Guests*

Guests can also supervise and train each other. Learning how to stand in line seems like an obvious skill until one encounters people from other cultures who do not believe in standing in line. Someone has to train the untrained to stand in line in an orderly way, and the people already in line will do that. Watch the customers already standing in line the next time you see someone break into a line and you'll witness a training session in line standing. Most guests of hospitality organizations, like most employees, are anxious to fulfill their responsibilities and do their jobs well. They can be seen watching other people to learn what their own behavior should be in the various tasks of the co-production process.

Waiting lines are often located to allow guests not being served to observe guests who are being served; by the time the guests in the airport security line get to the screener, they know pretty much what they are supposed to do.

We all learn from watching others, and with so many people in most hospitality situations on a typical day or occasion, we can learn what we're supposed to do to enjoy the experience by observing others. The first-time guest at a basketball game learns from others when to chant "airball" and enjoys the game all the more for chanting.

The organization can also use videos of experienced guests to show waiting guests what they are supposed to do. At most amusement parks, television monitors are set up so waiting guests can see what role will be expected of them when their turn comes to participate in the attraction or get on the ride. If the organization can use its guests to train at least some of the other guests, it can save itself the cost of those employees who would be required to train those guests and minimize the time spent explaining to the next guest what the last guest just did. The cost and time savings can be substantial.

Likewise, guests can supervise other guests in the performance of the roles they need to successfully perform to be satisfied with the experience. Many guests are more than willing to tell other guests where to go or not go, when they are behaving inappropriately or doing something that might be dangerous or detrimental to both their own and others' experiences. Managing guests as they manage other guests is a tricky task as there are costs and benefits of letting guests train and supervise one another that must be carefully balanced to avoid guest dissatisfaction.

## DETERMINING WHEN GUEST PARTICIPATION MAKES SENSE

Sometimes, both the organization and the guest benefit from guest participation and sometimes not. Distinguishing when, where, and how much the guest should or should not be involved in any part of the guest experience depends on a variety of factors. Generally speaking, co-producing the service is in the interest of guests when they can gain value, reduce risk, or improve the quality of the experience. Co-production is in the organization's interest when it can save money, increase production efficiency, or differentiate its service from that of competitors in a key way. Each opportunity for guest participation should be assessed on these criteria and designed into the hospitality organization when the factors are favorable and designed out when they are not.

### Enriching the Wait

Sometimes, situations encouraging guest participation evolve when guests are required to wait for service. Organizations should try to decrease the feeling that the wait is too long by giving guests something to do, ideally something that will enrich the overall experience. A good example is getting a group of people sitting on a delayed flight to participate in a singalong, a technique frequently attributed to Southwest Airlines. Passengers get the opportunity to keep active while they are waiting for their flight to take off, and the singing may even enhance the experience by providing a pleasant way to pass the time.

### Co-producing Value

While some hospitality situations require participation and some guests look for opportunities to participate no matter what, almost everyone is happy to co-produce if it adds value to their experience. By definition, value can be added by reducing costs (for the

same quality), increasing quality (for the same costs), or both. Costs include not only the price but also the other costs incurred by being involved in the guest experience. For example, if a potential guest sees a long line outside her favorite restaurant, the time cost of waiting for the next available table may be so great that she willingly goes to a nearby cafeteria or fast-food restaurant—to reduce the time cost of getting a meal. The guest may experience a decrease in quality but expects the greater decrease in overall cost to compensate for it. Similarly, guests who want to be sure of service quality may want to participate in providing service. Those guests derive additional value from knowing that they are getting the service “their way.” Even non-hospitality organizations like Home Depot have learned that they can make a lot of money serving customers who want to co-create the quality and value of their home repair by doing it themselves. Customers look to Home Depot not only to provide a fair price on the building products but also to give the necessary instruction or help to do the job correctly.

Another cost of co-production for the guest is risk, the risk that the service may not meet expectations. Guests who co-produce their experiences minimize the risk that a hospitality employee will not provide exactly what is wanted. Many people now surf the Internet looking for hotel accommodations and flight reservations. They believe that the travel agent or airline they contact may be more interested in selling them the most profitable travel package than in finding the price, times, or routes they want.

### Key Factors: Time and Control

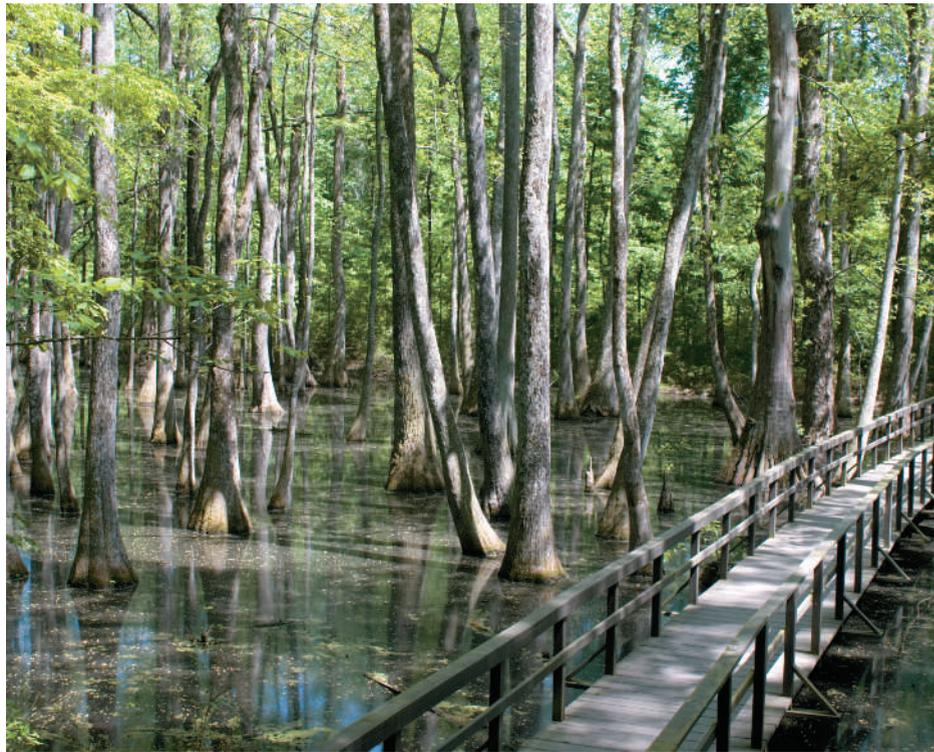
Several dimensions of providing service can help us distinguish between situations when guests can beneficially be involved in co-production and when they should not. The research suggests, surprisingly, that only two factors are important: time and control. Each of these is of two kinds: real and perceived.<sup>15</sup>

With respect to time, the *feeling* of how long something takes is as important to the guest as how long it *actually* takes. In Chapter 11, on waiting lines, these real and perceived factors are discussed in detail. The same is true for control. The amount of control over the quality of, value of, risk involved in, or efficiency of the experience that guests think they acquire by participating is as important in determining the value of participation as the actual control guests have. As an example, many resort facilities offer a climbing wall for their guests to enjoy the feeling of rock climbing. The walls are designed to allow climbers to choose their own path up the wall and experience the exhilaration of a successful rock climb. On the other hand, every climber is required to wear a safety harness to ensure that the occasional slips and falls do not turn into a disastrous experience. Climbers enjoy the illusion that they are in control of the situation, when in reality the harnesses cover up any mistakes.

### Cutting Costs, Increasing Capacity

From the organization’s point of view, the most obvious reason to incorporate the guest into the guest experience is to save money. As noted earlier, whenever the guest produces or co-produces the service, the guest is providing labor the organization would otherwise have to hire. The second reason is to increase production efficiency or increase capacity utilization. If a restaurant offers a buffet at lunch, it provides a meal product at a time of day when waitstaff are sometimes unavailable or unwilling to work. The restaurant still has the opportunity to derive income from its physical plant and food-production capacity without overusing its human resources. In a similar sense, many other organizations can add self-service capacity to handle surges or unevenness in guest demand. A hotel can offer its check-in and check-out guests an automated option if they don’t want to wait in

Sometimes, after the organization creates the servicescape, it is entirely up to the guest to produce the service experience, such as in this nature walk.



Photograph by Joel N. Sturman.

line, or a rental-car agency can offer automated check-in, check-out service for its regular customers. In this way, the organization can maintain a constant staffing level while still being able to accommodate the variability in customer demand for this service. Letting customers co-produce this part of the service experience increases the number of customers who can be handled without increasing labor costs.

### **Guest Participation as a Differentiation Strategy**

Organizations can also use guest participation as part of a product differentiation strategy. The obvious example is the cook-your-own restaurant that sells the experience of doing it yourself to distinguish itself from other restaurants. While the physical part of the service product is food, the entire service product also includes the experience. These restaurants often try to make the cooking a social experience, making reservations for groups of friends, and providing the environment that produces not only food people want and the opportunity to enjoy cooking their own meals but also the fun of the social experience. Other examples abound, such as self-service gas stations, car-rental agencies, cafeterias, and banking services. Boston Market offers a take-home product but no delivery service. This combination distinguishes it from both the quick-serve drive-through and home-delivery restaurants. Having the customer come inside gives Boston Market the opportunity to sell more products than it could if the customer was ordering over the phone or reading off the menu at the drive-through window. This guest participation strategy helps Boston Market position itself as a quick and convenient stop for busy people.

## Building Commitment

A final reason for letting guests participate is to build guest commitment and repeat business. If a guest feels the organization trusts her enough to let her provide her own service, the guest feels a bond and a commitment to this place where everybody knows her name. Getting the guest involved in the guest experience is a positive way for the guest to feel ownership in that experience and a loyalty to the organization that provides this opportunity.<sup>16</sup> Pouring one's own coffee at the coffee shop may be a way of getting a coffee cup filled fast, but it also may be a way for that guest and the organization to express their tie to each other. Many organizations try hard to build such relationships because they recognize the lifetime value of a loyal repeat customer. Loyalty programs such as frequent-flyer and frequent-guest programs are designed to build this attachment so that customers come back time after time to the organization that "knows" them.

## The Bottom Line: Costs Versus Benefits

The key to deciding when to offer the guest the opportunity to participate is to do a simple cost-benefit analysis (e.g., see Table 8.3). The organization needs to be sure, for both itself and the guest, that the benefits of participation outweigh the costs. The organization will want to look closely at the costs it will incur: the costs of extra training or more elaborate skill requirements for employees, extra or simpler equipment necessary for guest use, and extra effort to lay out the service delivery system in a way that is user friendly. In essence, these are the costs of training a guest to be a quasi-employee.

### *Help Wanted: Co-producer*

As it would in assessing any job position it wants to fill, the organization must ask itself the following questions: What are the KSAs necessary for a guest to perform successfully as a quasi-employee? Are we likely to find these KSAs in our job candidates/guests? What is the motivation of guests to participate, and how do we appeal to that motivation? What are the training requirements for successful performance in the guest-employee role, and do we have the time and personnel necessary to train guests in the proper performance of that role? Will guests come back and use that skill if we spend the time and money to train them? If so, the expenditure of time and money may be worthwhile. Is it cheaper, faster, or more efficient for the organization to provide the service or to allow the guest to do it? Are role models (especially other guests) available to help with the training, and

**TABLE 8.3 Advantages and Disadvantages of Guests Co-producing Service**

FOR GUEST		FOR ORGANIZATION	
ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES	ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Reduces service costs	May frustrate guest	Reduces labor costs	Increases liability risk
Increases interest	May diminish service level	Improves quality	Guest training costs
Saves service time	May not have needed KSAs	Reduces service failures	Increases needs for employee training
Improves quality	Requires a learning-curve period	New market niche	Increases design costs
Reduces risk		Enriches employee jobs	May interfere with other units
Chance to show off			Variability in guests

how can we physically structure the service environment to use these models? Are there interactions with other guests or other parts of the organization that letting guests provide their own experience will interfere with or harm?

To employ guests effectively in the guest experience, they must have the ability to participate, the knowledge of how to participate, and the motivation to help produce their own service experience at a level that meets or exceeds their expectations. Since the guests have come to your place to receive some service, they must see a reason to do something for themselves. Thus, the role they perform in the guest experience must be clearly defined.<sup>17</sup> In addition, some guests just want to do things for themselves and will do so if given the opportunity. These people get satisfaction out of serving themselves and being in control of the situation. Some people, on the other hand, do not want to do anything to help provide their own experience. If they are paying for it, why should they provide it? Organizations that see mutual benefits to co-production and try to encourage it must always have a backup plan to accommodate the fact that some guests will and some guests won't want to participate in the experience. Those organizations that find ways of using guests as much as possible will, however, decrease their costs and increase the value and quality of the service for those guests who co-produce.

### Inviting Guests to Participate: Guidelines

The basic point is that some, but not all, situations lend themselves to using self-service or guest participation for all guests. Two strategies are available to the hospitality organization contemplating how to gain the advantages of using guest participation while not incurring the disadvantages. First, they can let customers in their targeted market segment know that everyone entering the service setting must provide some of the service themselves. No one goes into a McDonald's expecting table service. The second strategy is to segment the service process so that guests entering the service setting can choose to participate or not. Some restaurants have learned that some guests wish to gain the advantages of serving themselves while others come to the restaurant expecting service and are willing to pay for it. To accommodate this, guests can decide whether to order off the menu or choose from the buffet.

Other ideas about when to include the guest in the experience are suggested in Table 8.4. It describes several situations in which both the guest and the organization may benefit. Obviously, the ideal is when both benefit in some meaningful way so that the experience is at least what the guest expected, and perhaps more.

## ONE LAST POINT: FIRING THE GUEST

In a sense, all guests co-produce—or have the potential to co-produce—the hospitality experience for others simply by being in each other's company. If a well-mannered, well-dressed guest sits quietly and passively within the service setting, that guest may be no more than a minor enhancement, an adornment, to the experience of other guests. Unfortunately, despite the old saying that the customer is always right, all organizations know that the customer is sometimes wrong by any reasonable standard; certain extreme behaviors are unacceptable in any hospitality setting. Guests get drunk, become verbally and physically abusive, refuse to comply with reasonable organizational rules and policies, and make outrageous demands.

Not all employees work out; not all guests work out either. Sometimes, the guest's "job performance" as a co-producing quasi-employee is so unsatisfactory that the organization must—as a last resort and employing clearly defined procedures—**fire the guest**.

**TABLE 8.4 Guidelines for Deciding Whether Guests Should Participate**

1. Would guests derive value or satisfaction from participating in the co-production of the service experience? Are they ready, willing, and able to co-produce their service experience?
2. Can you clearly communicate to guests when and how they are expected to participate in the service experience, and can you make it clear to guests when and why they may not participate?
3. Can you make it advantageous for guests to co-produce, thereby replacing employees and reducing labor costs?
4. Are your employees doing routine, repetitive, easy-to-learn tasks that could be performed by guests or guest-friendly equipment? Can guests participate in co-creating the service experience with little or no training?
5. Can guest participation speed the delivery of the service experience and eliminate waits?
6. Are your guests trying to avoid your service personnel (to avoid giving tips, perhaps) in a way that shows that some guests prefer to co-produce their service experience?
7. Can guests participate in the service experience without being a risk to themselves, other guests, or employees?
8. Are your customer-contact employees ready, willing, and able to help guests co-produce?
9. Can you design your service experience to permit those guests who can and want to co-produce to do so, and so that guests who do not want to co-produce do not have to?

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## Firing Airline Passengers

Customer aggression is an unfortunate part of a service employee's workday, causing emotional exhaustion and absenteeism.<sup>18</sup> The best hospitality companies recognize this reality, and will intervene to support their employees when necessary. Southwest Airlines, while always committed to customer service, has also worked diligently to protect its employees from such customers. Herb Kelleher, cofounder of Southwest Airlines, has said, "When we encounter a customer like that, we say to him, 'We don't want to see you again because of the way you treat our people.'" Kelleher made the point that the customer is not always right. If a passenger is abusive to a Southwest employee, Kelleher was known to have called the passenger on the phone. Customer complaints to management are common; management complaints to customers are unusual. Employees appreciate this kind of support.<sup>19</sup>

The airlines in particular have trouble with guests. In one month in 2006, over 1300 incidents occurred on British aircraft flights, including passengers becoming angry at flight crews, punching attendants, trying to open an emergency door, head-butting a copilot, and trying to break into the cockpit. This is nearly double what it had been in the previous year.<sup>20</sup>

Airlines are taking actions to reduce and address air rage. After a drunken passenger struck one of his flight attendants on the head with a bottle, the chairman of Virgin Atlantic Airways was able to achieve a British lifetime air-travel ban on the perpetrator. In the fall of 2002, British Airways extended giving yellow soccer-style "warning cards" to passengers who seemed to be losing control on the ground after a successful use of them to control irate in-air passengers. Some airlines now equip each plane with a set of plastic handcuffs and provide flight attendants with conflict resolution training. The causes of these incidents seem to be the record numbers of people wanting to fly, more passengers per plane with less room to stretch and move around, the increased frequency of airline delays, free liquor in first and business classes, and the smoking ban. Some passengers think the airlines have, to some extent, brought the unpleasant incidents upon themselves.

Other organizations fire customers too. In June 2007, Spring Nextel fired 1000 of its customers. In a letter terminating service to those customers, it was quoted as saying, “The number of inquiries you have made to us ... has led us to determine that we are unable to meet your current wireless needs.... We understand that having to switch to another wireless carrier may be an inconvenience.... So, a credit has been applied to your account to bring your current balance to zero.”<sup>21</sup>

### **Abrupt Firings**

The termination of the hospitality relationship must occasionally be dramatic and abrupt, perhaps even implemented by a security guard, a large person wearing an “Events Staff” t-shirt, or a “bouncer.” Dramatic “firings” should occur when customers threaten the well-being or safety of other customers, employees, or themselves. No organization should tolerate customers who are threatening, excessively rude or loud, or dangerous to others or themselves. If any customer threatens or endangers the physical and mental health of an employee, that employee should be empowered to tell the offender to go elsewhere for the service, as this organization is unable to continue rendering it. Employees should also be trained on how to recognize such situations and the procedures involved to get the assistance necessary to conduct the abrupt firing.

### **Subtle Firings**

Customers can also be fired subtly. Everyone realizes that organizations place their advertising so that their target markets will see it, as in beer commercials accompanying televised athletic events. But organizational advertising can also be carefully placed so that some customers never see the ads for a service, never get promotional mailings, or are never offered premiums for using the service. Sometimes, this strategy is more overt, such as a cruise line’s refusal to allow unaccompanied children under eighteen to book passage, or a resort hotel’s unwillingness to book a convention of ex-convicts, or a sign in a gift shop “No Shoes, No Shirt, No Service.”

### **Maintaining Guest Dignity**

Not even hospitality organizations are required to extend unlimited hospitality. They should of course give guests the benefit of the doubt. However, in the case of those few guests who are demonstrably unable to participate appropriately in the experience that all have come to the hospitality provider to enjoy, the organization should not hesitate to hand them their hats and show them the exit. If at all possible, however, the dismissal should be accomplished with minimal harm to the guest’s physical or mental well-being and dignity. The guest, like any employee, who feels unfairly treated, who is really angry about being dismissed or fired, can become a source of long-term negative publicity and bad-mouthing.

Although the firing of a guest is a response to a guest failure of some kind, the organization must realize that it has also failed in some way. The rude, troublesome guest had expectations—whether reasonable and realistic or not—and the organization failed to meet them.

**LESSONS LEARNED**

1. Train your service personnel to coach, monitor, and supervise the co-production of guests, and hire people who enjoy this kind of activity.
2. Train your guests to participate before you let them do so; be sure they have the KSAs.
3. Motivate guests who derive value and quality from participation to co-produce.
4. Encourage guests to help monitor the service behavior of your employees.
5. Structure guest experiences in ways that encourage other guests to train your guests; provide preshow videos or otherwise prepare your guests to engage in the experience.
6. The more guests do for themselves, the less you have to do for them.
7. Guest involvement can improve efficiency and capacity utilization, especially at peak demand times.
8. If you have to fire a guest, try to preserve the guest's dignity.

**REVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. Name some ways or situations in which guest involvement in the co-production of a restaurant experience can be useful to the organization.
  - A. Name some ways in which it can be useful to the restaurant guest.
  - B. What KSAs should restaurant guests have to be successful co-producers?
  - C. "Train them if they need it; motivate them if they need it; and keep it simple, undemanding." Would that formula promote successful guest co-production?
2. Name some ways or situations in which guest involvement in the co-production of a restaurant experience would not be useful or might be harmful to the organization.
  - A. When might co-production in a restaurant not be useful to guests? When might it be harmful?
  - B. What can the organization do to discourage co-production in those situations?
3. Suggest some ways in which a restaurant, a hotel, a theme park, a tour bus, and a travel agent might achieve a higher level of guest co-production that would benefit both the organization and the guest. Was it more difficult to apply the co-production idea to some of those hospitality or hospitality-related organizations than to others? If so, why?
4. Under what circumstances do you think the organization is justified in firing a guest? Think of a hospitality situation in which you would almost but not quite fire a guest. See whether your classmates agree with you or whether they would fire the guest.
5. Some hospitality authors suggest that guests should be managed as if they were quasi-employees.
  - A. Who do you suppose these authors think should do this managing?
  - B. Whoever these managers are, should they be selected differently for their jobs because of the type of "management responsibilities" their jobs will entail?
  - C. Should they be trained differently?

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**ACTIVITY**

1. Find a hospitality situation in which the guest is required to co-produce the service experience. Try to find something more challenging than a salad bar or receptacle labeled “Trash.” Describe and evaluate how the organization prepares its employees and its guests for successful guest participation. How effective is the co-production strategy? What incentives are offered to guests to encourage their participation? In what ways is this guest participation beneficial for the guest, the organization, or both?
2. Interview a manager or supervisor within a hospitality organization to find out what the organization will and will not let guests do regarding co-producing the guest experience. Try to get some examples of guests co-producing excessively—trying to do more for themselves than the organization wants them to—and find out how the manager, supervisor, or server handled those situations. Report your findings to the class.
3. Interview a teacher who seems to believe in classroom “co-production,” even if not under that term, and find out why the teacher does so and how the teacher got that way. Bring back your findings for discussion in groups. Discuss the extent to which you are required or invited to co-produce your own education, and how you feel about it.

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**ETHICS IN BUSINESS**

By definition, the co-production process requires certain actions on the part of the customer. But how much is the customer obligated to do? A fast-food restaurant uses co-production to facilitate efficiency. In order to provide cheaper prices, individuals clear their own tables. What if a customer does not clear his or her own table? At a buffet, co-production occurs when customers go up to the buffet and serve themselves. For health reasons, each time you visit a buffet you are to take a new plate. What if a customer does not want to do this? At the buffet, customers can take what they want. Typically, buffets do not allow customers to take leftovers home. So if any remaining food cannot be brought home, what responsibility does a customer have to not waste food? At a fine-dining establishment, part of the co-production is that others in the restaurant dress and act the part appropriate for that establishment. What responsibility does a customer have to dress appropriately? What if a customer chooses to be loud, talk on a cell phone, or otherwise act in a way that others typically deem inappropriate for that environment? In short, what are the ethical responsibilities of consumers in the co-production process to engage in the expected behaviors that enable the service experience?

## CASE STUDY

### Over the Bounding Main

Luke Dwyer and Sue Mayes met when they were both crewing on a yacht in a round-the-world sailing race. They married, started a software business on a shoestring, came up with several innovative ideas that enabled them to attain financial security, and then started looking for a way of life that would be more fun if perhaps not as profitable. Running a bed and breakfast was one possibility, but it seemed rather tame.

Then Sue saw an article in a shipping magazine about the *Shingo Maru*, a small 1920s-vintage freighter for sale. Luke and Sue sent off for a set of the freighter's plans, looked them over with a maritime architect, and decided to convert the ship into a kind of floating wilderness experience. They figured that a certain part of the cruise clientele must be tired of the typical big-boat cruise, where all you did was sit around on deck or by the pool all day, eat huge fattening meals, and drink all night while watching mediocre entertainment and waiting for the midnight buffet. Luke and Sue would give guests an opportunity not to be pampered but to take part in an experience they would remember for the rest of their lives: helping to sail a ship around the world or, for the less committed, some part of it.

About a million dollars and four years later, the conversion was complete, and Sue was breaking a bottle of champagne against the prow of the now-christened *Windenwaves*, a classic square-rigged, three-masted sailing ship with a top mast five stories high. The ports of call on its maiden voyage were going to be romantic-sounding, faraway places that most people experienced only through the novels of Joseph Conrad and Robert Louis Stevenson: Bali, Zanzibar, Bora Bora, Fiji, the Galapagos Islands, Tahiti, Samoa, Barbados, and Antigua. About half the time would be spent sightseeing in these ports and about half the time at sea. The hired crew of twelve, all of them veteran sailors, would help the three dozen paying guests learn to climb the masts, stand proper watch, navigate by the stars, steer, repair

sails, and all the other standard shipboard activities. For the privilege of co-producing their own sailing experience, the guests were to pay anywhere from \$4,500 for a one-month onboard stay to \$60,000 for the full eighteen-month round-the-world trip.

After about six months, approximately half of the passenger-guests had experienced the thrill of a lifetime. The other half wanted their money back. They didn't enjoy sleeping in bunks in one big dorm-type room, getting seasick, using a hose for a shower, being without TV, eating canned and dried foods (the ship had no refrigeration), and having little privacy. Some guests just couldn't "learn the ropes," and the experienced sailors among the crew didn't seem to be able to teach them how. One guest, who later claimed that he had been forced to climb the five-story mainmast, curled up into a paralyzed ball and had to be airlifted by helicopter to shore. He later sued the Dwyers and Windenwaves Partners Ltd. for \$750,000 and won; the Dwyers had not thought to get insurance protection against such an action.

The delighted guests thought their trip on the *Windenwaves* was a high point in their lives, and not just because of the climb up that five-story mast. Said one, "Everybody who's been on a sailboat dreams of a trip like this. We saw places and things we would never get to see in any other way." The disappointed guests were really disappointed. They saw no reason why they should pay so much money and have to do so much of the work themselves. Said one, "I wanted a relaxing cruise. They treated me like a common sailor; made me scrub the decks and empty the slop. At those prices, who needs it? Next time, I'm going on the Disney Magic."

1. Which dangers of co-production became realities for Luke and Sue?
2. How might they have headed off those dangers by planning more thoroughly?

**ADDITIONAL  
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## NOTES

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