

Changes in the Host-Guest Relationship and Implications for the Commercial Hospitality World

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ABSTRACT

Hospitality is a notion that has lasted as long as human history. Over time, the meaning of hospitality has changed in its nature and context. This article reflects on the meaning of hospitality and changes in its meanings and context. It also explores the changes in the host-guest relationship in social and cultural aspects. By doing so, we hope to shed light on the problems associated with the transition of the 'hospitality' concept into the commercial hospitality world. Finally, this paper attempts to explore an inextricable link between hospitality and emotional labor and aid industry in resolving problems of emotional labor.

Keywords: Hospitality, conditional hospitality, commercial hospitality, host-guest relationship, emotional labor.

“2 Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground. 3 He said, ‘If I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by. 4 Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. 5 Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way--now that you have come to your servant.’ ‘Very well,’ they answered, ‘do as you say.’ 6 So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah. ‘Quick,’ he said, ‘get three seahs of fine flour and knead it and bake some bread.’ 7 Then he ran to the herd and selected a choice, tender calf and gave it to a servant, who hurried to prepare it. 8 He then brought some curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared, and set these before them. While they ate, he stood near them under a tree.”(Genesis 18:2-8, The Holy Bible: New International Version).

When Abraham encountered the angels sent by god, who appeared in the form of three men, he showed the deepest reverence for his guests and offered his humble house. Described in the excerpt, Abraham was a host and the three men were the guests who appeared at Abraham's house without the host's invitation. Even though Abraham could deny offering shelter for these strange foreign men, he genuinely provided them with food, drinks, and place to refresh. Derrida and Dufourm-

antelle's (2000) distinction between the 'law of hospitality' (singular) and the 'laws of hospitality' (plural) explains the difference between *unconditional* and *conditional* hospitality, based on the relationship between the host and guest. According to Derrida and Dufourmantelle, the act of Abraham is viewed as 'unconditional hospitality,' as Abraham showed a type of goodwill gesture. For instance, Abraham welcomed three men and provided hospitality beyond his capacity, showing an example of unconditional hospitality from the host to guest (Westmoreland, 2008).

The term 'hospitality' encompasses diverse meanings and assumptions. The Oxford dictionary defines hospitality as *the friendly and generous reception and entertainment of guests, visitors, or strangers* (Oxforddictionaries, 2013). As shown in the definition, the act of providing hospitality encompasses not only the host catering for invited guests, but also the host catering for visitors and even strangers with utmost endeavors. The idea of unconditional hospitality was prevalent in ancient times, due to social norms and cultures. Hosts provided genuine hospitality, derived from their inner motives (Floriani & Schramm, 2010). Heal (1990) demonstrated that in early modern England hospitality was an altruistic, noble, and even sacred deed. Today, the meaning of hospitality is no longer based on the unconditional generosity of the host; rather, it focuses on the rights for the guest and duties for the host (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000).

Along with the development of the commercial domain of hospitality (i.e., hotels, restaurants, bars), the concept of hospitality has transformed to conditional hospitality (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000; Westmoreland, 2008). Conditional hospitality views that the transaction between the guest and host has naturally developed due to the social obligations and relationships among the members of society (Lashley, 2008). Lashley (2008) advocated that the nature of the host-guest relationship has become more reciprocal through this transition and, today, the meaning is different from unconditional hospitality. In other words, providing conditional hospitality means meeting the social expectations and developing social networks.

A superficial understanding of hospitality often associates hospitality with foods, drinks, accommodation, and entertainment. Although such perceptions reflect general consensus regarding interpretation of hospitality, the concept of accommodating a 'stranger' into the host's living place needs to be understood. Being a host and providing hospitality imply certain obligations and potential dangers beyond accommodating the needs and wants of guests. O'Connor (2005) pinpointed such matters as bringing a stranger into the host's residence. He also asserted that the distinction between hospitality and hostility was not clear because both the guest and host needed to accept a certain level of risks in a hospitality transaction. For instance, the host might have to accommodate his or her potential enemies, with possible danger. At the same time, the guest can

be exposed to certain circumstances, which can drive dubious thoughts about the host's ulterior motives behind hospitality (O'Connor, 2005). The fine line between hostility and hospitality has become differentiated as the nature of hospitality has become more commercial.

The hospitality industry has become globalized in its scope, culture, and people (employees and guests). The host-guest relationship has been completely transformed in the commercial domain of hospitality with the development of technology (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000; Lashley, 2008). Adopting the idea of Taylorism from the manufacturing industry (Taylor, 1998), the meaning of hospitality and the commercial hospitality industry has evolved into providing standardized and consistent services (Gronroos, 1994). Within this process, providing consistent and standardized service became obvious business practices. Along with the adaptation to Taylorism and standardization of hospitality service, the industry was able to duplicate its business principles and resulted in hyper-competition (Rigby & Vishwanath, 2006). To cope with competitions, organizations developed more unique business models. Through such endeavor, the meaning of hospitality has become more diversified to include entertainment, memorable experience, the symbol of luxury, privacy, safe environment, and, most importantly, the guest's valued feelings.

Upon these drastic changes in the meaning of hospitality, Ottenbacher, Harrington, and Parsa (2009) sug-

gested a need to modify the definition of hospitality and its encompassing industries. They defined the hospitality industry as consisting of six core industries, i.e., lodging, food service, leisure, attractions, travel, and conventions, needing support from economic and cultural forces, sociopolitical forces, academia, and tourism (Ottenbacher et al., 2009). As Ottenbacher et al. addressed, the changes in the definition of hospitality classified more industries into the hospitality industry such as art, fashion, entertainment, and decoration industries. For example, as the meaning of hospitality in the commercial domain embraces meaningful experiences to the guest, entertainment becomes an important factor. Therefore, to please today's guests, incorporating entertainment businesses (i.e. art, performance, and music) is critical for the success of the hospitality business.

The departmentalization of hospitality business units (i.e., rooms, bars, restaurants, or cafés) also converted the dynamics of the host-guest relationship in commercial hospitality domain (Lashley, 2008). For instance, guests (or consumers) inevitably encounter a wide range of hosts (frontline employees) and often need to initiate conversations with unknown hosts. This situation brings pros and cons to each party (i.e., hosts and guests). On one hand, consumers have freedom, privacy, and anonymity when they stay at large hotels; on the other hand, they have to suffer from dealing with multiple hosts that they are not familiar. Moreover, employees, the hosts, have to demonstrate the nature of hospitality to guests at all times. Pre-

viously the singular host-guest relationship has become multiple hosts-multiple guests relationships and it makes hospitality workers suffer from displaying organizationally desired emotions in order to derive customer satisfaction by delivering the nature of hospitality, compassion, affectionate service (Hochschild, 1983; Lashley, 2008).

Nouwen (1975) explains different facets of hospitality: 'free and friendly space,' 'stranger becomes a guest,' 'guest is protected,' 'host gives gifts,' 'guest gives gifts,' 'all guests are important and gifted,' 'acceptance-not hostility,' and 'compassion.' Although the meaning of hospitality in the commercial environment has evolved, consumers' expectations are not far different from those in ancient times. Since customer satisfaction is often contingent on employees' attitudinal and behavioral norms (Zeithmal 2000), employees are inevitably required to maintain socially desired emotions. Due to this transactional requirement, employees in the hospitality industry tend to have higher levels of stress and job dissatisfaction. For instance, Hwa (2012) reported a positive association between emotional labor and exhaustion among hotel employees.

Changes in the host-guest relationship, from the singular host-guest relationship to the multiple hosts-guests relationships, have inevitably led to the impossibility of establishing a long-term relationship between the two parties. For instance, by having multiple hosts-guests relationships, even though customers return to the previously stayed hospitality business property, they might encounter different

employees (hosts), or, perhaps, the employees they have dealt with in the last visit might no longer work for that property. Hence, customers may still feel alienated because employees they had a relationship previously might not be available in their next visit, which is up against the nature of hospitality, being reciprocal. In this case, the host is not identifiable and consumers will meet a wide range of hosts (i.e., frontline employees) during their stay at a hotel. Due to this multiple hosts-guests relationships, it makes harder to establish a long-term relationship between the host and guest. In the meantime, the importance of managing a long-term relationship with customers has been strongly advocated (Oliver, 1999). Satisfying the customer contributes directly to long-term relationships and organizational performance. Since a key characteristic of the hospitality industry is the employee-customer interaction, a competitive advantage depends on how successfully this interaction is managed (Zeithmal 2000). Accordingly, today's hospitality organizations tend to focus on the interplay among the employee, customer, and organization.

Acknowledging the critical aspects of managing the employee-customer relationship, that is, the host-guest relationship, literature (Grandey, 2003) highlighted the importance of managing employees' performance when they encounter guests. Oftentimes, frontline employees are expected to deliver service affectively, the expectation which originates in the old meaning of 'hospitality.' However, 'affective service delivery' or 'expressing positive emotions'

to guests at all times became a major stress for hospitality workers (Grandey, 2003). According to Hochschild (1983), it is named as emotional labor and it refers to emotions displayed in the workplace. Such a stress from emotional labor often turns into a problem of high employee turnover. This is an ongoing issue that hospitality businesses should resolve (Karatepe & Aleshinloye, 2009).

The importance of emotional labor was earlier emphasized by Hochschild in 1983. Since then, researchers (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Morris & Feldman, 1996; Grandey, 2000) have aimed to minimize negative consequences derived from emotional labor. According to the literature, emotional labor can be managed by employing three different strategies: (1) surface acting, (2) deep acting, and (3) expressing naturally-felt emotions (Dahling & Perez, 2010). Surface acting refers to a process of 'managing observable expressions' in order to provide organizationally demanded emotions (Grandey, 2000). Surface acting strategy was prevalently used as a functional strategy that required employees to display organizationally desirable emotions for every encountered guest. However, this strategy has faced severe criticism because it neglected negative outcomes associated with inner and outer inconsistency in emotional display, such as emotional dissonance, fatigue, and burnout (Dahling & Perez, 2010). To deal with negative outcomes of surface acting, the deep acting strategy was developed and suggested as a counteracting strategy (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Morris & Feldman, 1996).

Deep acting refers to a process of ‘managing feelings’ to match with organizationally desired emotions (Grandey, 2000). This strategy refers to employees’ ability to modify their own feelings to be consistent with organizational requirements (Dahling & Perez, 2010). Grandey (2003) referred to this strategy as ‘acting in good faith’ due to its genuineness of displayed feelings. Although deep acting is a functional solution and demands greater efforts in eliciting images, memories, and thoughts to provide a more authentic emotional response, it minimalizes the negative outcomes of surface acting (Morris & Feldman, 1996). Grandey (2003) suggests that deep acting strategies requires employees to attempt to match their internal emotional states to organizational expectations; employees need to change their inner feelings to maintain appropriate emotional displays. Deep acting strategies enable hospitality employees to modify their inner emotions in accordance with what needs to be expressed. When employees adopt deep acting as their display rules, they are more likely to maintain affective service delivery, have less stress, and have lower staff turnover (Grandey, 2003).

Naturally-felt emotion (NFE) is defined as a state of employees being able to match their true feelings with organizational demands display and, hence, does not require ‘acting’ (Dahling & Perez, 2010). Naturally-felt emotion strategies (Diefendorff, Croyle, & Gosserand, 2005) were proposed and adopted, albeit in a limited way because their managerial efficiency is yet to be proven. However, previous studies

(e.g., Diefendorff et al., 2005) asserted that emotional labor under the notion of NFE can be conceptually different from surface or deep acting strategies. In Diefendorff et al.'s study, it was supported that NFE allowed employees to demonstrate their feelings without modifying them, thereby resulting in less conflicts to employees. Although NFE strategy seems promising as a strategy to deal with emotional labor arising from modern meanings of hospitality, it awaits further investigation before organizational adoption.

In summary, the meaning of hospitality has evolved from unconditional hospitality to conditional hospitality. Historically, when hospitality was merely about providing a temporary shelter for both invited and non-invited guests, the major component of the host-guest relationship was 'generosity'. Therefore, offering unconditional hospitality for guests, or even for strangers, was possible. As the meaning of hospitality has gradually adopted more social features over time, such as social status and social relationship, it has gradually evolved into a reciprocal host-guest relationship, leaving the host and guest with an expectation of what to offer and what to receive. As society has accepted the notion of commercial hospitality (i.e., 'paying for one's hospitality'), the meaning of hospitality has shifted accordingly. The guest demands value equivalent to his or her payment and the host strives to provide utmost value for the guest. Despite the drastic change in the meaning of hospitality, the guest's expectations have remained unchanged. Guests are still seeking good service and long-

term relationships with hosts, wanting to be valued and treated with compassion and care. As such, hosts are obligated to provide good service and constantly display positive, expected emotions, a business demand giving rise to many problems of emotional labor.

Hospitality providers often do not recognize the true reason for serving guests. Admittedly, putting oneself into each guest's shoes is nearly impossible. However, there are ways to reduce employee stress emanating from performing the host's obligations, especially of emotion. If Abraham in the early excerpt was in a situation requiring him to serve at least 100 people per day, it might be difficult for him to provide unconditional hospitality every time. However, he might be able to show compassion for those guests by using deep acting strategy and that will reduce his burden of being a host for vast many people. The guest's expectations of hospitality remain unchanged over time. It is the context that has changed and is changing. Therefore, future guests will continue to demand for utmost hospitality involving the host's affective service delivery. There is no single solution to the issues arising from the modern concept of conditional hospitality, such as emotional labor. However, in the same way as Abraham was being a humble host to his guests, when hospitality organizations and employees are trained to deliver the true meaning of hospitality by relying on NFE strategies, hospitality workers can offer self-motivated service and result in better customer service and ultimately better customer retention.

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