

The Handoff

By Ruby Newell-Legner, CSP, Guest Relations Training Expert

In every organization there is a handoff of some kind. It is a time when one employee finishes their responsibilities with the customer and then 'hands off' the patron to the next staff member. These specific moments can either paint a positive picture or set the customer up for multiple disappointments. Here are the key steps in a handoff, using the example I used while presenting the Guest Relations Training Program for Heinz Field, home of the Pittsburgh Steelers:

Selling the Ticket

The first step probably involves the purchase of an event ticket. If the ticket agent is positive, friendly, and enthusiastic about their job, not only do they sell the ticket, they offer insight in making seating choices. They ask questions like, "Do you like seats in the middle of the field or do you prefer to be in the shade?" An astute sales person will prepare for the handoff by explaining the best place to park and the best gate to enter based on the seat location. Offering a detailed map of the stadium when the ticket agent hands the customer their ticket is a nice touch. If the ticket seller offers a fan guide to the purchaser, even better!

Parking at the Event

When the sports fan arrives at the game, they enter the parking area with a smile because they already know the best place to park. When the parking attendant greets them with a smile and directs them into the assigned space in a pleasant manner, impressions are on a positive role. If the parking lot attendant notices the guests carrying a large bag of goodies and a big thermos of liquid as they leave their car, it is appropriate for the parking lot attendant to warn the guest of the guidelines for what fans can take into the stadium using a positive demeanor to explain it to them. Adding "I thought you would want to know before you got all the way up there," can help avoid an ugly confrontation after the fan has walked from the parking lot all the way to the stadium. Once again, the handoff has been positive and promoted a positive experience for the fans and the employees.

Ruby Newell-Legner, Certified Speaking Professional

9148 W. Vandeventor Dr. • Littleton, CO 80128 • Phone 303.933.9291
Fax 303.904.2966 • E-Mail Ruby@RubySpeaks.com • www.RubySpeaks.com

Entering the Venue

When the fans reach the gate with a long line, a preventive action can be for security personnel to clarify bottle guidelines with fans before they get up to the gate. This allows a patron time to drink whatever they have in a glass bottle or make decisions on how to dispose of it without feeling the pressure of everyone when they hold up the line at the gate. This also makes the process run smoother for the ticket takers.

Being Seated

Once inside the stadium, ushers can begin positive relationships with those in their section by offering assistance to find their seat. Simple reminders for fans to take their tickets with them if they leave the section will help avoid delays or a possible altercation after a quick dash to the restroom!

Assistance with Concessions

When merchandise vendors know where specialty foods can be purchased and can direct fans to the correct location, refreshment stand workers often return the favor. Food vendors can direct their customers to a specific cart or store selling specific sports paraphernalia. One good turn deserves another.

When this kind of synergy is not in affect, the entire experience becomes a nightmare for the fan. Let's look at the other option for each stage of the handoff. Imagine the decrease in ticket sales with just one encounter like this...

The ticket seller doesn't explain where to park or where to enter the stadium so the fan misses kick off because they were lost. When they finally get to the gate with all their stuff, security tells them they can't bring it in and they have to take it all back to the car. Grrr. After finally getting to their seats, little Johnny decides he wants Dippin' Dots so dad takes Johnny up to the snack bar. No one on the concourse knows where Dad can buy Dippin' Dots and after settling for regular ice cream, the "ticket police" won't let dad and Johnny back into their section because Mom has their tickets.

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What are the chances of that family becoming season ticket holders or even coming back for another game? Probably slim!

Whether you are running a special event or managing guest relations staff, there is always a handoff from teammate to teammate.

Are your players aware of the importance they all play in this process?

To schedule training or to see when Ruby will be presenting in your area, visit www.GuestRelationsTraining.com or call Ruby's office in Littleton, Colorado at 303-933-9291

Ruby Newell-Legner, Certified Speaking Professional, is considered the pre-eminent Customer Satisfaction Expert in the Sports & Leisure Industry today. For over two decades Ruby has been helping organizations make exceptional customer service a way of life.

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