

# TeleGRAM

## Great American Hotel Group Newsletter

### Another Year Wiser

Wishing a very happy birthday to our Great American Hotel Group office and property associates:

Brandie Tweedie - May 24  
Dan Hays - May 28  
Rob Greene - June 28

### Around the Block

Wishing a "Happy Anniversary" to our Great American Hotel Group office and property associates:

Candy Grimbilas - 16 years  
Mercy Breitenbach - 2 years  
Tom Cherundolo - 2 years  
Bill Webster - 3 years  
Melissa Oliver - 1 year

### Things That Make You Go Hmmm

Career Builders Top 10 Most Bizarre Reasons for Being Late For Work:

*I knocked myself out in the shower. I was drunk and forgot at which Waffle House I parked my car. I discovered my spouse was having an affair, so I had to follow him this morning. Someone robbed the gas station I was at and I didn't have enough gas to get to another station. I had to wait for the judge to set my bail. There was a stranger sleeping in my car. A deer herd was moving through town. I'm not late....I was thinking about work on my way in. I dreamed that I got fired. I went out to my car to drive to work and the trunk had been stolen out of it.*

### A Laugh A Day ...

## WoodSpring Suites Debuts in NH

*By Dave Akridge*

WoodSpring Suites, the nation's fastest growing value segment extended-stay hotel brand announces plans for the first location in New England. The 124-unit hotel will be built in Hooksett, NH and is expected to open in mid-2016.



The hotel is being developed by NH Highway Hotel Group and will be managed by Great American Hotel Group.

Almost a year ago our TeleGRAM newsletter showed our Director of Human Resources, Suzanne Baele with some Value Place compatriots, in Wichita, KS as we were completing our training to be a Certified Operator of this exciting

economy extended stay brand.

What a difference a year makes!

Following our certification, Great American hosted a series of 3 development forums and invited likely developers to experience what the Brand had to offer.

Concurrently, on the Value Place Brand side, new CEO Bruce Haase and team were working on re-branding. In April, Value Place became WoodSpring Suites, An Economy Extended Stay hotel.



*Suzanne Baele and Value Place Friends*

We are pleased to have provided the forum to have this exciting Brand introduced to New England. On June 9th, NH Highway Hotel Group signed the first New England WoodSpring Suites license agreement to develop a WoodSpring Suites in Hooksett, NH.

We anticipate an October 2015 groundbreaking for this new hotel.

WoodSpring Suites, as well as its enhanced brand extension, WoodSpring Suites Signature, are hotels for good people with practical needs, down-to-earth attitudes and a comfortable style, and who appreciate the value of life's necessities — done really well. For more information, visit [www.WoodSpring.com](http://www.WoodSpring.com).

**It's Simple. Done Better.<sup>SM</sup>**

## I Don't Give a Damn 'Bout My Bad Reputation (But Here's Why You Should!)

*You're living in the past. It's a new generation.* Joan Jett got it: rebel against old ideas and grab new ones by the horns. For some this comes easily, for others adapting to new ideas is painfully slow. This is exemplified in a recent study that showed that only 56% of hotels are responding to TripAdvisor reviews and only 17% to Expedia reviews. This wouldn't be so surprising if we didn't know for a fact that management responses to travel reviews improves guests' images of a property.

For those needing a reminder, here's why it's time to quit living in the past and make sure you're taking impeccable care of your hotel's reputation.

### *Increasing Exposure & Increasing Bookings*

—Given equal prices, travelers are 3.9 times more likely to choose a hotel with higher review scores.

—The way hotel management responds to reviews matters. Appropriate responses to bad reviews improved 84% of users' impressions of the property. Negative responses from management reduced the visitors likely to visit the hotel by 64%.

—Properties that respond to more than 50% of their reviews increase their likelihood of receiving a booking inquiry by 24%, compared to properties that do not respond to reviews, according to a 2014 TripAdvisor study.

—Amazon Local Travel is using travel review ratings to curate their travel collection offerings. They aren't the only ones, and they won't be the last. Getting the exposure means getting more bookings.

—Approximately 90% of travelers report reading travel reviews prior to booking. They read anywhere from 6-12.

### *Return on Investment*

—Recent TrustYou research showed that when prices are increased for hotels with better review scores, travelers are more likely to book the hotel with the higher score despite the higher rate. In fact, when explicitly asked, 76% of travelers say they are willing to pay more for a hotel with higher review scores.

—Hotels can locate areas where investment will have the greatest payoff. For instance, bathrooms and beds are mentioned more often than any other issues in a survey of negative travel reviews.

Reputation is vulnerable territory—accepting that the reins are very publicly in others' hands. By its very nature, reputation also is not optional; it's not a choice. What is a choice is how you approach it and putting your best, most-authentic food forward is always meaningful when it comes to the R word. The stats prove it.

## Handling Customer Complaints 101

Customers come in all shapes and sizes and we can probably all agree that the most difficult is the angry customer. This is someone who has been wronged and is upset and emotional. We get it...mistakes happen, and you will have upset customers. As soon as it is apparent that your customer is upset or that there is a problem, it is absolutely necessary to deal with the situation.

### 6 Steps to Successfully Handling Customers

1. Listen completely. As the customer explains the situation, give them your full attention, give good eye contact and nod your head to show your attention. Don't half listen.
2. Let them vent. Allow them time to speak, state their case and openly complain. Be polite. Don't interrupt, explain, defend or justify until it is your turn. The customer wants to vent and it makes them feel better, so let them.
3. Apologize and mean it. This at times can be hard when you did not cause the problem or if you could not have prevented the problem. So when you apologize, you are sometimes not taking blame, but you are apologizing for how they feel and/or for the bad experience. Put yourself in their shoes and be sincere; no canned responses.
4. Ask what you can do. If appropriate, genuinely and politely ask what you can do to make things right or to make the situation better.
5. State your action steps. Assure them that you will fix/assist with the problem. State specifically what you will do and by when and tell them when you will follow up with a progress report.
6. Thank them. Without direct customer feedback, we have no idea if we are delivering the experiences that our customers want so we always need to show appreciation.

Your overall goal is to right the wrong and to alleviate the customers' concerns. Preventing mistakes and unfortunate customer situations from happening again and immediately addressing the problems will minimize the damage and possibly present an opportunity for an upset customer to become a happy one.

*(Article written by Katie Scheer)*



## 5 Time Winner

Congratulations Hampton Inn Bennington on being inducted into the Trip Advisor Certificate of Excellence Hall of Fame. This unique accolade is granted only to those businesses that have won the Certificate of Excellence for five years in a row.

This award is earned by consistently receiving great reviews on Trip Advisor.

trivia Questions Answers:  
1.e 2.b 3.e 4.d 5.d 6.b 7.d 8.c 9.d 10.c 11.a 12.c 13.c 14.b

## Selling the Sizzle ....

Linda Komornik, Corporate Director  
of Sales & Marketing

### How To Create A Social Media Marketing Plan

As with any marketing strategy, it is critical to create a plan before jumping in to any project. You know the saying, "Proper Planning Prevents Poor Performance", and I am all about the plan.

To create your plan you will first need to identify the goal. With any social media, the plan should be to build connections (find the right customer), create a buzz (engage those prospective customers), and get people excited to buy your product!

Building connections start by creating customer-focused messages, customized in your brand voice, with a specific and timely focus. The key is to be specific - not general. Today's customers are bombarded by sales messages from everyone. With social media, you need to be very cautious and not do a hard sell on every single post you make. You need a plan that incorporates a rotation of fun facts, captivating photos, and posts that make the customer want to reply/enter/answer, with your selling messages.

You must focus on each stage of the buying cycle in order to create a buzz. Think about the guest that is planning a trip. What do they want and need to make a buying decision? First and foremost, then need to want your product! Captivate them with irresistible photos where they can picture themselves having fun or experiencing an activity. Follow up with the details of when, where, how and why and then an easy way to buy with a link and/or a hook.

The second stage of the buying cycle is the customer who has already bought your product and is ready to share their great experiences. Give the guest an opportunity to tell their friends by suggesting reviews, check-ins, hashtagging, or posting photos. These are all ways for the customer to engage with your social medias.

Lastly, you need to address the post-purchase personas. Keeping customers and re-engaging a guest to become a repeat customer is critical. Keep your social media sites fresh, inspiring and full of current fodder. Keep a list of local happenings and keep engaging in an organized manner. This is also the stage where your guests become advocates. Posting is great but SHARING is priceless. Successful social media makes your followers want to share the info.

Write down your plan! Keep yourself on track by referring to the plan often. Update your plan and change course based on activity and results.

Happy socializing!

Linda

## Are You Smarter than a 5th Grader?

Do you know your summer anthems? Test your knowledge here and then build a summer playlist!

1. Who sang "Cruel Summer"?  
a. Karen Elson      b. Bananarama      c. Elvis  
d. Dixie Chicks      e. Both A & B
2. Who sang "Hot Fun In The Summertime"?  
a. Temptations      b. Sly & Family Stone      c. Peaches & Herb  
d. Jefferson Airplane      e. Earth, Wind & Fire
3. Who sang "Indian Summer"?  
a. The Doors      b. Gavin DeGraw      c. Brooks & Dunn  
d. Stereophonics      e. Duff McKagan
4. Who sang "One Week Last Summer"?  
a. Stevie Nicks      b. Tori Amos      c. Carole King  
d. Joni Mitchell      e. Carly Simon
5. Who sang "Suddenly Last Summer"?  
a. The Cars      b. The Police      c. The Go-Go's  
d. The Motels      e. The Hotels
6. Who sang "Summer Love"?  
a. Boys to Men      b. One Direction      c. The Osmond's  
d. ABBA      e. New Kids on the Block
7. Who sang "Summer Nights"?  
a. Rascal Flatts      b. Van Halen      c. John Travolta  
d. Olivia Newton-John      e. All of the above
8. Who sang "The Boys of Summer"?  
a. Elvis Costello      b. Darius Rucker      c. Don Henley  
d. Glenn Fry      e. John Mellancamp
9. Who sang "This Summer's Gonna Hurt"?  
a. Bruno Mars      b. Taylor Swift      c. One Republic  
d. Maroon 5      e. Magic Dragons      d. Coldplay
10. Who sang "All Summer Long"?  
a. Tommy Lee      b. Uncle Kracker      c. Kid Rock  
d. Eminem      e. Nickelback      d. Limp Bizkit
11. Who sang "Girls in Their Summer Clothes"?  
a. Bruce Springsteen      b. Billy Joel      c. Bon Jovi  
d. Ringo Starr      e. The Monkey's
12. Who sang "Out of Summertime"?  
a. Dierks Bentley      b. Sheryl Crow      c. Scotty McCreery  
d. Jewel      e. Craig Morgan      f. Keith Urban
13. Who sang "Lords of Summer"?  
a. Iron Maiden      b. AC/DC      c. Metallica  
d. Nirvana      e. Both B & C
14. Who sang the "Theme from a Summer Place"?  
a. Johnny Mathis      b. Percy Faith      c. Vic Damone  
d. Jerry Vale      e. Frank Sinatra      d. Dean Martin



*By Leslie Zieren, Esq. (Reprinted from Bad Hire? Bad Fire? Don't Let Desperation Cloud Your Hiring Decisions)*

Several employers in different industries I have spoken with recently are facing liability risks for the same reasons—they made bad hiring decisions. Now, attempting to manage those employees is causing the employers stress, valuable time, and lost productivity.

You may have had that open position for some time now, and everyone is working extra hours to make up the slack, so you want to fill it as soon as possible, but take your time. Sure, you will only hire a machine operator, for example, who has the skills and training to be safe and productive in that position but don't just check off the hard skills boxes and overlook attributes that really make a difference.

Skills can be learned or improved with training, but an employee either has a strong work ethic or does not. It's really not anything you can teach because work ethic is learned typically early on in life. People have enthusiasm and commitment or they don't at the time of hire, and it is not your job to try to reform someone.

A tell-tale sign you have made a bad hire is when a new employee, in the first month of employment, is late for work for reasons like oversleeping or not having a ride to work. And, that same employee does not even call, email, or text to let you know the situation and when to expect the employee to arrive at work.

If the level of commitment and communication is this low in the first month, you can be sure it will only get worse. You may have hired the most talented machine operator, but if he or she is not dependable in showing up for work, his or her productivity rate and skills become less useful.

Self-motivation is a key attribute. Does your machine operator attend non mandatory safety meetings? Does the employee come to you with suggestions for improving productivity or safety? Does the employee serve as a mentor of others, without being asked? Did the employee take a class at night to learn a skill that can improve job performance? These self-motivated actions show commitment and interest in your business.



Teamwork and resiliency are key. A team-oriented employee will encourage others, carry his or her load and more, and will display a positive, can-do attitude, especially in challenging times and in the face of difficulties. Does your employee crumble under pressure or rise to the occasion, pulling up others along with him or her? Does the employee take responsibility or blame others?

A brilliant and productive employee who is disorganized can end up being a disaster for your business. Should the employee become ill, is their work organized such that someone else could step in and know exactly what is due and when? Organization is an important attribute.

I once hired a paralegal who did not have the best skills or experience in the applicant pool I was working with, not by a long shot. I hired her because of what one of her former employers told me. Her former boss told me he regularly sent her to scheduled sheriff's sales to place bids on real estate for different clients. One day, the sale was to be held on the courthouse steps in a little town about three hours drive away. On her way to the scheduled sale, there was a downpour of rain and the paralegal hydroplaned off the two-lane country road and ended up with her car nose down in a drainage ditch at a 45-degree angle and not drivable. Luckily, she was not hurt. She grabbed the legal file, climbed out of the ditch, and started walking and thumbing for a ride. She caught a ride and, soaking wet and muddy, made it to the sheriff's sale with three minutes to spare before the auction began. She didn't crumble and she didn't panic. Instead, the paralegal was unstoppable and the client's interests were served.

Do your applicants have attributes such as a strong work ethic, enthusiasm, commitment, resiliency, responsibility, as well as communication, teamwork and organization skills?

## Operationally Speaking .... Bob Weiser, Regional Director of Operations

By Rocco Santopietro (Excerpt reprinted from *Why I Believe in "SNAP"*)

..... One night I asked my mentor, "How can I be the best at what I do?" The answer he gave was short and sharp, he told me simply: "The day you do the 'right thing' rather than 'things right' you will come to work smiling and whistling, and on that day you will know." My mentor gave me a small booklet (that I still have); remarkably it was the very first employee handbook written by Harry Gordon Selfridge for the Famous store in London. The first page struck me and influenced me so much, that today I still live and operate by this principle:

*"Get the confidence of the public and you will have no difficulty in getting their patronage. Inspire your whole workforce with the right spirit of service; encourage every sign of the true spirit. Treat your customers as guests when they come and when they go, whether or not they buy. Give them all that can be given fairly, on the principle that to him that giveth shall be given. Remember always that the recollection of quality remains long after the price is forgotten. Then your business will prosper by a natural process."*

The only way to offer a remarkable and memorable experience is with a hotel team and staff that possess emotional intelligence. This means intuitive people that can connect with each other, that possess empathy, and genuineness—"A team of people who quietly make guests feel comfortable and important." Aiming for excellence is not a task, it can only be achieved by those who make a choice of lifestyle rather than a career in hospitality. I'm sure that most of my colleagues would agree, it's not about success, but the sense of fulfillment and pride to make people feel good. My focus throughout my career has always been in creating memories and with that financial results have always come. As Henry Gordon Selfridge said, "excite the mind and the hand will reach for the pocket."

The hospitality has never been more challenging and exciting that it is today. Our industry is highly competitive and to prosper, you need to ensure that your operation is the best in its class. "Being remarkable" is what makes the difference today and that ultimately ends up improving the operations bottom line. Offering a remarkable experience pays dividends by increasing loyalty and word of mouth.

This is why I believe and actively practice day-in-day-out these 4 timeless principles, that are to me, the "four main pillars" of our industry. They will stand the test of time, no matter how technological, connected or automated hospitality will be or become.

### **Sense of urgency   No excuses   Attention to detail   Pride of ownership**

**Sense of Urgency** - I believe this is the key to hospitality. Our business naturally lends itself to attract a high percentage of people with that sense of urgency about them. There is just too much to be done. The truth is that your guests are counting on you and you should never disappoint them. Sense of urgency is an unrelenting push for results, or identifying matters of pressing importance and acting upon them immediately and avoid resting on the laurels of success.

**No Excuses** - I love the motto "Offer no excuses and accept no excuses." When we host a guest to our establishment, implicitly we make a promise. Delivering this promise should be done consistently at all times. There are no shortcuts in quality and we all learn from our mistakes. There are legitimate reasons why mistakes happen. You can explain why things went bad but what guests really want is the mistake quickly fixed on the spot, long before their stay is ruined. So, forget the excuse and have a plan in place to fix the problem.

**Attention to Detail** - True hoteliers know the small details which exemplify their service and make the stay more comfortable. There's a delicate balance between proactive and presumptive service. The guest should feel in command and not dictated to. No matter how elaborate your turn down service is, or how packed with technology your rooms are, it's the staff that really makes the difference. Engaged staff are intuitive to guests' needs and go out of their way to help.

**Pride of Ownership** - Focusing on the guest, but mostly trusting, nurturing and recognizing the ability of every single staff member and empowering them and instilling the pride of ownership will make every team member go beyond their job tasks and adapt/modify services to meet every single guest's needs. Adding little touches that go beyond the usual, and taking fierce pride in their craft will give you the ultimate hedge in the competitive hospitality business.

The bottom line is SNAP is simply creating memorable experiences and making guests feel special in the most natural way.

## Roomer Has It

### COURTYARD LAKE PLACID



Front Desk Manager Jason Beatty is constantly innovating and trying to find economical ways to take vacations. His latest tip on cutting down on air flight costs gives new meaning to sitting in the middle seat!

### SPRINGHILL SUITES QUAKERTOWN

Marriott International is pleased to announce the newest winners to gain access to Club 120. Congratulations to the SpringHill Suites Quakertown for achieving this honor.

To receive a Club 120 pass, SpringHill Suites branded hotels must achieve a RevPAR index of 120% or higher and achieve three of these four focus areas:

1. Increase non-qualified weekday rate by 4.5% or more over the same quarter LY
2. Increase non-qualified weekday mix by 1% or more over same quarter LY
3. Increase ADR index by 1.5% or more over same quarter LY
4. Access Mad About Market Share action plan 2+ times per month.

"We are very proud of our team for achieving this designation," noted Tom Cherundolo, GM. "Our staff is on a mission, and is focused on growth within our market while simultaneously taking extraordinary care of our guests."

## A Duck Out Of Water

Lewis the Duck is the brand mascot of Homewood Suites by Hilton. His image is featured in a series of children's books, games, videos and toys which illustrate the various aspects of business travel.

Lewis the Duck was created by Global Head of Brand Management Bill Duncan and his 18 year-old son Christian, to help guests stay connected with young ones at home, while parents are on the road for extended business trips. "If you are a working parent that travels often, extended trips can be difficult. Inspired by this fact and my own experience traveling while my son was young, the Lewis the Duck series was created to explain business travel in an engaging way and make our guests' families feel a part of their trips," Duncan noted.



Team Homewood Suites Gateway Hills has embraced this brand icon, whose new adventures embrace the Hilton culture of service and giving back to the community in which our team members live and work.

This past week, Lewis the Duck (aka GM Adam Robitaille) have been seen around the Gateway Hills campus, meeting with other businesses and getting to know the community. Their final stop this past weekend was at the Greater Nashua NH YMCA, where Lewis read his latest adventure to 120 preschoolers.

"Lewis will continue to assist the pre-opening team in our mission to tell at least 100 people a week about our hotels opening (later this month)" noted Jayme Putnam, Sales Manager.



## Thinking Outside the Box

Teresa Maynard, General Manager at Hampton Inn Bennington, shared a Best Practice for installing pool/spa drain covers.... she hires Scuba Randy for \$175 per hour (he replaced 4 covers in that time). This was much easier than draining the pool, filling the pool, and bringing the pool back up to temperature. It was also more cost effective given the price of the pool service technician visit and cost of water to fill the pool. Most importantly, she did not have to deal with ANY service recoveries because of a closed pool!

