

Opinions

Train your staff to avoid being in the wrong headlines

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A recent incident at a hotel in Virginia is a good reminder to train your staff on how (and especially how not) to handle a request by a customer.



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You would think after all the bad press surrounding the incident at a Starbucks in Philadelphia last month would give pause to everyone who works in a customer-facing job. You would think supervisors would remind their staff how not to get into trouble by saying something stupid/horrible/offensive while being recorded. You would think everyone would just ... just know better.

As you can surmise by the fact I'm even writing about this, that is not the case.

A hotel employee at a Country Inn & Suites by Radisson in Newport News, Virginia, [was fired](#) after he called a black customer at the hotel a monkey, The Washington Post reports. The customer, naturally, recorded most of the exchange on his phone.

The customer was there with his family to see his mother, who was visiting from West Virginia. Her guestroom smelled like smoke despite the fact his mother doesn't smoke, so his girlfriend went down to the front desk to request another room for her. The clerk appeared to be aggravated and told her the only other available room didn't have air conditioning. When she returned to the room with the news, the customer made his own attempt with the front-desk associate.

When he learned there was no supervisor to speak with, the customer sat in the lobby to write an email on his phone. Another customer came to the front desk to complain about the lack of a TV in his room. When the second customer looked over to share in his frustration, their brief exchange angered the associate. The associate told him to leave the hotel and, during the argument, the customer pulled out his phone to record it. It's after this point the associate uses the racial slur.

To the hotel's credit, the GM of the property told The Washington Post the employee in question was fired as a result of this.

"I want to apologize for the inappropriate behavior and comments of one of our employees. ... As a result of this incident we will also be re-training every employee this week on our code-of-conduct policies to help ensure something like this never happens again," GM Lisa Little said in a statement.

Obviously, this never should have happened. There were so many opportunities to stop this situation before it escalated to this point. I can't speak to what was going on with the employee or why he appeared to confrontational from the start, but it's clear his approach to handling a request to change rooms wasn't going to help anyone. Even if he had no better options for the customer's mother and was upset about his job, taking his frustration out on a guest is asking for trouble. Demanding a person leave the hotel because he or she isn't happy with a room's condition only compounds the problem.

The second the customer pulled out his cellphone to record the exchange, the employee should have stopped talking. He should have used that as a cue to take a breather and start over with the customer. It's not easy to think clearly once the adrenaline is flowing (a good reason to avoid getting agitated in the first place), which I'm assuming is why the employee continued to argue while on camera. Had the employee used this as an opportunity to try to calm down, it still would have been caught on camera, but at least the video would show him trying to take a different approach.

It's probably best to act as if every engagement with a guest, good or bad, is recorded in some form. It's a good mindset that could help prevent saying something that could come back to bite you later on.

The absolute worst thing here is the language the employee used with the customer. That kind of mindset has no place in society, let alone the hospitality industry. But the situation didn't need to get anywhere near this bad in the first place.

Managers, train your employees not only on matters of racial sensitivity but also anger management techniques. It could help save you a lot of headaches.

Why do we still need to keep learning these lessons over and over? What do you think could stop it? Leave me a contact below or contact me at bwroten@hotelnewsnow.com or [@HNN_Bryan](https://twitter.com/HNN_Bryan).

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