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The Guest R/Evolution (Meaning)

Introduction

Hospitality is about winning over people through not being judgemental, applying empathy, generosity, and kindness. A sustainable future is only possible with the buy-in of guests, staff, and suppliers. Believe me, when you empower people to act positively by extending hospitality you will get that buy-in, and the power that unleashes is incredible.

The key points of this chapter:

- **Utilise character strengths.** Each and every one of us has strengths. From bravery to inquisitiveness, these qualities can be given room to express themselves through conserving behaviours.
- **Health and wellbeing have never been more important to guests.** People the world over are paying more attention to their physical health, mental health, and the health of the planet. Hospitality experiences that cater to good health have a competitive advantage.
- **Seek flow.** Aim always for sustainable hospitality offerings that facilitate moments of flow – of total commitment to and immersion in a given task. It should be rewarding for all involved.
- **Involve everyone.** When you look for allies you will be amazed by the number out there. Guests, staff, and suppliers are key to a sustainable future, but so too are NGOs, community groups, and local governments.

Conserving behaviours can make people happy. It can enrich holiday experiences, build loyalty, and be the centrepiece of beautiful memories for guests and staff alike. It can transform the industry and have a knock on effect on the lives of your guests too. In this chapter, I reveal why guests like to participate in conserving and can find adapting their behaviours makes them happy. Using real-world

evidence from projects undertaken with my academic colleagues, I explore the motivation to participate in pro-environmental activities and sustain them, even if an individual does not hold a high level of affinity with nature.

Understanding what is at the heart of the guest's motivation to conserve will help you generate a more positive guest review, increase staff retention, reduce costs and carbon, and better support your efforts to regenerate your community. In addition, you will discover that it is not so much about whether people are environmentally minded, but the pleasure and positivity they gain from participating in conserving behaviours.

This last chapter is not the 'icing on the cake' that you add at the end of your sustainability initiative. It should be at the heart of the solution. Guest participation must be seen as an enhancement to a person's stay as it rewards them emotionally, besides assisting you to reduce impacts.

This chapter also challenges an accepted norm that guests will only comply with eco-friendly tourism provided it does not compromise their comfort and quality expectations. What that means is often poorly defined. Comfort can mean peace after a busy week, not being cold, or reconnecting with loved ones. Likewise, quality is a very unspecific term. Do we mean luxury? If so, we frequently get great pleasure from life's little luxuries that don't require ostentatious living.

As far back as Socrates (and before that, no doubt), we knew that pleasure was best when accompanied by intelligence so that we could appreciate something's value (*Pursuit of Happiness*, 2021). Earlier in this book, we discussed research that has applied theories that assess people's green intentions, but as we learnt, that is not necessarily an accurate measure of whether they will make green choices. If we consider the problem from another perspective, what motivates and drives people, we see the wealth of other opportunities. As I have explained, guests will happily adapt their behaviours once you persuaded them with the right combination of Materials and Skills, enabling them to apply their Meaning. Your guest experience solution should be transparent so that guests can appreciate their benefits (e.g. better food choices, healthier environment, greater comfort, authentic activities, knowing they have made a good choice) and see environmental and social results.

Tap into character traits

Tourism research often focuses on a narrow lens to assess our motivations to take eco-friendly actions, either a) by being incentivised or disincentivised, or b) by being altruistic. That is limited because we ignore that people also are motivated through drawing on their character strengths. To expand on this we are going to dive a little into psychology and philosophy. Not something you might expect,

but it is necessary to think more deeply about guest and staff participation than simple incentives.

We as humans have virtues – moral values that affect the way we behave in society and help us grow, building our resilience and contributing to our wisdom (Emmons & Crumpler, 2000; Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003). Virtues affect our character, which we display in the way we conduct ourselves. There are a debated number of virtues as they can be strongly affected by culture and religion.

What has all this to do with tourism? People perform better and are more successful if they can build upon their strengths, rather than focusing on their weaknesses (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999). If you tap into people's character strengths – which stem from their virtues – you can persuade them more effectively and, by so doing, stimulate them to sustain those behaviours. That is the important part. They might do an action once, but you want them to keep going.

The approach is similar to the psychology of influence but uses *positive* psychology, which focuses on people's mental health, rather than the application of psychology which in the past focused a great deal on peoples' mental illness (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). What we are seeking is commitment to your idea of sustainable hospitality and the guest experience. People are only going to be genuinely committed when they like and are part of the solution. We do not want nodding heads and polite positive faces that change as soon as contact ends, so we must strive for commitment. We can do this by reaching out to people's own happiness using positive psychology.

How is this relevant to tourism?

When we value something, our actions to achieve those goals make us feel good. These values can sustain our effort to reach them. Some people think that it is vital that the world's rich biodiversity survives, and this sustains their efforts to work as a volunteer on an African holiday. Equally, they can feel it is good to celebrate their marriage anniversary, which sustains their saving for their escape to Fiji. We tend to use hedonism as a sort of shorthand for all tourists' desires for holidays. That's a danger because it devalues the pleasure we all get from nature, love, truth, freedom, adventure... This shorthand of hedonism camouflages the true values many of our guests actually have, which can hold back hospitality evolution.

Guests, like us, are motivated by self-interest. We are motivated by things we value, to take care of ourselves and our ability to perform. This is not the same thing as selfishness, where you waste without concern. This can be directed to ourselves and the world around us. So if we frame conserving resources, cutting waste, cutting carbon emissions, and promoting environmental benefits in a manner in which guests value themselves, we are more likely to appeal to their