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Step 4: Interpersonal communication (Meaning)

Introduction

Earlier, we explored Materials used to save resources and the reasons why guests need to be shown Skills to conserve. Now in this chapter, I discuss Meaning, the third element that integrates with Materials and Skills. It considers the psychological factors involved in persuading guests to participate. Meaning is the essential element to master for businesses wishing to involve guests in resource conservation.

This chapter sets out how to persuade your guests to actively participate in conserving. This approach must be interwoven with your guest-centred designed experience (Chapter 6) so that you can make significant savings. Doing it right means increased guest satisfaction by exceeding expectations. It also means more positive reviews heralding your innovative hospitality. Is that not a breath of fresh air in a world full of commercial challenges?

Some hosts are sceptical about persuading guests, preferring to continue with the tangled web of materials. They fall back on unobtrusive signs and merely monitoring guests' consumption. This doesn't provide guests with know-how, nor does it persuade them. Monitoring results is not meaningful unless translated into tangible action. Your new design needs to be a purposeful, positive, core feature of the guest's stay. What you will discover from this chapter is that persuading guests is a joyful experience that delivers wide-reaching dividends.

This chapter is not a general review of what persuasion is, but a specific interpretation that can be applied in commercial service contexts like hospitality. It is based on my research conducted in several countries at different properties. You might think that this is all very well but in times of staffing issues and evolving accommodation services does not technology have a role here? Rest assured at the

end of the chapter you will find a technology approach. Technology does have a role but it must be humanised if we are to maintain the thrust of offering hospitality rather than a mere service.

Some key points

- **Motivation is essential to sustainable hospitality.** For guests and staff to adjust their behaviours, they need to believe in the cause. Deliver sincere, sustained, thoughtful communication and your customers will reciprocate.
- **Don't force guests; persuade them.** No-one likes being bossed about at the best of time, let alone while on holiday. Recognise your guests as partners who are free to decide their own level of participation
- **Show integrity and credibility.** You and your staff must know your sustainability policies and house rules intimately if guests are to take them seriously. Don't just know the whats, but the whys too
- **Keep it personal.** When introducing guests to your sustainability practices, start with what affects them directly. Chemical-free bathroom products and locally sourced food makes it easier to get them onboard
- **Adjust to cultural contexts.** There is no one-size-fits-all approach to guest communication. Treat them as the individuals they are, adapting your messaging to their culture, background, and priorities

All this helps foster a culture of reciprocation, with staff and guests influencing each other to make the hospitality experience as delightful as possible. When properly nurtured, these relationships actually improve satisfaction, all while conserving resources and supporting the local community.

Conserving resources by
transforming the guest experience

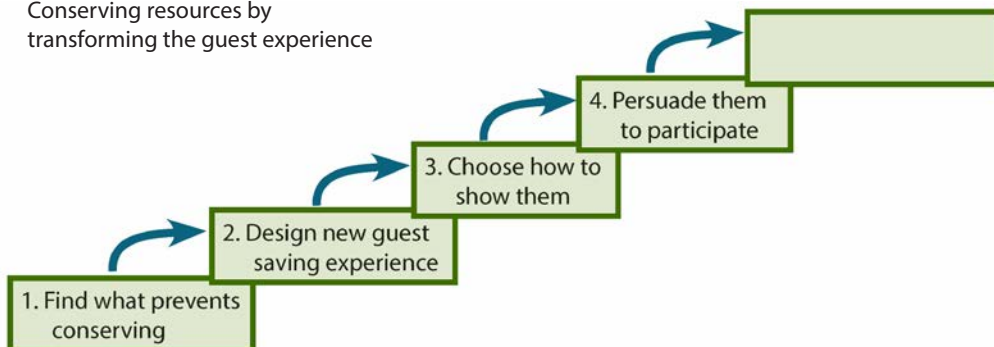


Figure 8.1: 5 Step Method to create transformational guest engagement

We must do better than ‘guest engagement’

Many hospitality firms leave the role of eco-friendly persuasion to tent cards, signs, websites, and in-room tablet communication. They use messages inviting guests to help, often with bold statements of ‘Saving the Planet’ or broad requests to ‘Help us save water’. These advertising approaches are far less persuasive. One-sided communication often backfires because it can appear superficial – an afterthought leaving guests and staff alike unconvinced, unable to relate, or dismissing the messages as greenwashing. (For contactless communication, I cover the best way to create written persuasive messages in the following chapters.)

Sustainability should be deeply embedded within the business. The request for guests to participate must be clearly and fundamentally integrated into the service experience. If you want to be convincing, you will need to offer a dialogue that persuades guests to participate. Simplistic messages can seem meaningless. To be persuasive, your communication must be meaningful.



Figure 8.2: You can provide evidence of your sustainability commitments. This is often of great interest to guests and persuasive. If you cannot afford the time, make sure guests can see and read this in their own time in their accommodation. Technology can replace this host-guest interaction provided it is humanised and you apply a multi-channel approach.

Beyond engagement to persuasion

Remember, we are asking guests to conserve by using less, cutting wastage or avoiding resource use. That may very well mean adapting their behaviour and breaking from routine actions. It should involve using your improved experience design. Text messages aren’t enough to encourage the guest to reassess their efforts sufficiently.

Persuasion is a more sophisticated communication method than the one-way approach of advertising. It involves delivering messages to change attitudes in