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Tourism Ethics

These are very trying times for people in the tourism industry. Safety and security continues to play a major role in the new travel paradigm and in people's decision-making about where to travel. To add to the challenge, many nations around the world are facing difficult economic hurdles. In other places, the so-called recovery is occurring in a sporadic manner. It is a truism that "when the economy catches a cold, the travel industry often catches pneumonia". During economically challenging times, there is always the temptation to cut corners, to save money, and to base decisions on the bottom-line. At times, efficiency measures make a great deal of sense. Nevertheless, if tourism is to continue to be a viable industry in the 21st century, it must find a way to produce profits without sacrificing its business ethics. Faced with all of these challenges, this year is a good time to do an ethical business review. Below is a partial list of suggestions.

- **When in doubt, the right thing to do is the best thing to do.** Don't cut corners because times are hard. Make sure to give customers their money's worth rather than appearing to be selfish and greedy. The hospitality business is about doing for others, and nothing advertises a destination better than giving something extra in a period of economic constriction. Likewise, managers should never cut their employees' salaries before they cut their own. If a reduction-in-force is necessary, a manager should personally handle the situation, perhaps by presenting a good-bye token and always attending the day of a lay-off.
- **When the going gets rough, be calm.** Managers do not have the right to bring their personal problems to the workplace. Sending out a letter telling people that you are giving them less so that you can make a profit produces poor public relations. Travel and tourism is a non-essential industry to some and if we become too selfish, the public may simply decide to vacation in their own backyard. Tourism ethics requires that one's personal life stays at home. If someone is too agitated to work, then it is better to give that person the day off. Once at the workplace, there is a responsibility to concentrate on the guests' needs only.
- **Always take the time to examine any major risk that may confront your guest.** Being prepared is an ethical duty. Our clients are our guests and come under our protection. Never wait until a crisis occurs. Each component of the tourism and travel industry should have a series of back-up or emergency plans that deal with anything from an illness to a physical attack.

- **Develop a good *esprit de corps*.** When the industry is suffering, employees soon learn how much you care. Never ask an employee to do more than you would do. Good managers, at least twice a year, do more than walk through a hotel or attraction – they leave their offices and perform the same tasks as their employees. There is only one way to understand the problems that employees have when at work – by actively participating in their jobs and experiencing their frustrations. Managers should never have unreasonable expectations for employees. If expectations are too low, it will result in boredom; if expectations are too high, it will result in frustration and cover-ups. Both levels of expectations can lead to moral dilemmas for employees.
- **Develop tourism-partnerships.** Visitors come to a location – not to a specific attraction. The tourism experience is a composite of multiple industries including the transportation industry, the lodging industry, the restaurant industry, the entertainment industry, and the security industry. Each one of these sub-components represents a potential alliance. In the 21st century, no one component can survive alone. Instead, it is essential that you define your common goals with each of these tourism components and know where flash-points between you may exist. Address these flash-points openly and develop areas of commonality.
- **Move beyond employee evaluations.** Rather than being seen only as a disciplinarian, work on performance goals for the next period. If employees assume that you are out to get them, then a certain level of dishonesty begins to creep into the relationship. Instead, concentrate on what the employee and you can do to partner toward a common goal. Likewise, never silence an employee. Often we can solve problems by listening fairly; bullying others only shows insecurity.
- **Honesty is the best policy.** Nothing destroys a tourism business as quickly as a lack of credibility. Most guests/customers understand that things do go wrong from time to time. In those cases, admit there is a problem, own it, and deal with the problem. Most people are able to see through double-talk and your credibility will suffer. Remember that credibility means believability, but not necessarily honesty. Don't just be credible, be honest!
- **Never stifle creativity.** Our jobs demand that we allow for risks and innovative ideas. It is all too easy to put someone else's idea down or dismiss it out of hand. Tourism and travel professionals ought to be creative. This in an industry in which statements such as "we do not do it that way" or "that's the way we've always done it" really have no place. In its essence, travel is about taking risks – thus, travel professionals who are afraid of risk-taking usually do no more than adequate job performances. Great ideas can come from both employees and travelers. Give talented people the room they need to shine.
- **Do not become too detail-oriented.** All too often we play linguistic games rather than solve problems. Clarity of speech, ethical behavior, and good customer service go hand in hand. Clarity of speech makes people treat others fairly and justly. When we muddy the waters, we tend to forget our principles or even our *raison d'être*.

- **Try to avoid overgeneralizations, selective observations, and creative information.** Deal with reality, size up the problem, and instead of making an excuse – fix it! Finally, “I am sorry” is a very inexpensive phrase. While saying this phrase is always appreciated, do more. If you are at fault, accept responsibility for the problem and offer fair and just compensation.