



Whose Job Is It, Anyway?

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How can city government and city services affect the success of tourism in a city? You've heard it over and over—you only get one chance to make a first impression. How true is that, and how does tourism fit into the picture for all city services?

It's simple: We all recognize that it is the "job" of those who meet and greet the public to be friendly, hospitable, and efficient to our customers. Those customers include both citizens and tourists. I have often said that it would be easier for us all to be nicer to the tourists in our city—if we only knew who they were. If only there were something that easily distinguished them from our own citizens—like maybe if they blinked off and on like a neon sign as they walked down the street. But they don't.

Regardless of the size of your city, visitors and tourists come to town all the time. In some cases, they are obvious. Certainly, a convention group wearing nametags, driving rental cars, and seeking information about things to do is easy to recognize. But these are not the only visitors to your city. The thousands of leisure travel visitors and business travelers who come through our cities are not as easy to recognize immediately—but they are here, nevertheless.

So whose "job" is it to be friendly and hospitable and welcoming? It's a question that is easy to answer, yet is oftentimes the most difficult to practice. **It's everyone's job** and everyone's responsibility to provide friendly, efficient, hospitable service to all customers. Since you may not be able to be sure if the person across the counter from you



Waco Central, the City of Waco Call Center, responds to calls from customers—citizens and visitors—on a daily basis. A friendly smile translates across the phone lines, also!

or on the phone is a visitor, it is easiest and best to treat everyone with the highest level of service.

Visitors get their first impression of a city in many ways. Maybe their first contact is over the phone, by mail, or even by e-mail. Maybe their first contact is when they drive into your city—they notice the signs, streets, medians, sidewalks, parks, and so on. This first impression is carried forward when they come into contact with city workers—at city hall, the police department, the fire department, the library, or (even more often than many of us realize) work crews who may be working on a utility or street project, collecting garbage, or mowing grass in the park.

All city departments, services, and employees dramatically and absolutely impact that first impression, and they greatly impact the success of tourism in your city.

Cities emit messages to visitors in many, many ways. Coincidentally, local citizens receive these same messages, as well. A city that prioritizes for tourism and visitors will demonstrate this commitment directly to the customer by providing positive messages about the city's cleanliness, safety, accessibility, and convenience.

Clean streets, sidewalks with adequate lighting, well-landscaped and mowed medians, and well-kept parks are clear evidence of a proud city that welcomes visitors. Street signs are important—and to go a bit further, good way-finding signs directing visitors to important landmarks and attractions are significant, positive messages. When thinking about the messages your city sends to visitors, don't overlook the less-obvious opportunities.

Friendly, efficient, informed, capable, responsible, and hospitable customer service is the very least our customers expect from all city workers and services. Therefore, that level of service should be the *minimum* standard of all city government personnel. City employees at all classifications and in all areas of operation should be held to the highest level of expectations regarding courteous, respectful, and helpful customer service.

You may think that some departments, or some job positions in some departments, really don't have to worry about providing this level of service. And certainly there are some departments whose functions are regulatory, which naturally puts them in positions to have negative customer contact. But those situations should not be exempted from at least the minimum of quality service.

Customer Service Case Study

Customer service is also about the city's appearance to citizens and visitors. In fact, this factor can be the most graphic representation of the city's value system. How clean, beautiful, and inviting is *your* city?

A great example of this type of service philosophy working successfully in the corporate world is the Disney Theme Parks. One of Disney's basic corporate tenets is the belief that customers will have a good time and are likely to return if they find the parks and resorts to be clean and well-kept. This is all part of creating and maintaining the "magic" for which Disney has come to be known. Putting this to practical application is really where the magic happens. The only way to accomplish this one critical element of the Disney organization's corporate message is to require all employees to be responsible for the cleanliness of the Disney parks and facilities.

That is, *all* employees are responsible for picking up trash when they see it. Yes, there are armies of workers whose primary job is to pick up trash and keep the parks neat and clean. However, it makes no difference in the Disney organization if you are a grounds worker, a ride operator, a retail concession operator, a tour guide, a firefighter, a police officer, a telephone sales associate, or an executive—it is an imperative imbued even in their pre-employment orientation that all employees, regardless of job or position, are *first responsible* for making sure the parks are clean.



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Clear, easy-to-read wayfinding signs send a positive message to visitors. These signs were produced in the City of Waco Sign Shop and installed in cooperation with TxDOT.