

GUEST EXPERIENCE

The Recovery Standard

Five steps for the complaint that reaches you in person — which is the good one. For every guest who tells you, several didn't, and they are the ones writing the review.

1 Hear all of it

Do not solve at the first sentence. A guest who is interrupted by a solution has not finished telling you the problem, and the part they hadn't reached is usually the part that actually matters.

| *Silence, eye contact, and one prompt: "What else?"*

FAILURE MODE Fixing fast. You solve the cold room and never learn that nobody answered the phone when they called about it.

2 Own it without explaining

The reason it happened is your problem, not theirs. Every sentence of explanation — short-staffed, a system issue, the previous shift — sounds like a defence, and a defence makes the guest argue their case harder.

| *"That shouldn't have happened, and I'm sorry it did." Full stop.*

FAILURE MODE "We've been extremely busy tonight." The guest now has to prove they deserve to be upset.

3 Fix the thing, then the feeling

These are two separate acts and most teams only do one. Solving the practical problem is the minimum; the guest's evening still went wrong and that needs addressing on its own terms.

| *"The room's changed and your bags are already moving. Separately — you lost an hour of your evening, and I'd like to make that up to you."*

FAILURE MODE Fixing the room and considering the matter closed. Operationally resolved, emotionally unresolved.

4 Over-return, once

Give something disproportionate and personal, one time, and never in the form of a discount. A discount says we overcharged you. A gesture says we noticed you.

| *The tasting menu, the transfer, the bottle they mentioned at check-in. Chosen, not calculated.*

FAILURE MODE Taking twenty percent off. You have priced the apology, and the guest now knows exactly what their evening was worth to you.

5 Tell the house

A complaint that repeats is not a guest-service event, it is an operations fault, and it will keep producing complaints until someone writes it down. Log it the same night, with the cause, not just the outcome.

| *"Third late-night AC call this week on the fourth floor. Engineering, not front office."*

FAILURE MODE Handling it beautifully and telling no one. You have solved it for one guest and left it in place for the next forty.

What Guests Actually Want When They Complain

Teams assume complaints are about compensation. They very rarely are. What follows is the gap between what your staff think is happening and what is.

YOUR TEAM ASSUMES	THE GUEST ACTUALLY WANTS	SO THE MOVE IS
They want money off.	To know it wasn't normal, and won't repeat.	Say it plainly, then fix the cause.
They want to argue.	To finish the sentence without being interrupted.	Let the silence run three seconds longer.
They want the manager.	Someone who can actually decide.	Bring authority, not seniority.
They're exaggerating.	To be believed the first time.	Accept the account as given.
They'll leave a bad review anyway.	A reason to tell the better story.	Make the recovery the memorable part.
It's a personality problem.	The thing they asked for, on the first ask.	Check whether it was refused before it was escalated.

How to use this with your team

Read one row per briefing for a week. The aim is not sympathy for the guest — it is a team that stops treating complaints as attacks and starts treating them as information.

This standard is drawn from the Guest Experience masterclass — filmed on property with the managers who run it. Seven masterclasses, taught by the people doing the work.

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