

## **No Room at the Inn**

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It was a 12-hour journey by car. Arrived at the front door of the motel at 1:30 a.m. Time to check in and get some sleep for the early morning meeting tomorrow. Well, that was the plan! While the 12-hour journey was uneventful, what was to take place over the next few hours was not.

Charlie, a middle-aged male traveling on business, had booked four nights of accommodation at the Blue Mountain Inn, an international corporate franchise, in Pleasantville, using one of the online travel agencies, an agency which he had used exclusively for a number of years for his personal and business (hotel and air) travel needs. In fact, Charlie preferred using this agency, since he found the prices quoted were often lower than those offered by a competitive online service. Up to the latest trip, there were never any problems at the time of check-in with respect to receiving the services requested.

When Charlie arrived at his destination, he found the doors to the motel closed; no one at the front desk, which he could see through the windows; and the lights dimmed inside. Charlie noticed an outside sign that indicated to call the number listed below the sign using the attached telephone. However, Charlie saw no number; just what appeared to be an empty placeholder for a phone number. Nonetheless, Charlie took a stab at trying a few numbers (e.g., "0", "9"), but to no avail. Charlie even called the number of the motel listed on his reservation document from the travel agency, again, no success. Finally, Charlie decided to call the travel agency on his cell phone using the 800 number listed on the reservation. Now the fun begins!

When Charlie made contact with the travel agency, he explained the situation. The representative of the travel agency called the motel, but there was no answer. Charlie spent an hour and a half talking to a "supervisor" and two other representatives of the travel agency trying to resolve the issue. Fortunately, it was a clear, warm summer evening.

The only resolution that the travel agency offered was that they would try to find another motel/hotel in the area. However, Charlie was informed that he would have to directly pay for night and that he would probably be charged for one night of accommodation by the original motel. The rate for the original motel was about \$50, the rate for the other motels/hotels in the area ranged from \$80 plus. To make matters worse, even though he had a map of the area, he had never been in this area before, so he wasn't sure where the other places of accommodation were located. The darkness of the night would also make finding the location of any other motel difficult.

Charlie's attempt to convince the travel agency that it was their responsibility to pay for a night of accommodation was to no avail. He was even told by one of the representatives that, since check-in

time at his original motel was 3:00 p.m., he should have been there at the time. Charlie laughed at such a ludicrous suggestion. He was also told that he should have contacted the motel to tell them that he would be arriving late at night. Charlie responded by stating that since he was dealing with an international operation, he expected someone to be manning the front desk at all hours. This was not a “Ma and Pa” operation. Charlie also indicated that he was not sure exactly what time he would arrive at his final destination, since he had never traveled this route before.

In the end, Charlie had no choice but to spend the rest of the night in his car, sleeping for part of the time. He was not going to shell out \$80 plus for a few hours of sleep. Fortunately, there was an all-night gas bar and convenience store near by, so at least Charlie could get a drink and some food.

At 6:30 a.m. the next morning, there was life in at the front desk of the motel. The employee at the desk opened the front door. Just as Charlie was about to enter the motel office, he noticed a number written below the sign he had read earlier. The number, written in black in the space for the placeholder, had not been visible in the darkness of the night. The background of the area where the number had been written was dark blue.

When Charlie approached the front desk, he explained the situation. The employee stated that a sign indicating the number for late arrivals to call should have been placed on the door the night before. She apologized.

Charlie was immediately given a room so he could get a few hours of shut eye before his meeting. The employee indicated that she would explain the situation to the owner.

When Charlie returned to his room late that day, in his room he found an apology from the owner, a \$25 gift card for a national restaurant with an outlet in the area, and a statement that he would only be charged for two of the four nights of accommodation booked at the motel.

Since Charlie found the accommodation acceptable during his initial stay, on another trip during the following week, he booked another four-night stay at the motel. This time, however, he used a different online travel agency to make his reservation. He has never used the services of the online travel agency involved in the initial fiasco again.

**Focus:** Service industry, service characteristics [intangible, inseparable, individual, perishable (no inventory storage), inconsistent], tangible vs. intangible aspects of service, channel facilitator, customer satisfaction, customer dissatisfaction, marketing (customer) orientation, conflict, attitude, attitude-to-behaviour relationship, initial behaviour, repeat behaviour, customer loyalty, attitude change, attitude models (weighted and unweighted expectancy-value models, conjunctive lexicographic model), attitude measurement (attributes/evaluative criteria/determinant criteria, importance of attributes), halo effect.

### Questions:

1. Define each of the concepts identified in the above list. Explain how each of the concepts applies to the case.
2. What is the problem in the case? What is/are the symptom(s) of this problem? Who is to blame for the problem?
3. If you were on a trip and something went wrong, to what extent would you expect your travel agent to come to your assistance.
4. Did the travel agent involved in this situation behave in an appropriate manner? Explain. What would you have done in this situation if you were the travel agent of record?
5. What if the situation described had involved a mother, a father, and two young children (under 10 years of age), was the resolution offered by the travel agent appropriate in this situation? Explain.
6. What if the event described in the case had occurred in the cold of winter, would the suggested resolution by you have changed?
7. What if the event described in the case had involved a young female, was the resolution offered by the travel agent appropriate in this situation? Explain.
8. What impact do you think the remedies provided by the owner of the motel had on Charlie's attitude toward this motel? How do you know?
9. What impact do you think the remedies provided by the owner of the identified motel had on Charlie's attitude toward the international motel entity involved in this situation?
10. What impact do you think the remedies provided by the owner of the identified motel had on Charlie's attitude toward the travel agency that originally booked the accommodation?