

Cross Cultural Cosmos

International Corporate and Business Communication and Behavior

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Hospitality: What Does it Mean?

Hospitality in the Middle East: In Middle Eastern culture, it was considered a cultural norm to take care of the strangers and foreigners living among you. These norms are reflected in many Biblical commands and examples. The obligations of both host and guest are strict. The bond is formed by eating salt together under the same roof.

Hospitality in the classical world: To the ancient Greeks, hospitality was a divine right. The host was expected to make sure the needs of his guests were seen to. The ancient Greek term *xenia*, expressed this ritualized guest-friendship relation. In Greek *filoxenia* means "friend of the stranger" and the host is responsible for the guest's safety and care as long as he is under their roof. This originated in the belief that the gods would disguise themselves as visitors and check if the innkeeper was being true to his duty. In addition, the way of life of the Greek at that time (traveling, commerce, wars) means they found themselves travelling frequently and in need of refuge, help, and protection. Foreign visitors were always welcome because they were the sole contact with the outside world and could pass on news and information. The moral duties of the innkeeper were:

To welcome and offer assistance to any traveller, regardless of their social, economic, or political status

To offer him a meal, bath, and bed

To never raise arms against a guest or his heirs – an obligation which extended to the host's heirs also

Upon the guest's departure to offer him a gift which created a friendship that was inherited by the host's family

Hospitality in Celtic cultures: Celtic societies also valued the concept of hospitality, especially in terms of protection. A host who granted a person's request for refuge was expected not only to provide food and shelter to their guest, but to make sure they did not come to harm while under their care.

Hospitality in India: In India, hospitality is based on the principle *Atithi Devo Bhava*, meaning "the guest is God." This principle is shown in a number of stories where a guest is literally a god who rewards the provider of hospitality. From this stems the Indian approach of graciousness towards guests at home, and in all social situations.

Hospitality today: the definition of "hospitality" is the friendly reception and treatment of guests or strangers; the quality or disposition of receiving and treating guests and strangers in a warm, friendly, generous way; kindness in welcoming strangers or guests.

Today hospitality has become an industry, ranging from rooms to let, bed and breakfasts, inns, boutique hotels, small hotels, large hotels, and resorts. It is obvious that in each of these establishments the relationship between the host and guest varies greatly. However, as a guest you do have a choice. Do you want personal attention, do you want someone at your beck-and-call, do you want to be anonymous – whatever you desire, it is available. Regardless of whether you are a 2,000 room hotel or a six-room bed and breakfast, your guest is your one and only priority and focus. Your goal is that he should return and that he should become your ambassador.

We have all been guests at some sort of hotel, small or large. Did we have a pleasant experience? Did it meet our expectations? Did it exceed your expectations? Were the promotions of its premises and staff true? Do your staff and housekeepers enjoy working at your hotel? Can they use their initiative? Are they knowledgeable – can they answer my questions? Are they discreet? Are they friendly? I am coming from a foreign country, are they aware of certain behaviors which are taboo in my culture? Will you forget me as you search for new guests? Will you remember me if I return? Many of us have been demanding and unreasonable guests. Many of us have become ambassadors of our favorite establishments.

If I choose to be a guest at a bed and breakfast, nothing pleases me more, and guarantees my return, than high-caliber service. I want my needs attended to. I want to be pampered. I want the things I cannot have at home. I want to escape the responsibilities and routine of home life. It is not the cost of your furnishings that will impress me - it is how you care for me, how you care for your staff, that your staff is knowledgeable, how you care for your premises, and that you will not forget me when I have left, that will guarantee my return, and my ambassadorship of your hotel. I will return because you have learned my habits, idiosyncrasies, and preferences. You leave me to my solitude when I want it, you will keep me company when I want it.

Am I a reasonable or an unreasonable guest?

The power of integrity, dignity, efficiency, and elegance in communication and behavior

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If I choose to be a guest at a large hotel resort, nothing pleases me more, and guarantees my return, than high-caliber service. I want my needs attended to. I want to be pampered. I want the things I cannot have at home. I want to escape the responsibilities and routine of home life. It is not the cost of your furnishings that will impress me - it is how you care for me, how you care for your staff, that your staff is knowledgeable, how you care for your premises. I look for pure anonymity. I want to be invisible. I want everything available at my fingertips. I want you to anticipate my needs so I don't have to converse. I know you will not remember me when I am gone, and that's fine. I know you will not remember me if I return, and that's fine.

Am I a reasonable or an unreasonable guest?

In all my demands, there is a degree of relativity with similar or identical desires by other guests. So, how can a host possibly guess all my desires? Let us put ourselves in a host's shoes for a minute.

The large resorts do not have to guess, what I described is part of their hospitality culture. They are too big to provide personal attention – unless the guest has visited very often. Their staff is perfectly trained and impersonal. They have experienced every kind of visitor, they have heard every kind of request, they “have seen it all before”. They are prepared for anything. They have funding and can refurbish and maintain their premises frequently. As long as their occupancy numbers are on or above target, they are satisfied. As a guest we must take all this into consideration when we make our choice.

The smaller hotels and bed and breakfasts will have an easier time. Their host-guest relationship is entirely different. It is personal. Their hospitality culture is based on exactly that. They talk to their guests. They keep company with them. However, operating in this personal way means the host has to know when to be there when you want them and when to be invisible when you want your solitude. The host has to have a good understanding of human nature. They may not have adequate funding and may struggle to refurbish and maintain their premises frequently. The bed and breakfast is more than just a business. There is a lot more personal effort on behalf of the host and the guest. As a guest we must take all this into consideration when we make our choice.

You can tell me that the person who will go to a 2,000 room resort is not the same person who will go to a B&B. I beg to differ. I frequent both. It depends on what I want from the experience at that period of my life.

And that is how the hospitality has changed from the days of:

To welcome and offer assistance to any traveller, regardless of their social, economic, or political status

To offer him a meal, bath, and bed

To never raise arms against a guest or his heirs – an obligation which extended to the host's heirs also

Upon the guest's departure to offer him a gift which created a friendship that was inherited by the host's family

Our lives have changed. We have choices. Life's demands on us have changed. We have choices. We travel now for pleasure, not only for business. We have choices. Do we want to stay in a resort hotel or in a B&B? We have choices. Do we want to travel alone, with family, with friends? We have choices.

Good hosts will do everything they can to meet or exceed our expectations. They want us to return. They exist for us. However, it is also in our hands, as guests, to guide them in understanding what we want. And, still, if we are not happy with our experience, we have choices.