

Do You Have a ‘Wow’ Budget?

How to empower your employees to make guests feel appreciated.

What if you could create a lasting impression on your customers without breaking the bank? It’s the little things we do today for our customers that have the potential to have the greatest impact. Today, it’s about creating the entire experience and not just selling your product or services.



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So, do you have a “wow” budget for your center’s guests? What’s a “wow” budget? My definition of the word “wow” is... random and unexpected. It should make you say or think, “Wow!”

A “wow” budget is a portion of your customer experience (or perhaps marketing and promotion) budget so that you can empower your staff to “go above and beyond” for a customer. Just think if they spent a little money from time to time so that your customers would say, to themselves or others, “Wow! I can’t believe they just did that for me!”

Some things to consider when you put your “wow” budget together...

■ **It does not need to cost a lot of money.** Most of the time, it is something you do that is heartfelt and means more than something expensive.

■ **It needs to be personal.** Something that you found out about them, or something that may have significance to them.

■ **Don’t confuse creating a wow moment with “delighting” your customers.** We should always strive to delight them, and then wow them on a random and unexpected basis.

When it’s random, you get to choose the time and place. There is something to be said about the element of surprise.

Listen to guests to find out what is important to them. Ask them about some of their favorite things. The word “favorite” elicits an immediate response when asked, so why not capture those answers to help craft and create the entire customer experience?

It’s an additional thing you do for them, not something you have promised them or something that they are already expecting.

Your “wow” budget can be for a loyal customer, one that

you are trying to move to become a lifetime bowler, or one who is brand new and with whom you’d like to develop a stronger relationship.

And when “wow” happens to a customer, it can create a domino effect. People love to tell others wonderful things that have just happened to them. When your customers are on the receiving end of this wow, they have the opportunity to become storytellers for your brand. They’ll typically share their story with others in many ways, especially on social media.

Three years after the fact, I still tell the story of the time that I had a knock on the door of the hotel room where I was staying prior to a speaking engagement at a conference. The manager and one of the hotel staff members were there with a beautiful tray that had two homemade cookies, some chocolates and a glass of milk on it. This was around 3 p.m., and they were intentional with that timeframe.

That was a wow moment for me, but there was an added wow that went along with it: the glass of milk. You see, I

have a lactose allergy, and the milk was lactose-free. How did they know this? The meeting planner (my client) casually asked me one day during a conversation we were having. Here was the key: She remembered it and acted upon it.

This entire surprise probably cost the hotel two or three

dollars, but it made a big impression on me — one that I still talk about three years later.

What about your center? As you plan your spending for the next several quarters, make sure to add some money and create a “wow” budget. Empower your staff to use it and see if the stories start to show up on social media — ones that shout the praises of your facility.

Bob Pacanovsky is a keynote speaker and trainer, and works with businesses and organizations that seek to achieve the highest levels of hospitality and service excellence in order to attract and retain more customers and employees. His programs are customized to meet the needs of his clients and he always strives to deliver a “Black Tie Experience.” He can be reached at Bob@BobPacanovsky.com.

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Rank First With LASTS

A valuable acronym that, when well executed, will wow customers.

How well does your team create an impression that LASTS with every customer or prospect with whom they come in contact? You may have employees that have gotten a little rusty when it comes to working with customers, or you may have new employees who may not understand how important it is to create an impression that LASTS.



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We all work to deliver what we perceive as good or exceptional customer service. However, unless the traits that follow are present, we may not do a very good job of creating this impression and exceeding our customers' expectations. Perhaps all they need is a "reset" when it comes to delivering that experience. It could be as

simple as creating the impression that LASTS.

L **How you LOOK.** Your body language, appearance, dress code. The first thing most people see are your non-verbal cues. If you don't look like you care about wanting to be there and help guests, why should they care about purchasing something from you? This also applies to your online presence. How your email correspondence looks is an important part of the brand message you are trying to create. Misspelled words, poor grammar and sentence structure all play a role in how you LOOK online.

A **How you ACT.** They say that actions speak louder than words. If this is the case, how do you "show up" in front of a customer or prospect? Do your actions tell them that you are there to listen, care about them, and help them solve their challenge? Are your actions focused on being proactive versus being reactive? The difference is that the former focuses on actions that anticipate the needs of your customers. These are actions that are benefiting your customers, like contacting them before the delivery of the product or service that they bought from you to assure them it is on its way. The opposite action, reactive, means that you could be apologizing for not taking care of them, for not following up with them — and now they are stressed and frustrated.

S **How you SPEAK.** What words do you use when working with people? And how do you use them? Is your

tone condescending or aggressive? Do you use words that are known in bowling but may confuse those who are new to it? Or do you speak with confidence and does your tone reflect respect and empathy toward your customers? This has the same effect when you correspond via email or on one of your social-media channels.

T **Your TACT.** Tact is defined as a keen sense of what to say or do to avoid being offensive — skill in dealing with difficult or delicate situations. How do your people handle some of the typical "company stuff" — the gossip, cliques, tantrums, aggressive behavior? Do they practice tact when it comes to serving their fellow team members before they can even start serving the center's guests?

S **How you SERVE.** This takes on two meanings. The obvious one is the service that your people provide to the customers. The not-so-obvious one applies to leadership. Is everyone on your team a "selfless Leader"? Do they put others and their needs in front of themselves? Are they willing to let others on their team take the credit

for success, and put their ego aside because it will help the team?

One big challenge in business today is that we rush to the "serve" part of this acronym, as everyone wants to create a top-notch customer-service experience. This is the disconnect, though, and there is a

reason the word "serve" is at the end of this acronym.

I believe that if we are striving to create that top-notch customer-service experience, we must be able to LOOK the part, ACT the part and SPEAK the part before we can ever SERVE the part.

Easy to remember, right? Absolutely.

Easy to implement? Absolutely... as long as everyone understands how important these five traits are in creating a wow experience and an impression that LASTS.

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Meeting Today's Expectations

Becoming the 'party place' requires training and empowering your staff.

As the fall months approach, you may be getting calls or inquiries at your center about company or other group events. Does your team know how to create the "party experience" at your center for these potential group events? You may get only one opportunity to create



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a memorable experience and motivate them to book with you again in the future.

It sounds simple enough: Get a call and book the event. But there is much more involved in creating a fabulous experience.

When does the party experience begin for your guests? I think it begins the moment the guest or customer starts looking at your center online. It may also begin

when someone calls your center to ask about booking a party or fills out the contact form on your website.

So, let's talk about your website. What does it look like? Is it showing real people having fun at your center? Are the party packages easy to understand? Are there any quotes from previous guests? Written quotes are good, but video quotes are gold. Both should say what a great time they had and how easy you made it for the guests.

If people call or email the center with party questions, what answers are we giving them? Do we sound excited that they want to potentially book a party with us?

To me, this part of the process is not just about making a good first impression. It's about making a first *lasting* impression.

Where the Party Experience Begins

Now you have the party or event booked at your center. This is wonderful, of course. But I believe that your first priority is still *not* to focus on your guests — which probably goes against everything you've heard in countless seminars over the years.

So, who do you focus on... and why? I think the "party experience" you are hoping to create for your "external" customers really starts with your "internal" customers — *your people*. What are you doing to make them feel more valued, appreciated and engaged while working at your

center? I never have forgotten this truism: How you treat your employees is how they likely will end up treating your customers.

That's why it all starts with the culture of your center. Think of it as your foundation. Without it, nothing is stable.

I remember speaking at one of the state conferences a few years ago, and for one of the evening events we went to one of the local centers. Right on the walls for everyone to see were the three core values that all the employees lived by.

Being curious, I approached a few of them and asked them about these core values and how they lived them while working. Do you know what? Their answers were spot on, and you could tell that those values were

engrained in the culture — and it showed in how they treated their customers.

As we've come to understand, a bowling center's competition is not just other bowling centers in town. It's any business whose owner considers it a "unique venue." This includes places such as go-kart tracks, miniature golf courses, sports stadiums, museums, zoos and so on.

3 Words to Remember

To separate your center from your competition, here are a few thoughts to create that memorable party/guest experience, beginning with three words to remember:

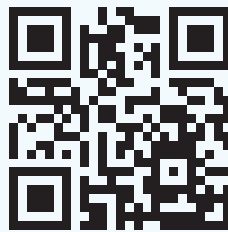
1. Empower. Can you empower your staff, through training, to take care of all the challenges that may arise during the party? If they have to constantly excuse themselves to ask permission for something, or if they can't make little changes on the fly, it can create a negative or —

even worse — a neutral impression in the minds of your customers. (Note: A negative impression is "better" than a neutral impression because a negative impression can be noted, addressed and solved, turning it into a positive.) Empower your team to make decisions or changes that will benefit the customer (and, ultimately, your center).

2. Personalize. How can you personalize the experience for your guests? One way is to have a welcome sign that has their name on it. Everybody loves to see their name on something. Beyond that, what other things have you learned about them or their event to make it feel more



Bob Pacanovsky covers the five essential laws of hospitality in this edition of BPAA's "Profit Break," hosted by Kelly Bednar.



special or personal? Perhaps it's having their favorite snack or candy available when they show up at their lanes or in your party room. Or maybe it's having dedicated staff members to work their event and handle all the details, including drink orders and so on.

3. Anticipate. Will you be proactive or reactive with your customers? Being proactive means you are anticipating their needs. You should know what they need for their event at your center better than they do. You're one step ahead of them because you've listened to them, taken great notes about their event and then shared those notes with your team. Being reactive means you're apologizing all the time: "I'm sorry. I remember you saying that you needed (fill in the blank), but I forgot to do it." This type of service does not create a great experience in the minds of your customers.

The Importance of Follow-up

There is one other area that you should focus on when it comes to creating the party experience. It's what I call the

"after-party," and it's all about the personalized follow-up.

This is not a 17-minute email survey, but rather a phone call, text or personalized email that goes to the customer. In it, you're thanking them for the opportunity to work with them, and you're asking them if they and their guests had a good time. You may even ask them if there were things that you could have done better.

But the key is that you're engaging with them and letting them know that you care about them, their guests and their event. Afterward, perhaps you could send them something as an incentive to book another event with you.

Personalized communication leaves a positive impression in the mind of your customer, and that equates with a wonderful party experience — and, hopefully, a customer who will come back time and time again.

Bob Pacanovsky is a hospitality industry veteran and sought-after speaker. Learn more about his services at bobpacanovsky.com.

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