

## As An Effective Management Tool, Satisfaction Sucks

By Martin R. Baird

For those of you who haven't met me, it's important to know that I'm not a big fan of sugarcoating things to make them palatable. I'm more known for brutal honesty. My friends at Hogan Assessment Systems found that my personality-assessment score is very low for "prudence," so that means I don't always regulate the flow of ideas from my brain to my mouth.

Just wanted you to understand that because I'm about to be blunt. Also, keep in mind that what I discuss in this column is backed by research. OK, here it is – guest and employee satisfaction sucks! As an effective measuring rod and management tool, it simply sucks. Yet tribal casinos gauge guest and employee satisfaction all the time, wasting their time, energy and hard-earned money.

Why do I dislike satisfaction surveys? Here are two clues – action (the lack thereof) and fickle.

It's important that we are clear that it is critical for casinos to have actionable data regarding guests and employees. Notice the word "actionable." Focusing on employees, it's maddening to me when casino general managers tell me they just completed an employee satisfaction survey. The fact that a satisfaction survey was conducted is tragedy enough. The real damage occurs when nothing is done with the data. The casino has all this information and fails to take action.

I'm repeatedly told that casino employees all want the same things: better wages, improved communication, respect, recognition, differential pay, etc. That's what the survey says. OK casino GM, what did you do with this data? How did you act on it to

improve your employees' work experience? Did you share the data and let everyone know what you were going to do for your employees?

Please don't say the information went to a terms committee. I just read a blog that said, "A committee couldn't create a successful ham sandwich." Yes, you need to work with a variety of departments at different levels, but most committees only create meetings, not real improvement or progress.

Taking action is a serious issue. Without action, data is of little or no value. Did it matter that the captain of the Titanic knew the ship had struck an iceberg? I don't think so because not much was done initially, based on the knowledge. The Titanic was billed as an unsinkable ship and the captain believed it. So knowing that it had hit an iceberg was not important.

There are casino "captains" who believe their property can't be sunk. Thus, knowing that employees don't like working there is of little importance. They know that if people leave, human resources will just hire more. (FYI, hiring more people to replace your departing ones is not taking action. That's a reaction.)

Enough on the word action. Now about that word fickle and this time let's focus on your guests.

Research shows that measuring satisfaction does not lead to improvement. Why? Because guest satisfaction is fickle. Think of the average satisfaction survey. It's scored from 5 to 1 with 5 being "extremely satisfied" and 1 being "extremely dissatisfied." But how does a person define "satisfied" and what value does it have to him? I was in London last November at a conference and someone told me that when people there dine out, they tell the restaurant that their meal was "very nice." Then they step outside and

gripe about how awful the food was. No doubt the restaurant thought they had a satisfied customer. But was that the case? Was the diner satisfied but wishing the meal had been better? Or was the diner very dissatisfied and not likely to return? The answers to these questions are vital to the restaurant's success but management would be clueless even if it had done a brief satisfaction survey.

When you ask people if they are "satisfied," the answers you receive are of little value because the question doesn't require them to risk anything when they give their opinion. This is a very basic point with major impact. As William Shakespeare wrote, "... he that filches from me my good name robs me of that which not enriches him, and makes me poor indeed." I think William was spot on when it comes to reputation and that is the key.

When you ask a person if they are "satisfied," you miss the meat of what has real importance to them. But if the London restaurant asks a diner if he would recommend the establishment to a friend – if you ask a guest if he would recommend your casino to a friend – then the person being surveyed must put his reputation on the line in order to give an answer. Suddenly, the answer matters and you have good data. Actionable data, I might add.

When you shift from satisfaction to measuring what affects a person's "good name," you now are measuring what's important and that means you have moved from fickle to rock solid. People have no vested interest in satisfaction, but when they invest their reputation, they put a high value on their answer.

What you are doing is measuring their level of advocacy for your casino, not their satisfaction with it. The more advocates you have, the more successful your casino will be. This works for employees as well as guests.

Now let's take this one step further. When you measure satisfaction, you have data that is suspect at best and it's difficult to take effective action based on the information. But you work hard and do act on the results of your research. I hope you see where this is going. You are now putting even more time, energy and money behind data that has little or no correlation to future results because it doesn't drill down to what your guests and employees value. This can create a huge waste! Programs are developed, training is done, meetings are held and it's all based on information that measures something that is fickle. That's no way to run a business.

Now you understand why satisfaction sucks.

I won't ask if you are satisfied with this article. What would be the point? But please drop me an e-mail and let me know if you risked your reputation and shared my thoughts with your GM or a colleague. That is something I would value.

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