

Chapter 13

The Guest Experience

Pete Gillespie

"We see our customers as invited guests to a party, and we are the hosts. It's our job every day to make every important aspect of the customer experience a little bit better"

Jeff Bezos



Learning objectives– at the end of this chapter you will be able to do the following:

- Know how to create fans in the modern world.
- Understand the importance of stick-ability and creating the loop.
- Understand the importance of measuring guest's level of satisfaction.

List of topics:

- A world of options.
- Creating fans.
- The 'loop'.
- Measuring our guest's satisfaction.

Introduction

At the centre of all our actions as snowsport instructors are our guests. The decisions we make for them, guide them through and help them shape are centred on their desire to have an experience. In this chapter we will help you better understand how to achieve this wherever you work and in the lessons that you deliver.

A world of options

Over the last 5 years it has been apparent in the leisure sector that people are looking for a series of 'life experiences' in their precious time away from the hectic work life. This can almost be seen as a bucket list of things that must be done during one's lifetime.

Along with the big life goals, like world travel, to amazing locations there is also the high quality but short duration experiences. It could be said that some time spent with a snowsports instructor could fall into this category. As snowsport instructors we are competing with lots of other offers. What is more challenging is almost anything is now available with a few clicks on a smart device. Gone are the days of visiting your travel agent to book a flight. Now this can be done to any location in the world within seconds. Barriers to some of the most exciting things in life have simply gone!

If we, as snowsport instructors, want to be towards the top of our guest's choice list then we too must reduce any barriers to access the experience that we can offer. This starts well before we meet our guests and can be through our marketing material, booking platforms, recommendations from previous guests and so on. As committed fans of snowsports we, as instructors, do not always see the barriers. However, on observing from another view, quite quickly, we can see snowsports is not perceived as 'convenient'. You need warm and somewhat specialist clothing and heavy bits of equipment and snowsports often takes place in resorts requiring buses and other mechanised forms of transport and hotels are not always near slopes. We need to work hard to shape our guest's decisions between choosing a snowsports experience or some time on the beach. We need to make it easier for them to choose our offer. The great news is that once you are with a guest you have a great opportunity to deliver an amazing experience. You can create a fan and influence a retention loop.



Creating fans

As snowsport instructors we are only as good as our guests choose to rate us. We may be high-end performers, have a huge depth of knowledge and work in an amazing environment but if we do not inspire people we will not retain them.

Different people will have a different desire to engage with an instructor so an obvious starting point is to ask them what they want to achieve or experience. The guest's expectations may be well within your capability to deliver, however, sometimes the expectation may be unrealistic or not achievable in the time frame or environment you have available. In these situations, the skillful instructor will reshape the expectations and help set new goals through positive influence.

Being a great instructor is more than just the technical skills. It includes being a mentor, an entertainer, and a fountain of knowledge regarding the local area or facility and an organiser to name a few. Ultimately people will need to enjoy spending time with you for you to create a fan. Fans keep coming back and tell other people about the great experiences they have enjoyed with you.

So you need to:

- Reduce barriers for your guests to access your product or service.
- Give people an amazing time with lots of 'Moments of Magic'.
- Listen to your guests and shape their expectations with them.
- Advise on 'what's next' in the journey. That is just simply great service.
- Surpass expectations whenever you can.



The loop

With so many 'experiences' on offer in the modern world once we are with a guest we need to work hard to retain them. There are positive distractions everywhere. It has been indicated that once a learner in a new sport has some ownership of their performance they are likely to make the new sport a regular form of recreation. They have switched the 'experience' into a new skill. In snowsports ownership can begin within around 5 hours of instruction.

We need to consider the following:

Never experienced snowsports and no real goal

Curiosity has led the guest to trying the new experience. Maybe it is a bucket list activity. There could be no intention of returning despite their outcome (good or bad). They just wanted to give it a try. This does, however, give the snowsports instructor a great opportunity to create a reason to come back. There is a chance to create a fan.

Conscious decision to learn a new skill

This guest has made the decision they want to learn snowsports. Maybe they have a holiday planned, or are looking for a new way to spend their recreation time. The seed is already sewn in this situation as the guest has mentally and financially already made a commitment.

A one-off experience

A corporate day out with work, a stag or hen party or a celebration with friends. A fun and memorable 'experience' but with no conscious plan to continue. This may be an opportunity for the snowsports instructor, nevertheless, if not it still requires the same level and energy input as the guest may never return but still may promote the experience to others as a worthwhile activity.

We can see that with different guest desires there are opportunities to create a 'loop' where the guest returns to snowsport and preferably with you, or your product offer, as their first choice.

Snowsport instructors working in the 'non mountainous' regions or environments have a great opportunity to create fans and '*stick-ability*' on a regular basis as the facilities are normally open all year round and are in urban areas.

These instructors are often the first touch point for people outside of traditional snowsports areas in delivering a snowsports experience. Before a trip to the mountains many people take their first steps in learning a snowsport at an artificial facility. The surface may be man manufactured however, the snowsport activity is as real as anywhere. This provides a great opportunity to create more snowsport enthusiasts, which is great for the industry globally. Equally, it provides a loop where people can experience snowsports in an urban environment in a non-mountain facility; take their skill to a mountain facility (vacation) but return to regular participation in their domestic environment. We have created the '*stick-ability*' in participation through providing a loop from mountain to non-mountain participation. **This loop is continuous provided both parts continue to deliver a desirable experience for the guest.**



Measuring our guest's satisfaction

Quite simply, any service provider that fails to respond or deliver a high-quality experience to their customers has a short terminal life in the modern world. As already discussed our guests have so many options in where and how to spend their precious leisure time and money. Guest service has never been as important as it is now. Attention to detail, retention and guest recovery will determine the winners from the losers.

We can place our guests into the following three categories:

- Detractors.
- Passives.
- Promoters.

Detractors

Detractors are very unimpressed and unsatisfied with the service you have provided. They aim to physically create a detraction force by themselves and other people away from your service. They will openly tell people in their circle of influence NOT to use your service. They will put their feelings on every forum and social networking platform they can.

One positive, in all this negative action, is that you can respond and recover them as their very actions have likely made them visible to you (via a social network platform as an example). An example of this could be Trip Advisor or Facebook. You have an option now to get them back and reverse their negative opinion of your service.

These people will often complain face to face. Fix it fast if you are fortunate to be given this opportunity.

Incidentally, if you fix a detractor's issue fast they often become 'super promoters' as they are so impressed with your recovery actions. They had not been expecting that. You can recover the loop.

Passives

Passives have not been blown away with your service. They have been left with NO lasting fond memories and rate the experience rather neutrally. “It was ok”, “probably will not go back”. Maybe if there is an offer in the future they may return but more likely they are looking for another experience in the future.

What is dangerous about passives is they don't really tell you either. They just drift off and don't return. You lose a potential fan forever and nobody wins. There is no ongoing loop.

Promoters

They simply love your service and you have surpassed their expectations. Like the detractors they are straight on the forums and social media platforms but to report the polar opposite experience. These people are your extended marketing team. The loop has longevity and they will try to influence other people in to the loop.

Guest satisfaction metrics

There are many guest satisfaction metrics in place and one of the simplest is a rating by scoring. One to five or one to ten tends to be the most common. The further up the scale the more likely you will find your promoters.

In a 1 to 5 rating detractors score 1 to 2, passives 3 and promoters 4 and 5.

In a 1 to 10 rating detractors score 1 to 5, passives 6 to 8 and promoters 9 and 10.

In developing the loop respond to any feedback you can be it poor or great. People respect that you appreciate they have taken the time to give feedback. It is an indication you value them.

Take time to place yourself in their shoes and see the issues they are raising from their point of view.

First aim to understand, then you can be understood.

It is worth remembering the iceberg theory. Only people who like filling out your surveys or writing on social media platforms will be visible to you through these methods, which is likely to be a tiny percentage of your guests and others will go unseen below the iceberg. The best way to gauge guest satisfaction is to talk directly to them. Keep seeking ways to stay in touch with your guests.

Finally, service will be the energy between successful and unsuccessful service providers in the future. Pay attention to your guests and they will keep coming back, and in turn promote your services.

Summary – key points from this chapter

- At the centre of all our actions as snowsport instructors are our guests.
- In the modern world peoples time is precious and they are looking for great experiences from a plethora of choices.
- We must look to reduce any barriers to access the experience that we offer.
- Being a great instructor requires a whole range of skills and ultimately people need to enjoy spending time with you if they are to become a fan.
- Creating stick-ability is vital if you are to maximise the opportunities to create a loop where the guest keeps coming back.
- A continuous loop between non-mountainous and mountain resorts is desirable and is determined by both parts delivering great guest experiences.
- Guests fall into three categories: Detractors, Passives and Promoters.
- Pay attention to your guests and measure their experience.
- The best way to gauge guest satisfaction is to talk directly to them.

Suggested reading and resources

The references listed at the end (with the exception of 'The Snow Centre Way') are all books available through the likes of Amazon and will expand nicely on the ideas presented in this chapter.

References

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