048 Reads the Cycle

Perspective Book · https://kb.jeffreysummers.com/docs/048-reads-the-cycle/

The Guest who had a great experience last visit is not the same Guest who walks in tonight. They are a Guest who walked in tonight carrying an attitude — a long-term feeling about the building — built from every previous experience. That attitude is the lens through which tonight's experience will be processed. The same plate, the same cast, the same standard — received through a positive attitude produces a positive perception. Received through a damaged attitude produces a neutral or negative one.

The operator who understands the [Human Experience Cycle] reads their building differently. Not "did we deliver a good experience tonight?" but "what attitudes are our Guests carrying, and what are we doing to compound or erode them?"

Temporal Discounting makes the attitude read hard. Attitudes are slow-forming and slow-moving — they don't change dramatically after a single experience. The operator whose instruments only report behaviors (covers, frequency, comp expense) is reading the lagging end of a cycle that started weeks earlier. The attitude that will produce next month's churn is already formed. The P&L will report it in sixty days.

Three Perspective disciplines for reading the cycle:

Track attitudes as leading indicators. The Guest sentiment that is trending negative before the covers start declining. The cast engagement that is softening before the turnover starts rising. The return frequency that is slowing before it becomes visible on the weekly report. Attitudes are the temperature gauge — they show where the cycle is going before the behaviors confirm it. The operator who reads attitudes is always ahead of the operator who reads only behaviors.

Manage expectations before the experience. Every Guest arrives with expectations — formed by past visits, by what they were told, by what they saw on the menu, by the reputation of the building. The experience lands relative to those expectations, not in absolute terms. The operator who over-promises and under-delivers has not produced a bad experience — they have produced a perception gap. The operator who sets accurate expectations and delivers to them has produced a positive perception even when the experience was not exceptional. Expectation management is experience design.

Read all three perception dimensions. Success alone is not enough. The Guest who got their issue resolved (Success) but waited too long (Effort) and felt dismissed by the cast member who handled it (Emotion) has had a negative experience regardless of the successful outcome. The operator who only tracks whether the Guest got what they came for is reading one third of the perception. Effort and Emotion are where most experience failures live — and where most operators stop looking.

What Changes Tomorrow

Before tomorrow's shift, identify one Guest who has been coming in less frequently than they used to. Not a Guest who complained — a Guest who quietly slowed down. That slowdown is an attitude reading, not a behavior reading. The attitude formed weeks before the frequency changed. Find one cast member who has had recent contact with that Guest and ask what they noticed. If nobody noticed, that's the read. The instrument that catches attitude drift before it becomes churn is the cast — and the cast only catches it if they know they're supposed to be looking.

Cross-fundamental note: connects to 2.X — Product (the three perception dimensions — Success, Effort, Emotion — are the GX measurement architecture; the operator who reads all three is reading the Guest Experience as it was actually experienced, not as it was designed) and 5.X — Profit (attitude is the leading indicator of LTV — the Guest whose attitude is eroding is a Guest whose future revenue is already at risk; the P&L reports the loss sixty days after the attitude formed).