2440 The Coherent Experience vs The Responsive One

Product Book · https://kb.jeffreysummers.com/docs/2440-the-coherent-experience-vs-the-responsive-one/

The operator who gives every Guest exactly what they ask for has not built a hospitality operation. They have built a custom shop.

There is a difference between listening to the Guest and managing to the Guest's stated request. The server who modifies every dish on demand, comps every complaint, and accommodates every preference regardless of what it costs the kitchen's ability to execute has not elevated the Guest experience. They have fragmented it — one exception at a time — until the building is producing a different meal for every table and nobody can hold the standard because the standard keeps changing.

[The Platinum Rule] requires reading what the Guest actually needs — not just responding to what they asked for. The Guest who asks for a modification that will produce an inferior dish needs the server's expertise, not their compliance. The Guest who asked for a comp after a mediocre experience needs a genuine recovery, not a transaction that extinguishes the relationship problem without addressing it. The Guest who asks for a table by the window on a full Saturday night needs an honest answer and a genuine alternative — not a desperate yes that creates a downstream problem for the floor.

Feedback is invaluable. It is not a mandate.

Jony Ive was asked why Apple didn't add calendaring and storage to the iPod. His answer: we've looked at those features many times and keep rejecting them because we haven't found a way to do it that won't negatively impact the music experience. That is a product operator with a coherent vision protecting it against feature creep dressed as responsiveness.

The menu that keeps adding items because Guests asked for them is not a responsive menu. It is a menu that has stopped being designed. The kitchen that can execute twenty-two items with discipline cannot execute forty-two with the same discipline. The Guest who asked for the item they wanted got it. The Guest who wanted an exceptional experience got a kitchen that is stretched too thin to deliver it.

Five disciplines for the coherent product:

The vision is the filter. Before any menu addition, service standard change, or product modification — run it through the vision. Does this strengthen what we are building or dilute it? The vision that is clear enough to reject a good idea in service of the right one is the most valuable product tool the operator has.

Listen to the problem, design the solution. Guests identify problems better than they propose solutions. The Guest who says "the portions feel small" is telling the operator something real. The Guest's proposed solution — "make them bigger" — may not be the right answer. The operator who listens to the problem and designs the solution has used the feedback correctly. The operator who implemented the Guest's solution without examining it has responded without thinking.

Coherence is a standard. The experience that is coherent — where every element works toward the same Guest outcome — is more valuable than the experience that is individually responsive. The operator who protects coherence is not being inflexible. They are being a designer.

No is a product decision. The operator who can say no to a Guest request without apology — because the request would compromise the experience the building is designed to produce — has internalized the product vision. The operator who cannot say no is not protecting the Guest. They are protecting the relationship at the expense of the experience.

The exception is the enemy of the standard. Every accommodation that exists outside the designed experience is a precedent. The first exception feels like hospitality. The hundredth exception is the standard. The operator who tracks their exceptions — who knows how many modifications, how many comps, how many accommodations happened last week — is reading the distance between the designed experience and the actual one.