

A Bite in the Night: The case of bed bugs at the Mountain Peak Inn

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Introduction

Hotel managers are tasked with ensuring that guests are being provided clean, comfortable, and safe accommodations during all stays. This case study will present a scenario of a hotel that had an issue with a guest finding bed bugs in his guest room. In this case study, background information about the hotel and the staff members will be discussed in detail. Additionally, the case study will provide a lengthy explanation of the events that took place and the efforts of service recovery. Finally, there will be several questions asked to help identify the service failures, service recovery efforts, and any future consequences of the events.

Background Information

The Hotel

The Mountain Peak Inn is a mid-scale hotel property located conveniently off of the primary interstate in northern West Virginia about 20 minutes from West Virginia University. The hotel was built in 2008 and is owned and operated by a local development corporation, HRA Hospitality. HRA Hospitality has ownership in two other hotel properties in the same community but do not have any operating responsibilities at those properties. The Mountain Peak Inn is an 86-room property with meeting facilities and a fitness center.

The Mountain Peak Inn has seen an increase in business in recent months. The inn's target market is business travelers attending events at the nearby convention center, as well as travelers just passing through the area. The Mountain Peak Inn is a very nice property that is usually within the top three recommendations on TripAdvisor.com out of thirteen hotels in the area. It is known to have a positive reputation amongst guests and online websites. On average, the hotel has occupancy levels between 85 and 100 percent nightly. Room rates vary, but typically range from \$79 to \$129 per night depending on the current occupancy level and the room types available. The owners of the Mountain Peak Inn are diligent about providing the best possible experience to all guests. To maintain a positive guest service reputation, they have upgraded the amenities in all of the guest rooms and increased the quality of the bedding.

The Manager

Craig has been an employee at the Mountain Peak Inn for two years. Prior to working at the Mountain Peak Inn, Craig worked in sales and various other customer service positions. When he joined the Mountain Peak Inn staff, he started working as a front desk agent, was promoted to front desk manager, and a year ago became the general manager. This was Craig's first opportunity to work in a management capacity and oversee an entire hotel property. Craig consistently proved himself as an employee and showed that he had strong management capabilities early on in his employment with the Mountain Peak Inn, which helped him to be promoted rather quickly to the general manager position. Craig has been successfully managing the hotel and progressively shown increases in financial gains, customer satisfaction, and employee morale. Considering Craig's proven success as a hotel manager, it should not be an issue for Craig to address customer service situations that he may face in daily hotel operations.

Management Situation

There is a significant amount of turnover at the hotel and Robert is a new hire, still within his probationary period. Robert was hired as a front desk agent for the 3pm to 11pm shift. He has been working at the Mountain Peak Inn for only three months. He received a significant amount of training prior to being left at the hotel alone. However, he had never worked at a hotel prior to being hired at the Mountain Peak Inn. Since it is a smaller hotel with no food and beverage components, it is not uncommon that only one staff member be at the hotel during the evening and night shifts.

Around 10pm, Charlie arrived at the Mountain Peak Inn without a reservation looking for a room for the night to get some rest before continuing his trip north. He did not want an expensive or fancy room, so the front desk attendant, Robert, offered him a single queen room with standard amenities for \$89. Charlie asked Robert if there were any cheaper rooms available. Different rate plans, typically membership or age based discounts, had been put into the property management system by management staff to entice rooms sales. Additionally, front desk agents are given a price range for which rooms can be sold. Typically, the rates are anywhere between \$79 and \$129, so the front desk agents can be flexible with the rates and discount the rooms up to 25% off the standard rate to help increase occupancy and revenue. Since there were several rooms vacant for the night Robert

decided to offer Charlie the AAA rate that was \$84. Charlie agreed and checked-in so he could get some rest before continuing his journey the next morning.

Charlie gathered his belongings and went to his assigned room (214) for the night. The particular room type that Charlie was assigned was a non-smoking, queen sized bed room. It was equipped with a microwave and refrigerator, flat screen television, and work desk with office chair. There was also a setting chair in the room for additional seating room. Robert waited approximately fifteen minutes after Charlie had gone up to his room to complete a courtesy call to see if Charlie found his room to be in adequate condition and ask if he wanted a wake-up call set for the morning. Charlie said that he was pleased with the room, but told Robert that he did not need a wake-up call.

The following morning, Charlie awoke to find his right arm itching with several rows of red welts all over it. He did not know what could have caused the red, itchy bumps to appear so he took a shower expecting that to help. Upon returning to the bedroom to dress for the day and he noticed a small bug crawling on the bed and quickly realized what caused his bumps. He had been bit by bed bugs in the night, causing his arm to itch and welt to form from bites. Typically, bed bug bites are found around the waistline and underarm areas. However, bites can be located anywhere skin is exposed. The bites will likely occur in a linear pattern or in clusters and can form a hive or blister reaction on the skin (Davis, Johnston and Sladden, 2009). To prove he was not fabricating the story, Charlie collected the bug in one of the complimentary plastic cups provided in the room and took it to the front desk to complain.

The lobby area was bustling with guests checking-out and enjoying the free continental breakfast in the lobby. Charlie was somewhat discreet in his mannerisms as he approached the front desk with the cup containing the bed bug. Hannah was working the front desk at the time and kindly asked how she could assist Charlie. Charlie handed her the cup and showed her his arm explaining he had been bitten by bed bugs in his room and expected proper compensation. Since Hannah was also a new employee, she was unsure how to handle the situation properly and felt it would be best to call Craig from his office to speak directly with Charlie in an attempt to smooth over the situation. Hannah picked up that phone and called Charlie asking him to come to the lobby to speak with a guest. She then told Charlie that Craig would be with him momentarily and began addressing the next customer in line needing assistance.

Despite Craig arriving in the lobby within five minutes, Charlie had grown irritated by Hannah's passive attempt at handling the situation and then having to wait for Craig to meet with him. Upon meeting Charlie, Craig asked Charlie how he could assist him. Charlie, who was very upset at this point, exclaimed that he had been bitten by bed bugs in his room and handed Craig the cup containing the bed

bug. Charlie also showed Craig the lines of welts on his arm and expressed his concern of disease transmission from being bitten by bed bugs. Through prior research and training, Craig was able to confirm that the bug contained in the cup was actually a bed bug.

Craig initially showed very little compassion for Charlie in the situation, but maintained a calm and cool composure. Quickly realizing that Charlie was thoroughly upset by the situation and how Hannah had handled the situation, he knew that proper action needed to be taken quickly to contain the problem at hand. Craig mentally processed several options to try to solve this problem. The first option that Craig thought about taking to correct the situation was to apologize to Charlie for the problem he had encountered, explain that it is below the hotel's standard level of customer service and experience, and remove all charges from Charlie's hotel folio and offer him free dry-cleaning service to insure he doesn't carry the bed bugs with him from the hotel to his home. Another option that Craig considered was offering Charlie assistance with medical treatment since he did have several welts as a result of being bitten by the bed bugs at the Mountain Peak Inn. Craig also considered just removing the room charges or compensate Charlie with a gift certificate for a free stay in the future or a meal at a nearby restaurant. Ultimately, Craig decided the best thing to do would be to offer to remove all charges from Charlie's hotel folio and offer to pay for dry cleaning services for all of his clothing.

Charlie was not happy about the entire situation. However, he was eager to get back on the road and decided to take Craig's offer. Craig then gave Charlie his business card and told Charlie to send his dry cleaning bill to the hotel. Craig then removed all the charges from Charlie's folio and apologized for the incident.

Key Questions

- What service failures occurred within this case study?
- What might need to occur for successful service recoveries to take place?
- What did the staff of the Mountain Peak Inn do correctly?
- What did the staff of the Mountain Peak Inn do poorly?
- What could Hannah have done to help ease the situation with Charlie?
- Did Craig make the right choice in his decision in how to handle the situation with Charlie?
- How could Craig and the Mountain Peak Inn have been more prepared for situations like the one addressed in this case study?
- If Charlie is still not satisfied with Craig's solution what might Charlie do after he leaves the Mountain Peak Inn? How might these actions impact the hotel?