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### Customer Service Killers: Know Them And Avoid Them, Says IAAPA Speaker

#### PARKS & ATTRACTIONS

By Tim O'Brien

**NEW ORLEANS** — When guests in your park get upset, it's probably not because of the product, but the "little pieces of neglect" they have accumulated since arriving.



"It's those 'I don't care about you' attitudes the guests get from employees that build up all day, and at some point, the guest gets fed up with that neglect," said Doug Lipp, Doug Lipp & Associates, in his portion of a guest relations seminar during the International Assn. of Amusement Parks & Attractions Convention & Trade Show here.

The session was entitled "How to Deal With the Challenging Customer," and Lipp told the early-morning crowd that customer service is nothing more than a series of balancing acts. "Even the best of us make mistakes," he said.

He outlined the seven customer

service killers, noting that the phrase or gesture you or your employees use can send a message to the customer that you didn't intend.

For example, when you say "I understand," it's likely to be interpreted as saying that you don't care, you're insincere, or that you are a robot and can't say anything else. "How can you understand? You're not that person," he added.

"Let me explain," warns the customer that the excuses are on their way, that you are defensive, or the phrase can be patronizing or condescending.

"If you would just listen," spoken by your employee, can be heard as, "Shut up, how could you be so stupid?" It can also start a confrontation when the guest responds, "No, you listen to me. I'm the one with the problem."

Lipp noted that you must not avert your eyes or work on something else as you listen to your guest. "It will appear you are bored, waiting for the important customers, and indicates you want them to go away."

Hands on your hips, arms crossed or hands in your pockets connotes that you are not listen-

ing, that you are nervous and/or incompetent, and that you are defensive and inflexible.

When you roll your eyes or sigh when you hear a complaint, you are expressing that this person is an inconvenience and that you think of him as a fool. If you raise your voice or yell, the person interprets that as "what's wrong with you anyway, are you dumb?" This is true especially if the customer is a non-native speaker of English.

Lipp noted that people react to actions, vocal tone and actual words in that order. "People believe the message they get from our facial expressions, general body language and the tone of our voice before they believe our words," he said. "Your words are useless unless your actions and voice are sending the same message."

In ending, Lipp said it's virtually impossible to please every guest all the time and that you will make mistakes in dealing with the challenging customer. He uses an old proverb to express that feeling. "Even monkeys fall from trees." In other words, even the best of us make mistakes. □