“Don’t Just Sit There… Sell Something!”

By Dr. Richard Kelley

The headline above distills in six words what Melinda Bush told the hospitality management students at the University of Denver’s (DU) Daniels College of Business about two weeks ago. I was in the audience for her lecture and watched the students pay close attention because they knew that Mrs. Bush is one of the world’s foremost experts on hotel and tourism sales and marketing. This is thanks to her years of experience running some of the world’s largest travel trade publishing companies, first for Ziff Davis, then Rupert Murdoch and then Reed Elsevier. Mrs. Bush is best known in Hawai‘i as the publisher of Hotel + Travel Index and as the woman who made the Index the “Essential Business Investment for reaching the Travel Agent.”

Outrigger Hotels and Resorts was an early multi-page, full-color advertiser in Hotel + Travel Index and, as a result, benefited from her industry research, expertise and helpfulness in advising on Outrigger’s historic decision to go after the global marketplace … as well as our travel agent relationships, which remain key to Outrigger’s business today.

Her advice to the DU students focused on how to do well in Travel & Tourism, no matter in what part of the industry they might eventually work. Here’s a brief summary of her presentation.

“Stay close to the customer, ALL of your customers,” Mrs. Bush emphasized. “In the hotel industry, our customers include the travel agent, the meeting planner, the wholesaler, the ground operator. You may work in reservations, at the front desk, etc. You may be a telephone operator, a bellperson, a housekeeper, etc. but at almost any time of any day you may also be your company’s prime touch point for a customer. Listen to them. Anticipate their needs. The first few minutes of a guest’s experience on property are the most critical and set the tone for the entire stay. Perform flawlessly. That’s the difference between a first-class team and the also-rans, particularly in today’s demanding marketplace.”

Mrs. Bush also reminded the students to always think internationally. Today’s Travel & Tourism customers come from all over the world. In New York City and Hawai‘i, 30 to 40 percent of visitors come from a country other than the United States. She suggested to the students that they become an expert on one of the countries served by the hotels in which they work. “Learn the language or at least the ‘lingo,’” she advised.

She also reminded the students not to forget to sell themselves if they want to get ahead in this highly competitive industry. She had some great tips on how to always be prepared and professional:

• Develop and practice an “elevator pitch” – a quick, compelling summary of one’s skills, interests and experience that can be delivered in just the few seconds it takes an elevator to travel a few floors when you meet a potentially important new contact.

• Always carry business cards – even at the beach.

• Include all contact information in emails – a business email simply signed George or Lucy with nothing else is not very impressive in the business world.

• When leaving a voicemail, give your name and phone number twice. Transmissions get garbled and your contact might not otherwise be able to return an important call.

• Always look professional. The business world still has a hard time dealing with sloppy clothing, tattoos and piercing.

• Follow up and say, “Thank You!” often.

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Adopt a personal “Yes, I Can Do That” mentality.

• Be accessible.
• Be helpful.
• Create a need.
• Close the sale.
• Don’t fear rejection. Selling really begins when a potential customer says “No”!
  • Show Up! Go to company and industry meetings and activities.
  • Learn lots of jobs.
  • Work on the next job you want to get without asking for a pay raise. (That will almost inevitably follow if you prove yourself. If it doesn’t, find a company that appreciates your talents and drive.)

Mrs. Bush reminded the students that no matter where their future company operates, it is part of a community that deserves attention and support.

• Do something good for your community. Here are a couple of suggestions. The opportunities are boundless.
  • Teach English as a second language.
  • Take extra food and clothing to homeless shelters.
  • Train/help a returning warrior transition back into civilian life.

She concluded by saying that Travel & Tourism is a great industry where you can be creative, be different in your approach and be ahead of the crowd.

• Think boldly!
• Try new things!
• Have fun!
• Make a difference!
• Sell a room. Sell an upgrade. Sell something. Sell yourself!

Thanks for the great presentation, Mrs. Bush. It’s not only good advice for students of Travel & Tourism, but a set of useful reminders for professionals already in the industry.