

# Practical Success

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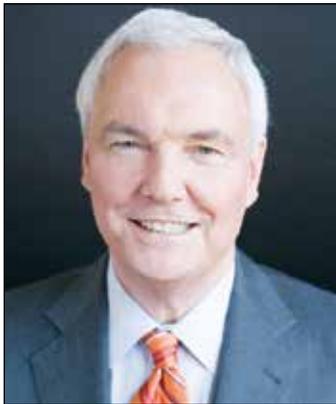
Cordell M. Parvin

## How a Law Firm Can Provide “Ritz Carlton” Service

In a world where legal expertise is assumed, lawyers and law firms can differentiate themselves by providing extraordinary client service. The interesting thing is most law firms think they are providing it and most clients think they are not. What is extraordinary service and how does it compare with service that is only average?

I find I learn about client service from my own experiences as a customer. You probably do also. A few months ago I stayed at a business hotel off the strip in Las Vegas. Because it was originally built as a condominium project it does not have a casino and is small enough to only need one person working at the front desk. That appealed to me.

After I finished my work I went back to the hotel. My return flight to Dallas was leaving at 6:00 a.m. the next morning and I knew it would take time to get through security. As a result, I wanted to print my boarding pass at the hotel. When I asked the front desk clerk she said I could print it in the business center. I asked if there would be a charge and she said there would be. I am not willing to pay



to print my boarding pass. There was no one other than me in the lobby, so I asked if she could print my boarding pass. She replied that she could not. I was quite surprised and told her to leave a note for the general manager letting him or her know that I will never stay at their hotel property again.

The next morning I woke up at 4:00 a.m. and after getting ready I went downstairs to check out. There was a young man working at the front desk and he asked how I liked my stay. I told him everything was fine, except for his colleague refusing to print my boarding pass. He got my flight information and printed the boarding pass in less than one minute.

I have written many times about Ritz Carlton service. One time my wife Nancy and I planned a short weekend anniversary trip to the Ritz Carlton at Marina Del Ray, near the Los Angeles airport. Two days before our arrival I received a call from a young woman who worked on the Club Level where we would be staying. She asked if we had any special requests. I told her we would like an

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early check-in. She then asked if this was a special occasion and I told her it was our thirty-fifth anniversary.

When we arrived, the parking attendant must have called the young woman because she met us inside and took us upstairs to check-in. She showed us three rooms that were available for early check-in and we chose the one we liked the best. Later in the club lounge she introduced us to the club manager. He asked if we had any questions. I asked what time they opened on weekends. He replied 7:00 a.m., which would be 9:00 a.m. Dallas time. I then asked where the closest Starbucks was and told him I had to have coffee before they were open.

That afternoon Nancy and I went for a walk. When we returned to our room there was a coffee pot and a large basket with two Ritz Carlton cups and about a month's supply of Starbucks coffee and other treats from Starbucks. The manager had written a handwritten note saying "Happy Anniversary. I hope you enjoy the coffee while you are here and will keep the cups to remember your stay." I still have the cups and still remember my stay. More recently, Ritz Carlton has put a coffee machine in the Club level lounge making coffee available 24 hours a day.

Over my many years traveling I have been an elite member of both Marriott and Hilton and I have spent many a free night using the lifetime supply of points I have earned. Ritz Carlton only recently created a frequent guest program. It is nice,

but it is not what makes me a loyal Ritz Carlton customer. I regularly stay at Ritz Carlton hotels for two reasons. First, I like the bed, the pillows and the ambience, I know what to expect and Ritz Carlton consistently delivers it. Second, I stay at Ritz Carlton because of the "ladies and gentlemen who serve ladies and gentlemen." The Ritz Carlton staff simply takes service to an unmatched level. If you want to learn how they do it, purchase *The New Gold Standard* by Joseph A. Michelli. The book is full of stories and interviews with Ritz Carlton personnel.

Clients are not satisfied with the service they receive from their lawyers and law firms. As a profession, we are not providing anything close to Ritz Carlton Gold Standard of Service. I have been to many law firm and practice group retreats over many years. I remember many discussions about the firm and about profits per partner. I remember far fewer discussions about client needs and how to provide extraordinary service.

To provide Ritz Carlton service do what Ritz Carlton does. Make it part of your firm's mission and culture. It will not happen by accident. Hire lawyers and staff who are committed to serving clients and then train them to listen more effectively and anticipate your clients' problems and then provide unanticipated extraordinary solutions. For more specific ideas, I suggest you and your colleagues read *The New Gold Standard* and brainstorm how you can create the New Gold Standard for law firms.

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