



Mr. Eftekari

How to Promote Five-Star Service in the Luxury Hotel Market

By [Mehdi Eftekari](#), General Manager, Four Seasons Hotel Los Angeles at Beverly Hills

Service often makes the difference between a fine hotel and a memorable hotel. With its personalized customer service, intuitive staff and cheerful culture, Four Seasons Hotel Los Angeles at Beverly Hills has made a memorable impression on its guests for the last twenty-five years.

By employing caring and thoughtful staff who make guests feel comfortable and important from the moment they check-in, we promote five-star service through our best asset – our people. Employees are hired based on their attitude and “hospitality personality” not their experience. They are adept at reading guests’ emotions, looking at their habits and actively anticipating their needs, which enhances each guest interaction. These intangible qualities are what make our property uniquely attractive to guests and leave them with a positive impression when they leave.

As part of the standards that we instill at our hotel, reservation agents are encouraged to gather as much information as possible in order to personalize the booking process. This allows us to create personalized welcome amenities for guests celebrating special occasions, during awards season or traveling with children. For unique requests, the Four Seasons Concierge team is available to coordinate fun activities such as helicopter rides, VIP tours of Warner Bros. Studios or even surf lessons. Our catering team will go above and beyond what’s expected by providing complimentary and personalized printed menus for private events, and our rooms division will happily reconfigure the layout of a room to suit guests’ particular needs. This level of flexibility and attention to detail are hotel features that guests love.

Our mantra is, “We’ll do anything that’s asked of us, as long as it’s legal!”

From a leadership perspective at the Four Seasons, five-star service is about a mentality, a way of working and most of all, a healthy disdain for anything mediocre. Mistakes are always reviewed to avoid future issues and follow through is always done. The best employees are recognized monthly and everyone works as though they have a personal stake in the property and part of a large extended family. The leadership team challenges their employees to further improve and not only adhere to basic standards, but to view customer service as an overall mindset.

Recognition is also imperative in the luxury hotel industry. We make a point of referring to our guests by name whether in person or by phone to invoke a feeling of warmth and friendliness. A beautiful entry and stunning restaurant ambiance are both lovely amenities, but it is the recognition and warm greetings given to guests that set our service apart from other hotels. By focusing on the soft skills of service such as recognition, eye contact or smiling, we are able to connect with our guests and provide standard services in a unique way.

Despite being a mid-sized hotel, Four Seasons Hotel Los Angeles at Beverly Hills provides the comfort and intimacy of a much smaller hotel combined with the amenities of a large one. Guests have access to a 24 hour Business Service Center, 24 hour open-air Fitness Center and a salt water pool offering elevated city views and poolside cabanas. The hotel also offers specialized children's amenities such as child-size bathrobes, babysitting services and the arrangement of various family friendly activities throughout the city. These personal touches ensure that each guest feels as if we've exceeded their expectations and provided the highest level of service expected with the Four Seasons brand.

Additionally, Four Seasons Hotel Los Angeles at Beverly Hills boasts superior design and finishes, which allow us to satisfy the needs and tastes of our discriminating customers, and to maintain our position as the world's premier luxury hospitality company. With a recent \$38 million dollar renovation and the opening of Culina, Modern Italian, our goal was to create a new look for our guests that touched every area of the hotel from the pool to the restaurants and lounges to the 285 guest rooms. With a nod to old Hollywood, the hotel has become the home away from home for entertainment industry leaders and movie studio press junkets, which adds an additional layer of excitement to the property and differentiates us from other luxury hotels.

For the busy business executive, our hotel has raised the bar on customer service by providing luxury transportation services that integrate the latest technologies so groups can work on business projects while sitting in Los Angeles traffic. We provide guests with an eight-passenger Mercedes van outfitted with electrical outlets, Wi-Fi and plasma screen TVs. This initiative redefines the concept of a business meeting, allowing guests the ability to mix business with pleasure while staying at Four Seasons. Made available are eight comfortable leather seats that can be arranged according to preference, an intercom phone, hardwood floors, 6'-3" inches of headroom and deluxe interior lighting controls with dimmers to capture the same atmosphere that one would find in a room at Four Seasons. Efficiency and luxury make an excellent combination resulting in another reason why this hotel never ceases to exceed expectations of what a hotel should offer its guests.

In today's competitive market, the success of a hotel is also driven by the innovative and unimaginable ways to meet the growing need of its guests. The hotel experience is defined by its level of commitment to providing guests with an ongoing element of surprise in order to offer the highest level of convenience, comfort, and care. We believe that a guests' experience begins before they arrive on the property which led us to take advantage of the incredible advances within the digital world. Our new Smartphone application gives guests the ability to organize their stay before arrival from the convenience and ease of their Smartphone. Guests can book a spa treatment, schedule dinner at the award-winning restaurant Culina, Modern Italian, make specific housekeeping requests, and can even request certain items to be placed in the room prior to arrival. This creates the ultimate first impression by giving guests control over their room so that when they arrive, everything is up to their expectations if not beyond them.

Furthermore, providing complimentary Wi-Fi throughout the hotel and an iPad2 in every room is an imperative in guest satisfaction and gives them the engagement needed to make this a top-ranking hotel. We have been very focused on providing the latest technology in order to impress and satisfy our guests. After we successfully installed fiber-optic cables in the hotel's suites during our 2010 renovation, we decided to go ahead and invest in the iPad2 devices in all 285 guestrooms and suites. We found that many of our guests own or travel with a tablet or Smartphone. Even if our guest has never experienced the iPad before, our front desk agents have two iPads at their disposal to explain how the device works, and the guest interface is very easy to use. We wanted the iPad2 device to be beneficial and fun for our guests to use as

they order in-room dining or place housekeeping requests while lounging on the couch. Installing the iPads was an initiative that tremendously benefited the hotel as it allowed us to offer additional services to guests and gain a technological advantage over hotels that lack this advanced iPad technology.

Four Seasons guests often prefer to place orders and deal indirectly versus meeting with our concierge or calling for housekeeping. On the iPad, guests can order room service, make housekeeping requests, purchase spa treatments, contact bellman, arrange for airport transportation, make restaurant reservations, research entertainment and cultural attractions, read the newspaper, contact valet parking, and even purchase the Four Seasons bed. For an interactive experience, we can also program the iPad to greet guests with a personalized video or greeting message upon arrival

Partnering with Intelity for the iPads and bringing in ICE with the backend management tool has helped us increase our efficiency and improve our ability to track and deliver services to our guests. As a result of implementing the back-end management tool, we can shorten wait times since requests are sent directly to the staff member in charge of a division as opposed to calling and having the message passed along. It allows our guests to customize their stay and digitally connect with all hotel areas which they have been taking advantage of. In a six month time period we received 2,712 in-room dining requests, 938 PBX requests, 586 housekeeping requests, 221 valet requests, and 154 express check-outs.

As we move forward in the highly competitive hospitality industry, Four Seasons finds itself holding a position of leadership in customer service and satisfaction. Through our hotel's dedication to innovation and top-of-the-line service, we fulfill our pledge to deliver the most dynamic experience a guest can receive. We are constantly thinking of new and exciting ways to reinvent five- star service, and we will continue to strive for excellence in every aspect of our business to generate a loyal, lasting customer base.

Mehdi Eftekari is a prominent leader in the hospitality industry and has spent the last 24 years with Four Seasons Hotels & Resorts. Mr. Eftekari began at Four Seasons Hotel Los Angeles at Beverly Hills as the director of food and beverage shortly after the hotel's opening in 1988, then spent 12 years as general manager of Four Seasons Newport Beach, and returned eight years ago as general manager of Four Seasons Los Angeles at Beverly Hills. Mr. Eftekari can be contacted at 310-786-2212 or mehdi.eftekari@fourseasons.com

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