



Mr. Creytens

Why Concierges Are Essential to the Guest Experience

By [Johan Creytens](#), Owner & General Manager, Hotel Heritage, a Relais & Chateaux Property

It is interesting to observe how the role of the concierge has evolved over the centuries. Particularly in Europe, concierge means “keeper of the keys,” referring to someone who was the caretaker of a small inn, usually living on the premises. Over time, the role of the concierge transitioned into the hotel employee whose occupation is to assist guests with special requests, anything from directions, to dinner reservations, airport transfers and tickets to concerts among other things.

The hospitality industry is, of course, ever evolving and adapting to continuous changes, especially in the world of online media. With smartphones at the hand of each guest, the question is often posed: “Do we really need a concierge in our hotels anymore?”

While for some this might be a “yes or no” answer, the truth is much more complex when it comes down to service, especially in hotels that value high standards and personalization. And while your smartphone can talk to you and make suggestions based on location and online reviews of restaurants, for instance, it cannot read your body language or ask you the right questions (at least not yet!). In some hotels, efficiently loaded information tablets are gradually replacing quite capable concierges at the front desk to save on time and money. But, is this the right approach into the future?

Concierges are essential when you are looking to plan a special stay or a memorable evening. A tablet cannot get you into a restaurant where there is a three-month wait list, can it? But, a person – the concierge – is much more likely to find you reservations, get last minute concert tickets, access to VIP lounges, and is generally far more capable meet extremely unique requests. There is power in human connections, and the best concierges have established long term relationships with the right people for the right clientele. It’s a dance they have mastered well and the price doesn’t come cheap, but the experience is most certainly something to boast about – to others – on social media and online reviews.

Generally speaking, it is much more likely that you will find the best hotel concierges in top rated hotels, whether independently managed or not. Chances are the room rate at those hotels is quite high and the guest service expectations are also very high. But, personalization does come with a price, even in the world of instant blogging and immediate gratification on social media. You can replace some things with smartphones and tablets, such as directions and top historic tourist attractions, but finding a private tour

last minute, or securing that special dinner on the last night before your departure is something that the professional concierge knows how to do well. Perhaps that is what might make your stay that more favorable – making you a repeat guest.

The role of the concierge includes additional responsibilities within the hotel that really can make or break the hotel's overall standard for guest service. The concierge should exemplify the standards of service, impress upon other staff members on taking the steps to ensuring a fulfilling and memorable guest experience. With that in mind, concierges are often times called upon training sessions and employee orientations in hotels in order to understand how they make their magic! Experienced concierges have an array of stories to lend from in order to showcase examples of how they fulfilled the seemingly impossible guest request, or how they took a poor guest experience and made it magnificent. Sometimes, concierges are referred to as artists; they are indeed masters of communication, understand body language and generally know how to establish rapport with guests early upon their arrival (and at times, even prior to arrival). Anticipation of the guest's needs is absolutely essential to this profession and concierges should interact with the other staff to help them hone some of these skills. Also, inter-department communication is necessary in order for the concierge to better service the guest.

For example, if the front desk knows that a family of four is checking in very early in the morning, then aside from doing their best to have their room ready with housekeeping and the bell staff alert for the luggage, the concierge should know as well – s/he should be prepared to help them plan their day and make adequate recommendations for lunch and dinner, as well as map information (this is where tablets come in hand), and of course transportation options. Some concierges will arrange for complimentary car service for any local drop-offs that are hard to get to on foot. The best concierges have 2-3 suggestions for meals and follow up with a note during the guest's stay to check in and collect feedback where needed.

Here are some characteristics of a Great Concierge:

- **Privacy and Discretion** - No matter what the request, a fabulous concierge maintains the confidence of the guest.
- **Efficiency** - Whether it is a businessman coming in for the night who is looking for a specific restaurant reservations or a family of four trying to get into an special exhibit, the concierge must act with speed and efficiency. Guests do not have the time to wait around, and good concierges simply make things happen; like magicians.
- **Service, service, service** - Concierges may seem to be working independently because they typically work in a separate desk with their own computer and resources, but they are still part of a team. Good concierges are team players; they jump in where help is needed to optimize the guest experience.
- **Personalization** - Whether it is sending a note card to the room to check in on how guests enjoyed their theatre tickets or a concert, personalization is essential to building long term relationships. The really good concierges build relationships not only with vendors, but with the guests. Often times that is one of the reasons why guests will return to a property, because they feel welcomed and taken care of. The concierge experience adds value in those types of guest profiles.
- **Enthusiasm** - This is a key element to a great concierge. Showing interest in what the guests are looking for during their stay and asking the right questions is not only encouraged, it is the pathway to understanding what the best itinerary will suit their needs. A display of genuine enthusiasm goes a long way with how the guests feel during their time at the hotel.
- **Commitment to excellence** - While hotel standards will clearly vary, the best concierges are more than likely found at the best hotels where a commitment to top service is highly anticipated. From taking the guest request and making it happen, fast and with efficiency, a commitment to excellence includes proper follow-up and feedback to ensure the guest is satisfied.

I am not sure how all of this can be done with a tablet or a smartphone, which is why I believe there is a solid future for concierges who wish to grow with the hotel and committed to amplify the guest experience. More of a supplement to information, a tablet should be available to a concierge to find various details that can make a difference in a guest's plan for the day, such as hours of operation at museums and tourist historic highlights, phone numbers of restaurants, airport information, etc.

One more thing we have noticed in the world of hospitality is that positive attitude and approach goes a long way. Positivity opens communication and removes those barriers with the guest. Ultimately, a negative approach is tiring and discouraging to the guest and to the employee, and does not serve anyone well. A positive interaction generally ensures that an effort is made to connect with the guest, understand requests and deliver accordingly. A "can-do" attitude makes a difference and that is often commented upon social media and online reviews.

In closing, the hospitality industry continuously evolves as the guest experience becomes increasingly more complex with far more requests that are often last minute, or simply seem very demanding. However, it's the concierge who goes out of his way for the guest that will secure the momentum for the hotel, and eventually that will show on social media pages and online reviews (we know that those do matter!). Finally, guests come and go much more frequently than earlier days as their expectations continue to rise. The "wow" factor can be tougher to achieve in a world of technology and instant gratification, but opportunities are always available for a hotel's excellent staff to shine.

Johan Creytens is the General Manager and Owner of the boutique luxury Hotel Heritage, a Relais & Chateaux property located in the heart of the charming city of Bruges, in Belgium. Mr. Creytens and his wife, Isabelle, purchased the hotel in 1992, and renovated the historic 1800's mansion into the award winning 24-room hotel it is today. Mr. Creytens studied Architectural Design with many years of experience as a project manager of Hotel projects. His hotel management skills were updated at the Cornell University with a post-graduate degree in Hotel Marketing. Mr. Creytens can be contacted at +32 50 444 444 or johan.creytens@hotel-heritage.com

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