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TAKING A PAGE FROM THE GUEST BOOK: HOSPITALITY EXPERTS TELLS BOMA/NY HOW TO MAKE THE CUSTOMER COUNT

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NEW YORK, NY --- Russell Crowe's recent phone tossing incident aside, the hotel industry prides itself on living up to its #1 maxim, "the customer is always right," said hospitality consulting expert Carol Bullock-Walter at BOMA/NY's June discussion panel focusing on the hotel industry's customer service technique. How would that play in the commercial real estate industry? And what techniques can the building industry learn from its fellow facilities and asset managers in the hospitality world?

Bullock-Walter believes customer satisfaction is achieved by recognizing "your true partners in delivering service. Often they are the grossly overlooked 'working poor' who clean the facility or perform repairs. And the dilemma is, you are charging \$1,000 a night and these 'partners' are going without incentives, or in some cases, the proper tools and skills." Citing examples from her experience in the Carlton Hotel turn-around, she stated that training, a "stars" program giving financial incentives as small as \$100, and a regular practice of listening to staff complaints and feedback were critical to having repeat customers.

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Hospitality industry at BOMA/NY/2

Communications at all levels is essential, she stated. Small touches often work—she cited then example of good will experienced after engineers left a simple card in the guest rooms, stating that their heating complaint had been received and the engineer had been on-site to fix it. Large scale projects, such as implementing a system of tracking all calls and complaints from beginning to end build results for guests and facilities staff.

If the ultimate goal is to have tenants renew their leases "without the blink of an eye," said panelist Jerry Moran of Hospitality & Service Consulting, Inc., it starts with a smile and desire to help. "Look for that in your potential hires," he explained. Then "train them in product knowledge and services skills, and finally empower them and build loyalty by identifying service opportunities."

"You've also got to appreciate the comments tenants volunteer when you are fixing problems...hear what they are saying and often you will find that their suggestions are very helpful and can spark a creative solution," he continued.

Complaints about elevator service in an older hotel were solved in just such a way, Bullock-Walter reported. Adding mirrors and house phones in the elevator lobbies allowed guests to use their waiting time effectively, such as adjusting a tie or make-up, or making a phone call they'd delayed in the rush to get out the door. She also advised reviewing elevator maintenance contracts to tighten up customer service items, stating, for example, that if the repair team did not arrive within 25 minutes of a guest being stuck in the elevator, the contractor would be obligated for the guest's stay that night.

BOMA/NY, which is attracting interest from building management personnel in the hospitality industry, staged this discussion panel to meet the needs of those new members and promote interdisciplinary interaction.

Hospitality industry at BOMA/NY/3

BOMA/NY is the greater New York area Association of BOMA International, with more than 860 members active in all areas affecting the industry—from continuing education to advocacy and codes and regulations updates. It is the sponsor of the real estate industry's most prestigious awards—the Pinnacles—which recognize excellence in operations and personal contribution. BOMA/NY is the major source for the profession's continuing education and is the exclusive provider of the BOMI coursework required for the RPA, FMA, SMA and SMT designations. In recent years, the Association has become an increasingly influential voice at City Hall, the State House in Albany and in Washington, DC, lobbying for issues as diverse as mold remediation and terrorism insurance.



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CAPTION: l-r Carol Bullock-Walter, consultant; BOMA/NY President Betsy Jacobs; Jerry Moran of Hospitality & Service Consulting, Inc.; BOMA/NY Executive Director, Roberta McGowan, CAE