

Henry McMaster  
Governor

Duane N. Parrish  
Director

July 24, 2018

The Honorable Gary E. Clary  
Executive Subcommittee Chair  
House Legislative Oversight Committee  
PO Box 11867  
Columbia, SC 29211

Re: Follow-up from Subcommittee Letter Dated July 16, 2018

Dear Chairman Clary:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide additional information to the Executive Subcommittee regarding South Carolina State Parks, SCPRT Customer Service Training and SCPRT's Communications Office. For your reference and convenience, the information in this letter and the enclosures (or attachments) are in the same order as the information requested in the July 16, 2018 letter.

***State Parks***

1. The enclosed Excel document contains all the requested information for state parks systems in the southeastern United States. In addition to the state park system acreage for each state, we have also included the total number of state parks for each state in order to provide more context for interpreting the requested information. The number of state parks and corresponding total acreage of state park systems varies widely from state to state. For example, Florida has a total of 175 state parks encompassing nearly 800,000 acres in total, while Mississippi has 22 state parks encompassing just under 23,000 acres. South Carolina and Georgia have a comparable number of state parks and relatively comparable state parks total acreage; however, South Carolina's state population and geographic size are roughly half of Georgia's.
2. SCPRT does not regularly track the number of repeat visitors for admissions or overnight accommodations; however, the agency has requested our reservation provider to develop a program that would capture this data in the future. SCPRT does track the number of new and repeat visitors during specific specials and promotions to determine the effectiveness of the agency's State Parks marketing efforts. For example, in 2016, South Carolina State Parks offered discounted reservations as part of its Black Friday promotion. During this promotion, 1,280 reservations were made, with repeat visitors accounting for approximately 66% of the total reservations. In 2017, repeat visitors accounted for approximately 46% of total promotional reservations.
3. Regular adult admission pricing at most State Parks have remained constant over the past several years. In FY 10, SCPRT increased regular adult admissions prices from \$3.00 to \$5.00 year round at Myrtle Beach, Edisto Beach, Huntington Beach, Hunting Island state parks. Over the past few years, SCPRT has also increased admissions prices to \$5.00 at Paris Mountain, Table Rock, Devils Fork, Sesquicentennial, Jones Gap and Givhans Ferry state parks. Admissions pricing to Charles Towne Landing was increased from \$7.00 to \$10.00 in FY 13. This admissions price allows visitors to access

all attractions within the park, including the museum exhibits, animal forest (zoo), and The Adventure replica ship. In addition, SCPRT has implemented a \$5.00 seasonal admissions price increase at Landsford Canal State Park during lily season. At all other state parks, the admission price is either \$2.00 or there is no admission charge. The admissions price increases were determined based on visitation observations of on-site State Park staff and visitation information collected through traffic counters. In each of these cases, the increase of admissions pricing was implemented to address increasing operational costs resulting from high visitation and alleviate visitor capacity issues.

4. To assist in pricing decisions, our full-time data analyst utilizes various reports and data sets obtained through our Central Reservation System. These reports and data sets include Occupancy Forecasts, Demand Statistics/Trends, Booking Pace, and ADR/RevPAR reports. Through research, our data analyst also completes Market Rate Comparisons to evaluate competitor/market prices when making pricing decisions for South Carolina State Parks.
5. In FY 17, SCPRT sold 35,125 State Parks passports. Of this total, 2,913 were sold as bulk corporate sales to South Carolina-based businesses such as Blue Cross Blue Shield. Based on audits of passport sales in January and July, approximately 4.5% of sales were recorded as out-of-state sales. However, it is important to note that in some cases, the person purchasing the State Parks Passport may not be the person actually using the Passport. For example, many State Parks Passports are purchased as gifts, especially during promotional sales events. Also, many rental property owners near Huntington Beach State Park purchases State Park Passports for their guests to use during their stay.

As also requested, the table below provides a breakdown of the top five State Parks Passport sales locations.

Park	Revenue FY 2017	% of Total
Myrtle Beach State Park	\$448,965.50	22.74%
Huntington Beach State Park	\$446,960.20	22.64%
Paris Mountain State Park	\$169,943.10	8.61%
Hunting Island State Park	\$144,615.20	7.33%
Sesquicentennial State Park	\$144,601.85	7.32%

6. The State Park Service acquires land primarily to provide access and opportunities for state park visitors to connect with the natural and cultural resources, while also ensuring the continuity of the state's natural and cultural resources for future generations. SCPRT's main focus is on the interaction between the visitors and the resources. Resource management activities in state parks, while necessary and important for the protection of indigenous species and historical assets, are principally to enhance visitor experiences through interpretation, education and recreation. Based on our interactions with other land resource agencies, this is a key difference between SC State Parks, SCDNR, and the SC Forestry Commission. SCDNR's primary mission is to protect the state's natural resources, while the SC Forestry Commissions' primary mission is to protect the state's forests through forest management. In our view, these three agencies have clearly defined missions, goals and activities that do not overlap, but complement one another. SCPRT works regularly with both SCDNR and the SC Forestry Commission on property management issues such as invasive species control and forest understory management and developed working relationships and partnerships

with these agencies to share expertise and optimize efficiencies for managing state parks property in a way that ensures the continuity of state parks' resources.

7. At this time, SCPRT is not aware of any other statutes involving State Parks management of properties owned by Santee Cooper or other state agencies to which the agency would like to request revisions at this time. As outlined in the Program Evaluation Report, SCPRT does recommend repealing the legislation regarding Fort Watson, S.C. Code Ann. 51-9-10 through 51-9-30.
8. The agency proposes the following legislation changes in regard to Hunting Island residential leases: completely repealing S.C. Code Ann. 51-7-20 and revising S.C. Code Ann. 51-7-30 to remove the reference to the residential areas of Hunting Island. Exact recommended changes are provided below.

**SECTION 51-7-20. Leases of residential areas; covenants in leases.**

~~The Department may set aside such portion of the island as it shall deem proper as a residential area. It may divide this area into building lots and may lease the lots for such terms of years, for such annual rentals and upon such conditions and covenants as the Department may determine. Each lease shall contain suitable covenants requiring the lessee to erect and maintain, within such period of time as the Department may prescribe, habitable dwellings of design and structure satisfactory to the Department. Each lease shall contain provisions for the forfeiture of the rights of the lessee upon failure to pay the annual rentals and, upon a forfeiture, all dwellings and structures that may have been erected on any such lot shall become the absolute property of the Department. The Department may also require, in its discretion, further and additional covenants in all leases to insure proper use of the leased premises for purposes consistent with the proper development and maintenance of the residential area. Such leases shall be available to all applicants but preference, so far as possible, shall be given to citizens of this State.~~

HISTORY: 1962 Code § 51-242; 1952 Code § 51-242; 1942 Code § 3284-5; 1940 (41) 1785.

**SECTION 51-7-30. Streets and roads; water supply system.**

~~The Department may construct and maintain streets and roads throughout the island and the residential area. It may also construct and operate a water supply system within *the island*. ~~the residential area and may establish rates and make charges for water furnished by the system.~~~~

HISTORY: 1962 Code § 51-243; 1952 Code § 51-243; 1942 Code § 3284-5; 1940 (41) 1785.

9. SCPRT is not aware of a customer service-training program available to state agencies. SCPRT develops most of its customer service training through internal programs developed by the State Park Service and the State Welcome Center program. The agency has utilized outside trainers and experienced agency staff to conduct internal customer service workshops.
10. SCPRT's leadership has been asked to present the South Carolina State Parks model for customer service to many other state park systems across the U.S., including Louisiana, Alaska, Wyoming and Missouri. SCPRT's Welcome Center program has shared its customer service training resources with SCDMV. In addition, SCPRT has shared its Guest Services Guide (enclosed) with welcome center programs throughout the southeastern U.S. and the U.S. Travel Association. Welcome Center staff have also conducted presentations on customer service at Virginia's annual Welcome Center conference and, most recently, at the South Carolina Governor's Conference on Tourism and Travel.

11. SCPRT freely shares its customer service materials with any requesting agency, organization or industry partner.
12. SCPRT is not aware of any national organizations or certifications specific to State Parks customer service. The US Travel Association has a national certification program for Welcome Center travel counselors. In FY 18, 72% of the FTEs in the Welcome Centers were nationally certified travel counselors. Certification requires years of study, active learning of tourism product knowledge, and passing a difficult test about customer service, safety, routing and other related subjects. Recertification occurs every five years.
13. SCPRT intends to conduct succession planning for the Communications office in a similar manner as succession planning for other areas of the agency. Specifically, the agency will likely provide a specific amount of overlap time for the incoming and outgoing Communication Director to work together. This approach allows the outgoing Communications Director the opportunity to share her working knowledge with the incoming director through hands on training.

I hope that this information and the enclosed reports and documents will adequately satisfy the needs of the Subcommittee. If I may provide any additional information or clarification about any of the information provide in this letter or accompanying documents, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



Duane Parrish

Enclosures

cc: The Honorable Laurie Slade Funderburk  
The Honorable Wm. Weston J Newton  
The Honorable Robert Q. Williams

STATE	# OF PARKS	ACERAGE	MI <sup>2</sup> OF STATE	POPULATION OF STATE	AGENCY THAT MANAGES STATE PARKS
Alabama	21	48,164	52,419	4.87 million	Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
Arkansas	52	54,573	53,179	3.00 million	Department of Parks and Tourism
Florida	175	792,230	65,755	20.98 million	Department of Environmental Protection
Georgia	48	80,662	59,425	10.43 million	Department of Natural Resources
Kentucky	49	43,664	40,409	4.45 million	Department of Parks
Louisiana	22	34,124	52,271	4.68 million	Department of Culture, Recreation & Tourism
Maryland	66	134,539	12,407	6.05 million	Department of Natural Resources
Mississippi	22	22,943	48,430	2.98 million	Wildlife, Fisheries & Parks
North Carolina	41	183,430	53,819	10.27 million	Department of Natural and Cultural Resources
South Carolina	47	90,167	32,020	5.02 million	Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism
Tennessee	56	194,502	42,143	6.71 million	Department of Environment and Conservation
Virginia	37	72,973	42,775	8.47 million	Department of Conservation and Recreation
West Virginia	37	164,000	24,038	1.81 million	Division of Natural Resources

South Carolina Welcome Center  
**Guest Service Guide**

Our  
Values

Our  
Story



Our  
Guests

Our  
Standards

Our  
Responsibility

**Guest service is the vehicle that allows us to achieve our core purpose.**

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## **Purpose**

This guide was developed to assist with the training of new employees and the professional growth of current employees. By reading this guide you will gain an understanding of the guest service views, values, expectations, practices, and standards of the SC Welcome Center program. When you apply the principles outlined, and continue to study and grow your service skills, you will be a shining example of a guest service expert.

## **Our Mission and Vision**

The SC Department of Parks, Recreation, & Tourism has defined our mission as:

*Growing South Carolina's economy by fostering sustainable tourism economic development and effectively marketing our state to increase visitation and improve the quality of life for all South Carolinians.*

Our vision is defined as:

*Grow the state, (the economy, jobs, the product base, etc.)  
Enhance the authentic experiences. (Remain true to what makes South Carolina special.)  
Sustain the resources. (Protect and preserve.)  
Lead the way.*

Our agency has also set the following goals:

### **Heads in Beds**

- *Short Term: Develop and implement a plan to renovate the state's nine Welcome Centers to reflect changes in travel trends and technology, with a prototype underway by July 2014.*
- *Short Term: Redesign Discover South Carolina website and social media outlets by July 2014 to strategically incorporate content and visual elements that reinforce the Undiscovered SC marketing message.*
- *Long Term: Develop and implement an Undiscovered SC Enhancement grant program to help grow tourism in rural areas of South Carolina.*

### **Feet in Fairways**

- *Short Term: Leverage South Carolina's growing reputation as an international golf destination by enhancing golf advertising presence in South Carolina's prime international markets (Canada, UK & Germany).*
- *Long Term: Partner with the South Carolina golf/tourism industry to increase consumer awareness and use of the state's golf product.*

### **People in Parks**

- *Short Term: Pursue completion of capital projects that will serve as difference makers for State Parks' revenue generation and alleviate some priority deferred maintenance needs, including addressing the physical impact of heavy rains during the spring and summer of 2013.*
- *Long Term: Create an effective and achievable plan for the State Park Service to become 100% operationally self-sufficient by the end of CY 2014.*



The SC Welcome Center Program has defined our vision as:

*Because we, the South Carolina Welcome Center Program, value our guests above all else, deliver distinct customer service by actively engaging every guest with expert travel information; connecting with the guest through shared stories of South Carolina's treasures, inspiring new adventures; and providing an experience that transcends expectations.*

### **Why It All Matters!**

Sometimes it is hard to understand how and why mission and vision statements affect us. It seems that these are something used by managers and leaders of an organization in reports and media or to develop strategic plans for the agency. However, the agency's mission and vision statements are vitally important to us. These statements tell us how we should behave, what we should be achieving, and they define who we are as an agency and program -- and how our program fits as a piece within the whole of the agency.

This is why they are the first thing in this guide! Mission and vision statements are our guides and they define our values. Use these statements to guide your behaviors and let them inspire you to provide amazing guest services every day!

Take a moment and think about the following parts of our program responsibilities. How do each of these relate to, and fulfill, the agency's mission and vision statements listed above? How do they correspond to the Welcome Center vision statement? Can you see how the program's vision statement relates to the agency statements?

- Reservations
- Training and Certification
- Collateral Inventory
- Partner Development (SCATR, CVB's, etc.)
- Visitor Data Collection
- Pleasant and Professional Atmosphere (personal and center appearance)

### **A Word About Our Guests**

When we speak of guests in this guide, we are referring primarily to visitors or residents of South Carolina visiting a Welcome Center for information and assistance. However, we must also extend the same service principles to our industry partners such as destination marketing organizations (CVB's, SCATR, Chambers, etc.), attractions, accommodations, etc. and our teammates, maintenance and grounds workers, and other SCPRT employees.

This guide is worded in a way that provides advice driven to the primary audience, but it is important to remember that our team-oriented environment requires each person to be open, kind and professional in their communications, and be advocates of service towards one another.

## Interaction phases

Every interaction with a guest should go through four phases. In this section of the guide we will identify these phases, provide a brief description of each and explain how these phases enable us to provide our guests with excellent guest service. In later sections we will provide you with tools you can use to complete each phase ensuring each interaction will be successful and inspiring. The phases are:

### 1. Greet

This phase is vitally important because it sets the stage for the entire guest experience. Communication starts here and will be used through all 4 phases of the guest interaction. Communication is defined as the act or process of using words, sounds, signs, or behaviors to express/exchange information, ideas, thoughts, feelings etc. to someone else (Merriam Webster). (As you can see, communication is not just what we say, how we say things is actually more important than what we say.) According to John Maxwell, Leadership Expert and Author, "90% of the impression we often convey has nothing to do with what we actually say." The 90% we convey comes from our non-verbal, written, and visual communications that occur in our surroundings when we speak. If all of these forms of communication are not synced we will not convey the clear message we intended to convey."

For example, if a guest walks into the center and you say "Hi there, welcome to South Carolina." but you are looking down because you are counting a visitor data sheet not done from yesterday. You smiled, just like this guide said to do. But was it effective? No. To the guest it looks like you've just read something funny because you didn't look up and make eye contact to acknowledge their entrance.

On the other hand, looking up, making eye contact, faking a small smile while sighing out a bored "Welcome to South Carolina" is also just as ineffective.

A greeting **MUST** encompass the verbal and non-verbal communication cues to be effective.

### 2. Engage and Connect

In this phase of the interaction we should be accessible to our guests and making an effort to get to know them and understand their needs. When you connect with your guest you can identify with and relate to them. By doing so you are increasing your influence with them (John Maxwell). You will not be able to achieve this connection unless you value each guest that walks into your Center. You have a unique opportunity to affect the life of every person you interact with. They have given you their time which is one of the most valuable things they have. We must respect that and give that guest our very best service. Without guests there is no reason for a Welcome Center and if there is no need for a Welcome Center there is no need for us. Our guests are **VALUABLE** and we must respect them and never forget that they are the reason we exist!

Because we recognize that some guests are not receptive to assistance, we should respond in an appropriate manner, informing them we are available if needed during their visit. With experience, you will gain insight and the ability to "read the guest" and determine if further promptings are appropriate.

### **3. Assist**

During this phase our marketing efforts begin. During phase one and two we have established communication and have learned about our guests, now we can provide them with the information and literature that will be the most useful to them. We are able to offer reservations and ensure that we answer any questions they may have. We also have an opportunity in this phase to suggest additional tourism products they can enjoy on their trip or perhaps inspire them to begin planning their next visit to South Carolina before they leave our Center.

### **4. Close the Interaction**

The final phase allows us to say good bye to our guests. It is also what can turn a new guest into a repeat guest and keeps repeat guests coming back. During this process we also need to ensure that their visit has been recorded with us and our actions in phase one through three were successful. We need to ask specific questions to ensure the information we provided met their needs and was presented in a clear, concise and useful way. If we find our actions were not successful in all areas, we still have time to readdress those areas. This is our last chance to show our guests that they are valued and we must use it to ensure we have exceeded their expectations. As a final closing, it is important to thank them for their visit and invite them to return again in the future.

## **Expectations and Standards**

With any interaction that takes place there are expectations and standards to meet. Our guests and employer expect us to behave in a predetermined way. We as individuals all have standards that we will not violate. Expectations and standards are part of our everyday lives. Since we are not representing ourselves as individuals, but the state, it is important to establish expectations and standards we can all agree upon and use with every guest interaction. They are broken down into Our Values, Our Story, Our Standards, and Our Responsibilities.

### **Our Values**

SCPRT Director Duane Parrish began referring to the Welcome Centers as the “front porches” of the state, the first welcome, impression, or experience for visitors. As with friends and family invited to our homes, we believe our visitors are our “guests”, welcome to “sit a spell” with us at our front porch so we can tell them all about what is waiting inside our great state for them to experience.

Because we understand that the environment our guests see, feel, smell, and hear is just as important as what we say, we must ensure our Centers are pleasing to all of the senses when we prepare for their arrival...just as we do in our homes!

We have a responsibility to each traveler, knowing that they are likely a stranger in our state and we are here to make them feel welcomed, comfortable, valued, and in the end, happy they chose South Carolina.

### **Our Story**

We are proud of our state and the southern hospitality we are known for. We're Southern... and it's ok!! Say Y'all, Howdy and all those sayin's. The majority of the guests love it and want more of it. Our state has a beautiful story to be told, a story that offers something for every guest. Learning those stories and keeping current on tourism product is vital to sharing that story and

we must continue to increase our knowledge and our ability to share our stories to enhance our guest experience. We must strive to tell our story with excitement and energy, emphasizing the fun and making the ordinary extraordinary for our guests each time we tell it.

### **Our Standards**

Welcome Centers exist to serve the visitors and residents of this state. Realizing that we are the first impression of the state, we will provide a positive service experience for each and every guest. Our expertise on the state's tourism resources, geography, history, culture, etc. will remain unparalleled. We will strive to provide safe and clean facilities, exceed their expectations whenever possible, "make their day" by performing at our best every time we are on stage (Fish! Philosophy), and provide a fun and unforgettable experience while they are with us.

### **Our Responsibility**

We understand that we are South Carolina to our guests and are responsible for ensuring they have an awesome experience while on our premises. We acknowledge that we perform guest service functions on the phone, in person, on the Welcome Center grounds, before we open and after we close. Because of this fact, we believe that everything we do should focus on the guest. In all interactions we will strive to give them our undivided attention, listen to them, paying close attention to what they want and seeking to understand their point of view. We will have patience with them, show care and concern for them and strive to inspire them.

To be successful in these areas we must be willing to leave our attitudes, egos, preconceived beliefs, and bad tempers back stage. We must show that we can accept differences, maneuver challenges, and be genuine in all interactions. We need to be self-aware, use our talents and abilities to their fullest and always work to improve our skills. We need to develop our people skills so we will be able to discover, understand, and meet the unexpressed needs of our guests. It is our responsibility to prepare for our guests' visit, to do more for them than they expect, and to have fun with them. While we know there are boundaries we must operate within, we must always seek new and innovative ways to interact with our guests.

### **Practical Matters**

This section of your guide will give you practical advice to enable you to provide exceptional, awesome, extraordinary service to our guests and it all starts with you and your co-workers backstage. So we are providing you, in list format, things to think about and do before you begin and during your work day:

#### **Before Going Onstage:**

- Remember, on-stage is when you can be seen by a visitor or partner. You must be "ON" because you ARE the travel counselor extraordinaire who exceeds expectations! The parent, spouse, bill payer, etc. are left in the back to be picked up again during breaks, lunch and after work. Backstage is where you can relax a little bit. However, remember that your teammates are your guests as well and it is our shared responsibility to care for and serve with these special guests.
- Plan to have fun, play, have fun, play. We cannot say it enough! It's important and infectious so have fun and play! Just because it is work does not mean it can't be fun!
- Smile, smile, smile, even when you don't feel like it. It will make you look good and it won't give you frown lines. In fact, it takes more muscles to frown than smile. Did you

know that if you smile continuously for three minutes, your body will release endorphins and your mood will naturally improve?

- Be intentional about your emotions; be happy, warm positive, energetic, enthusiastic, excited and expressive. These emotions will help you communicate and make you and our guests feel better.
- Make a conscious effort every day to genuinely like the people you encounter. If you do this long enough you will learn to like all people, even the challenging ones. You may even find you like those challenging encounters the most.
- Our appearance and body language communicate to our guests before we say the first word. To ensure you are ready to communicate the correct message ask yourself the following questions:
  - How will I look to the guest entering the lobby?
  - Is my uniform clean and pressed?
  - Is my facial expression inviting and appropriate?
  - Am I ready to make eye contact with my guests?
  - Can I maintain good posture while onstage?
  - Have I prepared the center for the guest's arrival?
    - Are the racks straight and stocked?
    - Is the lobby clean and neat?
    - Is it pleasing to the eyes, ears, and nose?
- Leave the following items back stage:
  - Bad attitudes (These are contagious also with disastrous consequences for co-workers and guests.)
  - Assumptions and generalizations about people. Both of these will prevent you from communicating effectively and will impair the service you offer our guests.
  - Personal conversations.
- Remind yourself of the following:
  - My guests deserve my best efforts.
  - The guest always comes first; it's not about me onstage.
  - I must be able to empathize with my guests.
  - I must be observant and approach guests with physical and mental impairments in an appropriate manner.
  - I need to serve guests as quickly and effectively as possible because their time is valuable.

### **Greeting the Guest**

- Make sure you are aware of the following when you talk with guests: tone, inflection, timing, volume, and pacing of your voice. All of these will affect the guest interaction either positively or negatively. Everything you do with your voice, body language, and facial expressions communicates something to the guest.
- Acknowledge and greet guests as soon as possible after they enter your center. Remember, you can acknowledge guests non-verbally if you are working with another guest by making brief eye contact, and smiling, nodding, or waving. All of these will let the guest know that you are aware they have arrived and need to be assisted.
- Try to use different greetings with the appropriate amount of energy as you greet your guests. We want our guests to feel like our friends or family would feel if they were visiting our home and we would not greet them in a robotic fashion. Our greetings must

always be genuine. This will also keep you from getting bored. Shake it up and remember to have fun!

- Always pay attention to your guest. Limit distractions if possible.
- Ask questions that require a response other than yes or no so you can begin a conversation.
- Take the initiative to start the conversation with our guests by moving from behind the counter to greet and serve. Don't wait for the guest to approach you.

### **Engaging and Connecting With the Guest**

- Show interest in your guest. Ask questions, listen, make eye contact, and show your guest you value them and what they say.
- Use "make their day" (Fish! Philosophy) statements. This is a simple way to serve and delight guests that is meaningful and contributes to their lives.
- Always speak in a way the guest can understand. Make sure you are relating and communicating properly and effectively.
- Be responsive to your guest's questions. Give and do more for them than they expect.
- Tailor your behavior to your guest's needs. Adjust to their reality.
- Answer questions by asking follow-up questions to gain insight, ensure you understand your guests, and to get additional specific information about the topic.
- Use interactive statements and keep all members of the party involved if possible.
- Find common ground with your guest.
- Capture your guest's interest, tell them South Carolina's story, and inspire them to do and experience more in our state.
- Continue to learn as much as you can about South Carolina tourism products so you can guide your guests to traditional and non-traditional destinations they will enjoy.
- Be genuine. Use the best of yourself to impact the guest. You were hired for a reason and we want you to use that spark we saw in you to engage the guest!

### **Assisting the Guest**

- Add value to the guest experience. Make sure the information you give them can be used, is accurate and up-to-date. Make a difference in their trip and life.
- Provide the guest with more information and options than they request (add-on sales).
- Paint a picture with your words when describing attractions, etc. to your guests.
- Highlight maps, write down directions, give mileages, and time to destinations. Do what is needed to make their life easier.
- When questioned about the weather, pull up the radar and forecasts for them. If the forecast is a disappointment, empathize, provide them with indoor activities and encourage them. Let them know their trip will not be ruined by the weather.
- Never point to anything, always direct your guests with an open hand, palm facing up or down. Instead of directing your guest to a location in your center, take them there if possible. Especially when they are interested in brochures. When you accompany them to the brochure racks you have an opportunity to pull the brochures they are looking for and to sell them additional tourism products based on the interests they are sharing with you.
- Educate yourself on what will affect your guests as they continue their travels. What time of day is it? Will the sun be in their eyes? Will they hit 5 o'clock traffic? Is there a wreck that is causing traffic delays? Are they traveling near a meal time or within hours of

darkness? When you know what they will experience you have an opportunity to offer options to keep them from experiencing a negative situation and have the opportunity to tell them about dining options, hotels along their route and attractions they can enjoy.

- Use your resources: brochures, coupons, visitor guides, maps, computer, and reference files will all enable you to better serve your guests.
- Make sure guests are aware of the services we offer: special deals, coupons and rates, accommodation and attraction reservations, directions, literature, maps, product expertise (For partners: Accommodation and exit updates, special events, NTW, advertising program, and research data).
- Don't leave a guest until you have completed the interaction or have appropriately passed them to a co-worker who can assist them.
- If you must leave a guest do the following:
  - Excuse yourself
  - Apologize for the interruption
  - Let them know you will return as soon as possible
  - Thank them for their patience when you return
- Give the guest options for routes, places to stay, things to do, and where to eat. They may choose more than one.
- Always apologize for inconveniences, mistakes, misunderstandings, and interruptions.

### **Closing the Interaction With the Guest**

- Ask test questions to ensure the information given to your guest is useful and meets their needs.
- Make sure all their questions and needs have been met.
- Let the guest know you hope they have a wonderful and safe trip.
- Thank them for visiting and invite them to return.

### **International Guests**

International travelers are a very important part of our state's tourism market. Many international visitors speak little or no English. Extra patience and understanding are necessary in order to relay the information the guest needs. Use visual aids (brochures, maps, visitor guides and the internet) as much as possible to serve and assist the international visitor. Keep your sentences and directions as simple as possible when conversing with international visitors and always avoid using slang. Remember, what may be acceptable slang in our culture may be totally unacceptable in theirs. Hand gestures should be used cautiously for the same reason. Be aware that habits, customs and manners in other countries can sometimes differ widely from ours, and be prepared. The Language Line or Google Translation are two tools available to assist you through difficult situations.

### **Disabled or Hearing Impaired Guests**

Our disabled or hearing impaired guests may need extra assistance or consideration. When working with a person who is hearing impaired you should first ask without exaggeration if they can read lips. If they can, you should maintain eye contact and not look away or down when speaking. Speak first and then show the directions on the map. If they cannot, it may be easier to use pen and paper or communicate by pointing on the map unless there is a translator or translating device available. Extra patience and understanding are needed to relay the information the guest needs. Avoid using any hand gestures or motions when speaking to the hearing impaired individual and speak normally for lip reading.

For other disabilities, such as wheelchairs and other mobility devices, ensure the person is able to reach, see, or access the information they need. Offer to assist them if you notice a difficulty and make necessary adjustments/accommodations/modifications wherever possible to provide the guest with a quality service experience.

### **Other Needs**

If a guest makes a request for a private location to breastfeed, receive breathing treatments, etc. you should try to be as accommodating as possible. Suggest options such as: allowing the person to use the kitchen area and check on them frequently, provide a comfortable seat for the family restroom, provide a comfortable seat in the center's corner with a nice view of the outside, or provide a seat in the office area against the back wall that faces directly out toward the front through the French doors. If your center has additional locations that would be comfortable for the guest, and safe for our staff and equipment, you may offer those as options, using your best judgment. Allow the guest to choose where they are most comfortable. (A note regarding breastfeeding- it is permitted in any location where the mother is permitted or has a right to be. This is dictated by both federal law [because it is federally owned property] and South Carolina state law and it is exempt from indecency laws.)

### **A Word About Complaints**

Although we strive to provide our guests with an excellent experience, there will be a complaint. Sometimes they are upset by things we cannot and do not control. While our human nature would love to ignore those complaints or to pass the blame to whom it truly may belong, those who provide excellent guest service know that if a guest voices a complaint or concern to them, it becomes their responsibility to address that complaint or concern. It is about the guest, not you, or the person at fault— it is only about how the guest feels. We must respond within our boundaries to the issues our guests bring us. The following suggestions will help you resolve the issues you are presented with:

- Never take it personally.
- Allow the guest to vent.
- Be quiet and listen attentively to the guest.
- Take notes and/or give the guest the option of writing out their complaint.
- Remain calm, pause before speaking, display a caring attitude, and keep your voice soft and even toned.
- Ask probing, non-threatening questions to ensure you understand your guest.
- Restate the guest's concern to assure them you hear them and to make sure you understand what they are saying.
- Always attempt to resolve the issue; know your options and boundaries.
- Present options
- If you cannot resolve the issue or the guest is becoming more upset, notify your manager or a more experienced co-worker.
- Control the conversation, keep on topic, and never argue.
- Avoid the word "policy."
- Do not make it personal by using statements such as, "you should have" or "as previously stated."
- Most of all, the guest wants to be heard and never proven wrong about the complaint.



Use the following questions/statements to calm situations:

- Active listening and demonstrated caring will usually diffuse any situation.
- I want to make sure I have this down correctly, would you mind repeating it one more time, please?
- Before you go any further, my manager will need to hear this. Would you mind if I go get her/him so you won't have to repeat yourself? (And then stay with your manager and listen.)
- I can appreciate/understand what you are saying
- I can understand how you would feel
- I can see how that would upset you, I would be upset too
- I want to help find a solution
- As a solution may I suggest that ...
- What I will do right now is ...
- We really appreciate this feedback ...
- I'm so sorry to hear about this ...
- Thank you so much for your patience/understanding ...
- Let me see how I can fix this ...
- I am more than happy to help you...
- Is there something I can do to improve your experience?
- Would you mind if I document this so I can share it with ...? I would like to prevent this from happening in the future.
- I apologize for the experience you have had I will ...
- Let's see what we can work out.
- Let's see what we can do to resolve this.

Tips for dealing with irate guests or other extreme situations:

- Assume the guest has a right to be angry and remain calm in your language, tone and posture.
- Try to signal for your manager or a senior staff member for assistance.
- Never ask or tell the guest to calm down.
- Try to move the guest to a quieter location (but still visible to your co-workers).
- Use active listening and actively empathize with their situation.
- Apologize for their experience.
- Solve the situation or let the guest know what you will do to resolve the issue.

Remember **LAST!**

- **L** stands for **listen**. Listening is a vital part of communication and when done actively can help you understand your guest and work towards a resolution of an issue they will be happy with. It also shows them respect.
- **A** stands for **apologize**. Apologizing to the guest lets them know that you care. You can apologize even when you have nothing to do with the issue. I'm sorry you had that experience is an example of an apology that does not place or accept blame but lets the guest know you are sorry they were upset.
- **S** stands for **solve**. While many times we cannot solve the issue while the guest is in front of us, or we may not be able to solve the issue at all, we can at least assure the guest we will take all action that we can, such as passing the complaint to the appropriate

agency, etc. When we can solve the issue, we need to do so immediately or provide the guest with a timeframe.

- **T stands for thank.** Always sincerely thank your guest for bringing an issue to your attention. This lets the guest know you care about their experience and appreciate them.

#### Some advice on **Active Listening**:

- Give the speaker your undivided attention: Look at the speaker directly, put aside distracting thoughts and environmental factors like side conversations, do not mentally prepare a response while they're speaking, and pay attention to their body language.
- Acknowledge the message through these types of non-verbal communication: Nod occasionally, smile or use other appropriate facial expressions, notice your posture and adjust so it is open and inviting, encourage the speaker to continue by using small verbal comments like mm, hmm, uh huh, and yes.
- Reflect what has been said by paraphrasing. Great ways to do this are: "So I can make sure I have this correct," and "I am sorry that you...repeat bad experience". Ask specific questions to clarify certain points and summarize the speaker's comments periodically. Do not ever interrupt. It frustrates the speaker and limits full understanding of the message. Allow the speaker to finish each point before asking questions.

**For Example:** A guest comes in the center and tells you the bathroom sink does not have water. Your response should be very similar to this: I am so sorry you had that issue. Were you able to wash your hands? (If not, provide guest with an alternative sink.) Can you please tell me which sink was not working? Were you in the inside or outside restroom? Thank you for telling us about this, we will immediately notify our maintenance staff so the sink can be repaired. Again, I'm sorry you were inconvenienced. We appreciate you letting us know. Is there anything else we can assist you with today? I hope you have a wonderful trip.

#### **Closing Thoughts**

Guest service is our chance to impact the lives of our guests. According to John Maxwell, Leadership expert and Author, "People will not always remember what you said. They will not always remember what you did. But they will always remember how you made them feel." Because WE are South Carolina to our guests, it is our responsibility to ensure they leave our centers excited about their trip and awed by their experience at the South Carolina Welcome Center. They will remember how YOU make them feel!

#### **Tools**

Sometimes the mere words we use can communicate the wrong ideas so we have included a chart below with some of the common words and phrases that should never be used in guest service interactions with an appropriate phrase to use in its place. Most of these are self-explanatory where an explanation is necessary it is provided below the chart.

<b>Don't say that ...</b>	<b>Say this ...</b>
We're closed	I'll be glad to accommodate you
You got it	What would you prefer
Fill out the register and I will get you a ...*	While I pull your ... I hope you will fill out our guest register.
Problem	Concern, issue, situation, difficulty
What is your problem...?	If you share with me your concern, I will do my best to resolve it. OR I understand there is an issue. How may I assist?
But	However
OK	Absolutely, certainly
No problem/not a problem	My pleasure. I am happy I could help. Thank YOU.
No	Unfortunately (include an explanation and options)
Honey, Hun, Sugar, Baby, etc.	Sir, Ma'am, Miss
I can't help you with that	Unfortunately we are not able to help with that (include explanation and who can help them). However, I can....
Yeah, nah, huh, etc.	Yes, No, Excuse me?
Customer, traveler	Guest
It's not my job	Let me see what I can do
You should have	I can see why you might have ...
We can't do anything about that	Thank you for bringing that to our attention ...
Are you kidding me? Please!!!	Unfortunately, due to ... we are unable to do that; however we can do ...
I need/ want you to ...	Will you ...?
You have to ...	Would you be willing to ...?
I'll try to ...	I'll personally look into ...
We don't do that here	I apologize but we are not set up for those services here but I am happy to provide you a number/address/directions for....
Sorry	I apologize for ...
You need to ...	You could ...
Can I get you some travel information today?	Where are you/y'all traveling to today?
I know how you feel...	I can understand how you feel
I don't know ...	Although I don't know the answer to your question I will find out

\*When you say to someone fill out the register and I will get you a ... it can sound to the guest that you will not give them the item they have requested unless they fill out the register. Some guests can be offended by this. Our information and service is free and our guests do not have to do anything to be served.

### **Statements/Questions To Use During Guest Interactions:**

The following statements are good to use when working with guests. These have been and are currently being used throughout the Welcome Center program. Use these to enhance your ability to communicate with guests.

#### **Greetings:**

- Good morning/afternoon
- Welcome to South Carolina
- Welcome
- Hello/Hi, how are you today/this morning/this afternoon?
- How can I make your travels "just right"?
- Where are you/y'all traveling to today?

#### **Open-Ended Questions/Statements Usable To Start A Conversation:**

- Where are you going today?
- That's a pretty \_\_\_\_\_. (This and other compliments are examples of the Fish Philosophy! "make their day" statement)
- Your children are so nice.
- Your hair (skirt, shoes, bracelet, etc.) is beautiful.
- Are you visiting with us or is South Carolina home?
- I have a map and travel guide to assist with your travels in South Carolina.
- What part of South Carolina will you be visiting today?

#### **Open-Ended Questions/Statements Usable To Engage, Connect, and Assist Guests:**

- What do you like to do?
- Is there anything you don't like to do?
- Do you have reservations?
- Do you have a hotel for tonight?
- Are you going to drive all the way or will you need a place to stay tonight?
- Do you plan to stop on your way to your destination or are you going to drive all the way?
- How far do you want to drive before you stop for the evening?
- How long before you want to stop?
- Is there a hotel chain/brand you prefer?
- Can I make a reservation for you in South Carolina?
- I will call the hotel or attraction for you to make sure they have space for you.
- Don't forget to gas up your car before leaving South Carolina, our prices are usually lower than ...

#### **Phrases To Encourage Guests To Complete the Guest Register:**

- Please fill out our guest register
- I hope you will fill out our guest register

- We would appreciate it if you would fill out our register
- If you have a moment please fill out our guest register
- Please let us know where you are traveling from
- Please help us complete our guest register
- We like all nice people to sign our register

#### **Explanations for Guests Who Question the Guest Register:**

- The register lets us know how many people come in each day
- It helps us count our traffic
- It's just a traffic count

#### **Test Questions to Ensure You Met Your Guest's Needs:**

- Do you have any questions about the items we discussed?
- I hope the information we provided is helpful, do you have any questions that we did not answer?
- Is there information you want that we have not given you?
- Will the information we provided you help with your travel plans?
- Can we do anything else to make your trip better?
- Do you think this information will be useful to you on your trip?

#### **Closing Questions and Statements:**

- Thanks for coming in, without you I would not be here.
- If you have any other questions let us know; we will be glad to assist you.
- Thanks for stopping
- What else can I do for you today?
- Is there anything else I can help you with?
- Do you have any other questions?
- Can I assist you with anything else?
- Have a great day!
- Have a safe trip
- Come back to see us again

#### **Tips for Growth:**

- Did the guest just leave and you thought "I should've said..."? That's ok. We all sometimes miss an opportunity but recognizing it is a great step in your growth! Write down your missed opportunity and share the experience with your teammate or your manager so you can remember it for the next time.
- Observe your teammates while they interact with guests. Notice what works and doesn't work in communication with guests.
- Train yourself to look for signs that a guest has a question. Look at their eyes, are they scanning the room, map, etc. If so they are probably looking for something. Are they lingering close to the counter but have already been assisted? This usually means they have another question but they won't ask unless you give them the opportunity. Did they tell you they were going to Myrtle Beach but are now looking at brochures in Charleston? Maybe they intended to visit both destinations but didn't mention both to you. Or, they are visiting Myrtle Beach and didn't realize Charleston was so close until they saw the wall

map and decided to check it out. This is a great opportunity to talk with them again to provide assistance and market the state to them.

- Learn about communication, engagement, marketing, etc. There are many resources (free) on the internet. Most articles are short and take just a few minutes to read.
- Ask your managers and teammates for help. If you are having a difficult time communicating with someone, ask a co-worker for help and stay with them (if possible) to observe and learn what they do to make the communication easier.
- Develop your emotional intelligence, which is the ability to monitor people's emotions in an attempt to understand what they are feeling at a given moment. As you develop this ability you will know how to say things and ask questions in a way that will be the most helpful to your guests. Look and listen for the clues every person gives when they are in your presence.
- Learn to tell a story that is appealing and interesting. Know the facts about our tourism products but also learn what makes that product special. Learn the product's story and tell it in a way that inspires the guest to visit.

### **Fish! Philosophy**

#### **Be There:**

People need all of you. Set aside distractions and judgments, be fully present. It's a sign of respect and will improve communication and strengthen relationships.

#### **Play:**

Don't take yourself too seriously. Play is a mindset, not an activity. It allows you to throw yourself with enthusiasm and creativity into whatever you are doing, in a way that is natural, not forced. "Playing" with ideas helps you find solutions to everyday challenges.

#### **Make Their Day:**

Simple gestures of thoughtfulness, thanks, and recognition make people feel appreciated and valued. When you make someone feel good you feel good, too.

#### **Choose Your Attitude:**

To actually choose how you respond to life, not just react, you must be intentional. When you get up, decide who you want to "be" today. Moment-to-moment awareness is key. Ask yourself throughout the day, "What is my attitude right now?" Is it helping people who depend on me? Is it helping me to be effective?

From Fish! Philosophy Website

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Lisa and her team opened dialogue with all levels of the program and received invaluable input and expertise from all participants. The system-wide dialogue process not only provided insight for this guide, but for many it also sparked a self-reflection and a renewal of a passion for customer service. This team spent countless hours researching and discussing customer service— what makes our service exceptional, and how to put our program's goals, standards, and expectations into words. Thanks to the many people who openly shared their experience and expertise and to the team who worked diligently to put it all into a comprehensive guide.