

LESSONS IN LEGENDARY SERVICE FROM RITZ-CARLTON

Six lessons from studying Ritz-Carlton

Legendary service isn't created by isolated moments of brilliance. It is built through culture, people, systems, personalisation and a relentless commitment to raising the standard

1. CULTURE COMES FIRST

- Legendary service starts with a clearly defined culture and absolute consistency. It must feel genuine and human – never scripted or over-rehearsed.
- Move people from their function to their purpose. Purpose creates a passion to make a difference.
- “We are Ladies and Gentlemen serving Ladies and Gentlemen” – it removes hierarchy and makes everything about respect. Senior leaders are the “Guidance Team”, not the “Exec Team”.
- Everyone carries the credo card (Latin for “I believe”, in place since 1986) and teams talk about it constantly.
- Your people hold your brand in the palm of their hands. Culture isn't launched – it's reinforced every day.

2. SELECT FOR ATTITUDE – THEN DEVELOP RELENTLESSLY

- Hire for one thing: attitude. “You can't train heart.” Fill roles slowly and carefully – “We select, not hire” – and only let great people recruit.
- **Day 1:** the GM opens orientation at 8am. It's 2 days and 16 hours of culture, run by business leaders, opening with the message “You are in the top 1% of service professionals in the world.” Role induction comes second.
- **Day 3–21:** a buddy (a certified coach) helps habits form, followed by an assessment, coaching to any gaps and a GM/HR check-in: “Are we living the culture? What should we stop, start or continue?”
- **Day 365:** a stop/start/continue conversation “psychologically rehires” the employee and career planning begins. That's 250 training hours in year one.

3. TURN CULTURE INTO DAILY HABITS

- Every shift, in every department and hotel, starts with a 10–15 minute line-up. Everyone attends – “We are never too busy to do it.”
- Cover one credo element a day (the same one worldwide), share WOW stories and teachable moments, celebrate birthdays and anniversaries, and set the gold standard of the day. At the end of the credo, start again.

Clarity → Consistency → Repetition → Habit → Culture

Don't rely on people remembering the culture – build systems that keep it alive. “There are systems behind the smiles.” Or as the Disney Institute puts it: “Success is 95% systems and 5% magic.”

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4. MAKE SERVICE PERSONAL, MEMORABLE & UNIQUE

- Stay in the moment and “point your heart” at whoever you’re talking to. Use guest names – a simple way to build loyalty.
- Capture the little details in the Mystique guest profile and on a preference pad – e.g. green-tea wrappers in the bin means the guest loves green tea.
- Meet the unexpressed need – a child left their teddy on the plane, so a new one is waiting in the room.
- Beginning, middle, end: a warm, sincere welcome at every touchpoint, and a fond farewell – thank them, invite them back and ask “What could we have done better?”

5. EMPOWER EVERYONE TO OWN THE EXPERIENCE

- Every employee takes one step forward to improve service – it’s not a department’s job, it’s everyone’s. You are ALWAYS on stage. When something goes wrong, use LAST:

L: Listen & repeat back	A: Ask open questions	S: Solve the problem	T: Thank them for raising it
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6. NEVER STOP RAISING THE STANDARD

- Don’t look to see competitors fail – use them to raise your own standards.
- Give “red zone” hotels extra focus. People are believed to tell 10–12 more people about a bad experience than a good one.
- To improve a role, get its top performers together and ask them what behaviours success requires.
- February SWOT (every department, every hotel, every year): one letter a week, debated and kept on a flip-chart all week; GMs submit at month end and the central team builds out the best themes.

THE OVERARCHING LESSON: Legendary service is created by brilliant people, supported by brilliant systems, consistently doing the small things exceptionally well.

6 REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How clearly have we defined what legendary service looks and feels like?
2. Are we selecting people for the attitudes and behaviours our culture requires?
3. What do we leave to chance that should become a simple, repeatable system?
4. How well do we capture and use the small details that make an experience personal?
5. Does every person genuinely believe they own the customer experience?
6. What is one standard we could raise today?