



By Meghan Boyer

# Focusing On Service

Excellent service is something every retailer wants to achieve. The Ritz-Carlton, a leader in customer service, has internal structures in place to ensure every guest at the company's hotels and resorts has a pleasant, consistent experience.

**A**s retailers, you know providing good service — the kind customers go home and tell their friends about — is no easy task. The devil is in the details, as the cliché goes, and while much of good service can be qualified as common sense, it's still difficult to consistently achieve it every single day at your garden center.

The Ritz-Carlton Company is known for consistently delivering quality service at its hotels and resorts. After receiving two Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Awards, the company decided to open the Leadership Center to teach its winning ways to other businesses (see sidebar, page 80). The center offers a series of courses year round, with Legendary Service being the most popular by far, according to Diana Oreck, vice president of global learning and the Leadership Center.

"What we are centering on is leadership and the fact that everything starts with senior leadership role modeling the culture," she explained.

## Spreading The Message

The message the Leadership Center teaches is transferable to any industry, said Oreck, because it is based on values. From aviation to food service to academics, an array of industries takes part in the classes, and all of the industries receive the same message.

"Sixty-five percent of the business today is coming from financial institutions and healthcare, which I think is really interesting. The two most important relationships of your life, your health and your money, and they're realizing it's not enough just to be competent. Bedside manner does count," said Oreck.

The popular Legendary Service class is based on the Ritz-Carlton's gold standards of service, which provide structure to the Ritz-Carlton and its employees (see sidebar, page 81). "We strongly believe you must have systems behind the smiles," said Oreck. Structure is important because each employee can interpret good service in a different way: Defining what good service is and putting rules in place helps ensure that every customer receives a consistent experience.

## Building Structure Into Service

The Ritz-Carlton uses different internal methods to reinforce the company's service standards with all employees. Three times a day (once each work shift), Ritz-Carlton employees meet together in a daily lineup to review service standards. An internal communications manager keeps

## Three Steps Of Service

1. A warm and sincere greeting. Use the guest's name.
2. Anticipation and fulfillment of each guest's needs.
3. Fond farewell. Give a warm goodbye and use the guest's name.



Three times a day (once each work shift), Ritz-Carlton employees meet in a daily lineup to review service standards. (Photo: Ritz-Carlton Company)

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## Strengthening Businesses, Teaching Leadership

Strengthening your business is the pleasure of the Ritz-Carlton Leadership Center, which welcomes thousands of executives, managers and employees from an assortment of industries each year. Open to the public since 2000, the center focuses on teaching businesses the winning practices of the Ritz-Carlton, 2-time recipient of the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award.

The Leadership Center offers a series of courses each year open to all industries except those companies also in the hospitality industry that compete with the Ritz-Carlton. Sixty-five percent of the center's business currently comes from financial and health-care institutions, according to Diana Oreck, vice president of global learning and the Leadership Center. Other industries that take advantage of the center include academics, associations,

government groups, automotive, aviation, food service and information technology. People from mom-and-pop establishments up to heads of large corporations are welcome.

The Ritz-Carlton Leadership Center Web site explains who the classes benefit: "The services of The Ritz-Carlton Leadership Center are ideal if your organization is looking to create sustainable change, out-perform the competition and increase employee and customer loyalty. The knowledge and information participants receive transcend all industries and levels of leadership."

People are welcome to take classes at the Leadership Center's corporate

headquarters in Chevy Chase, Md., and select Ritz-Carlton locations, or businesses can elect to have leadership classes presented at their locations. For a list of courses, dates and prices, visit <http://corporate.ritzcarlton.com>.



Diana Oreck, vice president of global learning and the Leadership Center, teaches a class at the Ritz-Carlton's Leadership Center. (Photo: Ritz-Carlton Company)

the message consistent among all locations every day, and participation is mandatory for everyone, from the company president to every house-keeping manager. Employees also share best practices. On Mondays and Fridays, they share "wow" stories during the daily line up, which are random acts of kindness among workers.

Problems in the workplace are discussed using an acronym, Mr. Biv, which stands for **M**istakes, **R**ework, **B**reakdowns, **I**nc efficiencies and **V**ariation. A cartoon represents Mr. Biv, who is intended to take the stigma out of reporting problems. Providing this for employees helps bring more problems to the surface, which makes it easier to get rid of them. To further reinforce the idea of providing good service, each Ritz-Carlton employee is empowered up to \$2,000 a day per guest to make an incorrect situation right.

The benefits of providing structure are numerous: "What they're doing is employee engagement. They see that they are part of a very fine organization and they are seeing that kindness is rewarded and that being gracious is rewarded, and what this allows them to do is live our culture instead of just hearing it," explained Oreck.

### Tips From An Expert

Oreck and her team help set the global learning strategy for the Ritz-Carlton Company worldwide. She also is heavily involved in the



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Leadership Center and teaching people from different businesses how they can achieve consistent, quality service. In short, she knows all about providing legendary service. Here are her tips for retailers who want to improve the level of service at their garden centers:

**Hire well.** The Ritz-Carlton selects employees for raw talent. "We feel that we can teach most

people the job, but I can't teach someone to be kind. I can't teach people to smile. That's part of your DNA," said Oreck.

**Train often.** Repetition is important. The Ritz-Carlton engages employees in the company culture every day with its daily lineup, which Oreck recognizes won't work for every business. "We do think you should reconnect at least twice

a year with your employees regarding culture and service issues," she explained.

**Connect with customers.** There are lots of lawn and garden retailers selling similar products, which means success is based on a company's heart: "What is the emotional connection you are making with your customers?" asked Oreck. "I don't just want a competent sales person. I want someone who is going to make a connection with me. At the end of the day, it's all about people."

**Stay consistent.** Don't rest on past laurels. "You're only as good as the last time the customer experienced you," she said.

**Love your employees.** The most important tip is perhaps the most basic of all: "You've got to love your employees to death," said Oreck. "We know that if the emotional needs of your employees are met, they're going to turn around and love your customers to death. If they are not happy, then they are going to go and gather by the water cooler and talk. It all starts with the employees."

For more information about this article, contact Tim Hodson, editorial director of Lawn & Garden Retailer, at [thodson@sgcmail.com](mailto:thodson@sgcmail.com).

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## The Ritz-Carlton Gold Standards

The gold standards are the thread that weaves the Ritz-Carlton together, according to



The Ritz-Carlton is known for offering legendary service at all its locations. (Photo: Ritz-Carlton)

Diana Oreck, vice president of global learning and the Leadership Center. The standards encompass the values and philosophy by which the company operates and consist of a credo, a motto, three steps of service, twelve service values and an employee promise. The Legendary Service class offered through the Ritz-Carlton Leadership Center, which is the most popular among attendees, is based on these gold standards, and the standards are reinforced in Ritz-Carlton employees through structured daily meetings and the sharing of best practices.

Because they are based in basic values, the service standards are transferable to different industries and situations. Here is a portion of the Ritz-Carlton's gold standards: the three steps of service. To view the standards in their entirety, visit <http://corporate.ritzcarlton.com>.

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