



## Cultivating a Sense of Hospitality

Sales & Marketing — Andy Peay

In case the headlines have you in a funk about the current state of civility in the world, rest assured that being hospitable is not an entirely dead concept, not even in the fractured United States. Years ago I fell in love with the southeastern part of the country in large part due to the warm embrace I received from just about every person I met. Of course, I was pouring them wine, that helps. I was invited into people's homes, not just to visit, but to stay the night, to eat dinner with their families, to share stories, and to become part of their extended network of friends.

Just last week I hosted a private tasting for 40 people in a customer's home (complete strangers to me) and I was invited and stayed the night in the guest room. They encouraged me and my family to come back and vacation with them next year. A few days earlier I stayed at one of the Country's nicest resorts as a featured vintner (I know, I don't personally make the wine) and *we* were winned and dined for 5 nights making us feel like honored guests, not the hired help. Now I know why some of you stay there! This personal, neighborly Southern Hospitality is world-renowned, supported by practices like listening attentively without interrupting, arriving with a house warming gift, and sending a hand-written thank you card (a practice I have tried to adhere to.) I left Tennessee for Norway feeling connected in a wide human web of good feeling and bonhomie. Without being conscious of it, I was friendlier to everyone: Making eye contact, telling stories, and, in general, was expansive and happy. Hmm.

Of course, people from other parts of the US also share these "Southern" behaviors. I like to think the good eggs from the Midwest—where Nick and I hail from—are welcoming. If you are new to town you will not remain a stranger for long as you will be invited weekly to parties and community functions. I often offer up my friends as contacts whenever a friend or acquaintance moves to their town. This desire to help others feel connected and welcome is reflexive to a Midwesterner.

There are certain people born with a frequency in their brain that hums when attempting to please someone, whether it is choosing the right music, bottle of wine, dish, or entertainment. When witnessing a situation that is clearly not ideal, they must rectify it or they will explode. These people gravitate to restaurants, hotels, and customer service-oriented businesses and despite brutal hours and poor pay come home fulfilled as vibrating at that frequency is the psychic payment they need to be happy. They make the best servers, sommeliers, concierges, customer service agents, and, well, employees. It is immediately obvious to me in a service situation when someone has this bone in their body; and, when they do not. When they do not, they are willing to let standards slide, for discomfort to persist, and to find others to blame for a shortcoming. There is no accountability, "Ah well, someone else will get to it," is the general attitude.

With this in mind, we just hired our first full-time employee to represent Peay to our customers. For twenty years we have focused on developing a strong voice for Peay and to building relationship with you, our customers. We wanted to be sure we hired someone who also shared this drive. And I think we did. Some of you may have already met Derek Reijmer as he traveled on behalf of Peay the past 6 months. Derek has worked as a sommelier in some of the finest restaurants in the country (Alinea, Little Nell, Matsuhisa) and has pursued the academic side of his profession, as well, passing the advanced



sommelier certification last November (a very difficult exam). Derek and I will now work as a team to represent Peay at dinners, events, and private tastings. He is younger and more handsome than me and can pour wine without dribbling which I apparently often cannot. He has been a buyer of Peay wines for 10 years both professionally at restaurants he worked for and also as a consumer when out to eat. I am thrilled he has joined us and I hope you have the pleasure of meeting him soon as he is a member of that rare breed of people who at their core wish to provide service to others at a very high level.

Derek is a lot like the small group of very accomplished sommeliers I drank wine with late on the final evening of the Nantucket Wine Festival last May. As we cleaned up the leftover bottles (euphemism fully intact) the four of them mulled over a high profile luncheon they all worked that day that went awry. The issues emanated from the kitchen so they attempted to keep guests happy out front by topping up glasses, engaging in conversation, and, in general, making the best of an increasingly bad situation. There was little they could do and their frustration at being part of an unsatisfactory customer experience tore at their very flesh. But they held it together in front of guests and did their best. A few tears were even shed—12 hours after the luncheon! I was impressed as they obviously care in the core of their being about what they do. May we all possess as high standards and self-respect in our pursuits. And I would guess, most of us try to. Whether it is how we parent, conduct business, or interact with friends, most of the time, we all strive to hold ourselves to the highest standards of hospitality.

I want to adopt this level of commitment to being hospitable in all my interactions with people, even those I do not naturally gravitate to, or agree with politically, or look like, or “have time for.” It reminds me of my youthful fascination with the concept of karma; if you put out good energy, you get positivity back, if you put out negative energy, that is how others react to you. Karma is essentially the Golden Rule though less prescriptive. A commitment to being hospitable in all of my interactions may help create some ballast while my surface emotions are whip-sawed in today’s information storm. What I realize after my time in Tennessee was not only to be hospitable for the sake of others, but also for myself. It makes me a happier person. I can drink to that.