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On Taking Responsibility

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"How can I help you, sir?" asked the manager of the hotel. I explained to her the problems that we'd had with our reservation the night before, checking into a room with one bed when we'd reserved two, sleeping on a small cot and being charged more than quoted.

She said in a tone that most people use for soon-to-be ex-spouses in divorce court, "Sir, I have your computer reservation here, and it says that you reserved a single bed at a rate of \$210." I explained to her that I make hotel reservations on the Internet more than 100 times a year and that I've never had a problem before. She replied that the mistake was mine, that she was sorry, but that there was nothing that she could do.

Blaming the customer is an interesting business strategy. There's an EMS system that's been in the news a lot during the last month. One of the top-of-the-fold front-page headline stories alleges both employee and patient abuse. Several paramedics have been fired and others are under investigative suspension. One of the managers of the service was quoted in the newspaper. When asked about patient abuse, he said that because many patients are drunk and don't understand what kind of medical care they need, they might misperceive their care as abuse.

There's always a possibility that the reporter took this comment out of context. Maybe the manager described the challenges that paramedics face working in a high pressure, inner city system with a rough and tumble culture. Maybe he described the new customer and employee feedback systems that they were putting into place to improve the situation. Hopefully, he didn't really blame customers for their sense of being abused.

Last night when we checked into another hotel in the same chain and walked into our room with one bed, I called down to the front desk. The clerk said, "I'm so sorry, some of our rooms have been changed from two beds to one, and they didn't update our computer. I'll send someone up with the keys to another room that I'm sure has two beds. I'm really sorry about the mixup."

It's so nice to deal with an organization that takes responsibility for their systems and actions. Does yours?

More from Mike is available at www.miketaigman.com.

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