Case Study 2
Service Quality at the Excelsior Hotel

Kristen Adams had recently transferred to the Excelsior Hotel to improve the level of customer service. She had been with the company for five years and had been quite successful in improving the level of customer satisfaction at the two previous hotels to which she had been assigned. Kristen knew that the Excelsior was going to be a real challenge. The mix of business was 60 percent individual transient guests and 40 percent group business. Of this group business, about one-third was motor coach tour groups.

On her first day on the job, she witnessed quite a sight. There was a line of about 20 guests waiting to check in when two motor coaches arrived and more than 80 additional guests and guides walked into the lobby to check in. Needless to say, the two front desk agents had a look of terror in their eyes as they worked diligently to process the registrations for those waiting to check in. Some 40 minutes later, everyone had been checked in, but the general manager said to Kristen, “I’m glad that you are here; we need to work out a better system. Let’s meet for lunch tomorrow to discuss your initial ideas.” Kristen had just picked up a pen to start brainstorming ideas to present to the general manager when a guest approached her desk.

“Hello, my name is Bill Foster, and I stayed at your hotel last night with my family. We really did not have a good experience, and I want to tell you about it. I want to make sure that this does not happen again, to me or anyone else.” Mr. Foster then proceeded to tell Kristen his account of the events. “I was traveling with my wife and our son, who is four years old. Our connecting flight was delayed, so we did not arrive at our final destination until 10 p.m. The Excelsior had an advertised check-in facility at the airport, and I assumed that I would be able to secure my room while waiting for the luggage. When I approached the employee at the hotel’s airport facility, I was told that check-in service was not available at that time of the day. I found this to be surprising, since this was the very type of situation in which an airport facility would be beneficial.

“Next, my family took a shuttle van from the airport to the hotel, where we were given directions to the front desk. Two front desk clerks were on duty when the passengers from the airport shuttle arrived a little before 11 p.m. However, one of the front desk clerks was apparently going off duty at 11, and she proceeded to close her drawer at that exact moment.
This left a line of approximately 10 or 12 guests to be checked in by one clerk. Needless to say, it took some time to process all of the guests, and we had to wait 20 or 30 minutes for our turn. We were assigned to a room, but at this point we had a few bags and my son was fast asleep and had to be carried. When I asked for assistance with our luggage, I was told that no one was available at that time of night. The hotel was large, having over 1,000 rooms, and the rooms were spread out among several adjacent buildings. Our room was two buildings away from the lobby area. My wife and I struggled to carry the luggage and our son to the room. We arrived there about 11:30 and attempted to enter the room. The key unlocked the door, but the door would not open. After a couple of attempts, we heard a woman’s voice in the room. Obviously, the room had been double-booked and the woman woken from her sleep. I used the house phone to call the front desk and explain the predicament. The front desk manager offered a quick apology and said that she would send someone with a key to a nearby room. About ten minutes later, a housekeeper happened to be going through the hallway, and she let my family into the room that I had been given over the phone. However, the housekeeper had no idea what was going on and took my word. After we had been in the room for ten minutes, the phone rang and I spoke with the front desk manager. She acted as though she had sent the housekeeper to open the room, but she still needed to send someone with the room keys. She apologized one last time and told me to call the front desk if I had any other problems.”

Case Study Questions and Issues

1. What steps should Kristen recommend to the general manager?
2. What action steps and timetable should she recommend? How should decisions be made about which steps should be done initially?
3. Develop a service blueprint of the check-in process. How might this be used to improve the situation?
4. Discuss the gaps in the service quality process that Bill Foster experienced.
5. What kind of service failures occurred and what recovery strategies were employed?
6. How did the Excelsior Hotel fail to meet Mr. Foster’s expectations?
7. What other actions could have been taken?