



## Customer Loyalty Directives And Employee Turnover Intention: A Qualitative Hospitality Industry Study

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## Introduction

Customers and employees represent two crucial stakeholder groups in the hospitality industry (Choi & Wang, 2009). Organizational leaders with positive customer satisfaction ratings achieve sustainable competitive advantage through increased customer loyalty (Hanzaee & Mirvaisy, 2011). Many leaders establish organizational directives for employees to follow to cultivate customer loyalty (Murthi, Steffes & Rasheed, 2011). Leaders employ customer loyalty directives to foster, boost, and reward customer commitment (Bijmolt, Dorotic & Verhoef, 2010). The term *customer loyalty* is a reference to the potency of the organization-customer relationship. Customer loyalty is influenced by two conduct dimensions: attitudinal and behavioral (Shih-I, 2011). Customer commitment level and positive reflections are measurements of attitudinal loyalty; customer purchase decisions relating to volume and frequency are measurements of behavioral loyalty (Bijmolt et al.).

A critical leadership challenge in the hospitality industry is employee turnover (Kim & Jogaratnam, 2010). There is a corresponding reduction in the quality of customer service as a result of high employee turnover (Proenca, 2012). Employee turnover intention is affected when employees experience challenging customer encounters (Zablah, Franke, Brown & Bartholomew, 2012). Negative customer interactions are an antecedent to higher employee turnover (Zablah et al.). Employers experience increased recruiting and training costs as a result of high employee turnover (Zablah et al.). Hospitality industry leaders may benefit from learning the role of customer loyalty directives on employee turnover intention.

Employees follow customer loyalty directives to improve customer loyalty ratings (Murthi et al., 2011). Negative employee-customer encounters may result in adverse employee reactions (Choi & Wang, 2009). Sheridan and Abelson (1983) and McWilliams (2011) asserted that shocks to employees' habitual thinking and behavioral models are an impetus to turnover intention. Industry leaders could be informed through the results of the study of unintended contributors to employee turnover resultant from the deployment of customer loyalty directives.

## Statement of the Problem

The general problem was that the high rate of employee turnover in the hospitality industry of 61.6% in 2011 (United States Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012) has a negative impact on customer loyalty (Câter & Câter, 2009) and is a barrier to hospitality managers being able to cost effectively manage their personnel costs (Maier, 2009). With almost two-thirds of employees in the hospitality industry leaving current employment each year, the discovery of antecedents to employee turnover intention was a critical leadership

challenge (Maier, 2009). Researchers have studied contributing factors to employee turnover intention: the positive customer orientation of employees (Babakus, Yavas & Ashill, 2011), the volume of negative customer encounters experienced by employees (Zablah et al., 2012), and job burnout (Babakus et al., 2011).

The specific problem of this study was the unknown impact of the role of customer loyalty directives regarding employee turnover intention (Cardy & Lengnick-Hall, 2011; Zablah et al., 2012). Leaders in hospitality firms routinely implement strategies to strengthen customer loyalty by offering incentive programs to customers for their repeat business (Homburg, Wieseke & Hoyer, 2009). Supervisors often task service delivery employees with the implementation of many of these incentive program features (Bijmolt et al., 2010). In consideration of the visibility and strategic importance of these loyalty programs, the directives for hospitality industry employees who deliver loyalty programs, and the high, persistent, industry turnover rates, greater understanding by hotel leaders for reducing turnover could be achieved by an examination of the interplay of these factors.

The purpose of the interpretive qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of frontline hotel workers to learn the role of customer loyalty directives on employee turnover intentions. Leaders' decisions to reinforce or dissuade the implementation of customer loyalty directives in other organizations could be influenced by the discovery of the role of customer loyalty directives on employee turnover intention. The data from the study included insights into whether certain customer loyalty directives have had an adverse influence on employee turnover intentions and if such directives could be considered by organizational leaders or researchers for further review and potential revision.

**Table 1. Frequency of Subjects' Role**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Front desk associate	9	50%
Server	4	22%
Driver	2	11%
Concierge	2	11%
Porter	1	6%
Total	18	100%

The study subjects included 18 frontline employees from full service hotels in the continental United States (see Table 1 for a breakdown of their job positions). Data from 18 subjects were sufficient for the achievement of data saturation. Recruitment of subjects was from hotels with at least 150 rooms for the enhancement of the

probability of onsite management teams and complexity in employee-customer encounters in two typical eastern U.S. states. Study subjects had tenure of at least nine months with the existing employer. Tenure of nine months was a subject inclusion criterion for the improvement of the probability of customer loyalty directives familiarity. Subjects from five full service hotels were included in the study. Not all subjects were employed by the same hotel franchise. Selection of subjects from hotels in large cities resulted in increased potential for richer data collection from a broader sample as compared to subject selection from one hotel or franchise. In-person, one-to-one semi-structured interviews were conducted in quiet locations external to the subjects' work site. The interview locations were in library and university meeting spaces, and other quiet locations where responses were audio recorded.

### Research Questions

Analysis of responses to semi-structured interview questions regarding subjects' lived experiences was conducted to answer the central research question and two sub-questions. The focus of the study was the central research question:

- Central Question: How do the lived experiences of frontline hotel employees' compliance with customer loyalty directives influence turnover intention?
  - Sub-question 1: How do the lived experiences of frontline hotel employees relative to customer orientation influence employee turnover intention?
  - Sub-question 2. How do the lived experiences of frontline hotel employees' customer encounters while delivering customer loyalty directives influence employee turnover intention?

Leaders' awareness of an important antecedent of employee turnover may be increased through the analysis of data regarding the role of customer encounters on employee turnover intention. Many leaders of service industry organizations strive to build customer loyalty to achieve sustainable competitive advantage (Choi & Wang, 2009). Leaders are prompted by such an objective to establish customer loyalty directives (Murthi, Steffes & Rasheed, 2011). Subject responses to the research questions included an understanding regarding whether compliance with customer loyalty directives had a role in turnover intention.

### Theoretical Framework

Knowledge of whether the directives leaders deployed to improve customer loyalty have a role in employee turnover intention may be demonstrative of a relationship or lack thereof, between customer loyalty directives and

employee turnover intention. Several theoretical frameworks were included in support of the separate customer loyalty and employee turnover constructs. Saxe and Weitz (1982) advanced customer orientation theory in support of customer loyalty improvement. Theories relevant to turnover included employee retention theory (Mendes & Stander, 2011), catastrophe theory (Sheridan & Abelson, 1983) and shock theory (McWilliams, 2011).

**Customer orientation theory.** Managers who put the customer first in developing business strategies are practicing the central tenet of customer orientation (Nwokah, 2009). Customer orientation is fundamental to thriving corporate cultures (Brockman, Jones, & Becherer, 2012; Hanzaee & Mirvaisi, 2011; Nwokah, 2009). Elevated degrees of customer orientation are an indication of high concern for customers (Saxe & Weitz, 1982).

Organizational leaders who embrace customer retention business strategies are more likely to recruit employees with customer-oriented dispositions (Chen, Shen & Liao, 2009). Customer-oriented service employees desire to comply with prescriptive directives (Solomon, Surprenant, Czepiel & Gutman, 1985). Through enhanced customer-employee relationships, organizational leaders can expect to improve customer loyalty ratings (Dick & Basu, 1994), customer orientation (Chen et al.), and competitive advantage (Brockman et al., 2012; Choi & Wang, 2009; Hanzaee & Mirvaisi, 2011; Nwokah, 2009).

**Employee retention theory.** Loyal employees contribute toward creating loyal customers (Mendes & Stander, 2011). Mobley, Griffeth, Hand, and Meglino (1979) asserted that a negative relationship exists between tenure and turnover, supporting the theory that the longer an employee remains with an organization the less probable that employee is to leave current employment. Employee turnover is decreased when job satisfaction (Hausknecht, Rodda & Howard, 2009) and job expectancy (Shin & Lee, 2011) are increased.

**Catastrophe and shock theories.** Sheridan and Abelson (1983) discussed the catastrophe theory of the dynamic turnover decision process associated with convergent job withdrawal triggers. The catastrophe model is a depiction of the triggers that workers attempt to overcome to retain current employment (Sheridan & Abelson, 1983). McWilliams (2011) asserted that shocks to employees' habitual thinking and behavioral models are an impetus to turnover intention. Any trigger or shock could result in a decision to quit (McWilliams; Sheridan & Abelson). Strong organizational leader commitment and fervent employee customer orientation may diminish turnover intention (Sheridan & Abelson).

#### Methodology and Data Analysis

A modified van Kaam method of analysis for phenomenological data was utilized (Moustakas, 1994). In-person interviews of 18 subjects were conducted using semi-structured interview questions. The semi-structured interview questions were open-ended to reduce researcher bias. Follow-up questions were asked to discover deeply held perceptions. Subjects were interviewed in quiet settings outside of their workspace. Verbatim transcriptions of the audio-recorded interviews were presented to each subject for verification. Each interview included initial general conversation for ease of the subject. The subjects received an explanation of the purpose of the study, risks and benefits of participation, withdrawal procedures, confidentiality assurance, and a reminder that the interview would be audio recorded. During the interviews, subjects each responded to eight semi-structured questions and provided answers to clarifying questions when necessary to ensure revelation of employee perspectives. The eight interview questions used to collect study are listed in Table 2.

**Table 2. Interview Questions**

1. What is your current role at the hotel?
2. How long (in years) have you worked for your current hotel?
3. Describe how, if at all, you have been trained in your hotel's customer loyalty program.
4. Describe what you are expected to do to promote customer loyalty.
5. What comes to mind when you hear the expression "The customer is always right"?
6. What are the consequences for employees who do not comply with your current hotel's customer loyalty directives?
7. How have your experiences with customer complaints affected your intention to continue working with your hotel?
8. What customer loyalty-related experiences, if any, have you had that caused you to think about quitting your job?

The design of the first two interview questions was for the purpose of the determination that each subject met inclusion criteria as a frontline hotel employee with a minimum of nine months' tenure at a hotel with 150 or more rooms in the continental United States. Questions 3 and 4 were the questions for the determination of the customer loyalty directives mandated by hotel leaders through formal and informal training methods. Data collected from responses to question 5 were for the determination of the subject's level of customer orientation. The design of question 6 was for the subject to reveal known consequences for failure to comply with mandated customer loyalty directives. Responses to questions 7 and 8 were reflective of each subject's deeply held perceptions regarding the influence of customer complaints and customer loyalty-related experiences on turnover intention.

Within 10 days after completion of the interview, subjects received a verbatim transcript for verification. No corrections to the verbatim transcripts were received from subjects within 30 days of delivery. Subsequently there was a thorough analysis of the data contained in the verbatim transcripts. Multiple coders were engaged in data analysis to enhance research reliability and trustworthiness. Two coders assisted with analysis and coding. The coders were trained in doctoral level research and had prior experience in open-ended theme identification. The coders reviewed the research study purpose to ensure understanding of the problem, research questions, and literature context. The coders reviewed verbatim transcripts of subject responses, independently identified initial themes, and reached consensus on final themes. Theme frequencies were used to compute a Cronbach alpha. The alpha was .95, which is indicative of good reliability between coders. The multiple coders identified six major themes that emerged from the collected study data: (1) training, (2) directives, (3) customer orientation, (4) compliance failure consequences, (5) customer complaint experiences, and (6) customer loyalty experiences.

**(1) Training.** Subjects revealed that hotel employers provided dissimilar types of training (see Table 3). All subjects except one reported receiving formal training. Four subjects received informal training. A number of subjects received training in previous, similar roles. Subjects performed assigned roles after receiving at least one type of training. No subjects reported receiving no training before performing assigned roles.

**Table 3. Types and Frequency of Subjects' Training**

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Formal training	17	71%
Informal training	4	17%
Previous training	3	13%
No training	0	0%
Total	24	100%

Formal training included classroom attendance or course work to deliver mandated training. Through responses to question 3 of the interview, subjects revealed that 94% ( $n = 17$ ) received formal training with their current employer. Verbatim comments by subjects reflected specific formal training. Subjects identified specific formal training titled with an acronym for the purpose of improving employees' retention of the instruction. The purpose of other training titles was to remind employees of expected demeanor or attributes requisite of appropriate

customer service designed for improvement of customer loyalty. [Subjects are identified by an alpha-numeric code such as N1 to preserve confidentiality.]

*N2: We had one training; it's called the SMART training. We have 15 different steps to providing good customer service. We have Energy, and we have Loyalty, and Good Service.*

*N18: I had training from my manager and from other front desk associates who have lots of experience; they've been there a long time. They told me how to do things that would make sure I made guests comfortable and didn't make mistakes.*

*N9: I was trained how to please guests by exceeding their expectations-and that keeps them coming back to our hotel. To do that, I was given lists of contacts to call to get theatre tickets, concerts, event passes-you name it. I was into event planning before joining the hotel, so I know the people who can get things done.*

**(2) Directives.** Subjects revealed that hotel employers directed certain actions to be performed by frontline hotel employees and with the intention of improving customer loyalty. Two categories of directives were identified: directives for treatment of every hotel customer (customer directives) and directives for loyalty program customers (loyalty program customer directives).

Customer directives: these directives revealed by the subjects are required to be performed for every hotel guest regardless of the guest's loyalty status. Subjects were instructed specifically in manners of speech, behavior, and demeanor.

*N1: There is a rule, like, 15-5. When you're 15 feet away from some customer you are going to cross at the hotel you look at the eyes. And when you're about 5 feet away, you're going to say something. That's the rule. I mean, you have to do it. Don't ever pass a customer or guest and don't look at them because that would be a no-no. You have to look at them. But the space, don't look at them if you're 50 feet away because that would make them feel uncomfortable. But 15 feet, look at them and smile. Five feet you have to say "hello" whether they like it or not.*

Loyalty program customer directives: hotel managers issued specific directives for actions and behaviors with loyalty program customers. Such directives include free room upgrades, additional loyalty points, discount prices for food items, and faster service. Thirty-nine percent ( $n = 7$ ) of subjects disclosed directives specific to loyalty program customers.



*N4: Rewards members, we give them extra points and those points can be used for free stays. They get free upgrades; nobody else gets free upgrades.*

*N7: If the guest is a loyalty member, I have to acknowledge that, say "Thank you for being a loyalty member" when they check in. I offer them a choice of room types if we have them available. Some guests have their preference listed on their member profile. But if we have a better room available, I'm supposed to offer an upgrade just because they're frequent guests.*

**(3) Customer Orientation.** Solomon et al. (1985) asserted that employees who exhibit a high level of customer orientation desire to comply with prescriptive directives. In question 5 of the study interview, subjects were asked *What comes to mind when you hear the expression "The customer is always right"?* The purpose of question 5 is to evaluate subjects' level of customer orientation. Contained in Table 4 are the subjects' perceived levels of customer orientation, and the number and percentage of subjects exhibiting each customer orientation level? More than one-third ( $n = 7$ ) of the subjects exhibited a high level of customer orientation.

**Table 4. Frequency of Subjects' Customer Orientation Level**

Category	Frequency	Percentage
High	7	39%
Moderate	6	33%
Low	5	28%
Total	18	100%

High level of customer orientation: subjects who expressed spontaneous, enthusiastic, and voluntary desire to meet or exceed customer expectations (Chan & Wan, 2012) were deemed to possess a high level of customer orientation. Thirty-nine percent ( $n = 7$ ) of the subjects exhibited a high level of customer orientation. Subjects with a high level of customer orientation served in the roles of front desk associate, server, concierge, and porter. Subject comments indicative of a high level of customer orientation include:

*N5: No matter what the issue, the guest's needs are paramount for dedicated employees. And I am a dedicated employee.*

*N14: I treat the guests like they're my guests. I do it just the way I would if I owned this hotel. I'm good to them not just when they first come in but every day during their stay, and when they leave, too. I'm the first*

*person they see when they come in and I'm the last one they see when they leave. So I want to leave them with a good memory of staying here. I always tell them to come back and stay with us.*

Moderate level of customer orientation: subjects who willingly followed the employers' customer loyalty directives though they did not express enthusiastic desire to meet or exceed customers' needs were considered to exhibit a moderate level of customer orientation. Thirty-three percent ( $n = 6$ ) of the subjects conveyed a moderate level of customer orientation. Subjects with a moderate level of customer orientation served in the roles of front desk associate, server, and driver. Subject comments reflective of a moderate level of customer orientation include:

*N6: Whatever the guest wants and needs, that I am to provide, if I can. If I cannot, I must see if my supervisor can find how to do what they need. I don't ever say, "I can't do something." I say always, "I will talk with my supervisor for you."*

Low level of customer orientation: subjects who expressed reluctance to follow customer loyalty directives or who were perceived as indifferent to customer needs were categorized as possessing a low level of customer orientation. Twenty-eight percent ( $n = 5$ ) of the subjects provided responses that were indicative of low level customer orientation. Subjects with a low level of customer orientation served in the roles of front desk associate and server. Subjects exhibiting a low level of customer orientation provided comments such as:

*N17: She (the manager) says everybody has to be treated like royalty. Really? What's up with that? These people ain't royalty. They're people that paid for a room. And that's what they get. They didn't pay for the red carpet and they sure didn't pay me to roll it out for them.*

**(4) Compliance Failure Consequences.** Through responses to interview question 6, subjects revealed their perceptions of consequences for employees who do not comply with hotel employers' customer loyalty directives. Included in Table 5 are the consequences for failure to follow customer loyalty directives. Compliance failure consequences include managerial counseling, verbal and written warnings, and termination. Forty-two percent ( $n = 16$ ) of the responses provided by study subjects were indicative of termination as a consequence of customer loyalty directive compliance failures.

**Table 5. Frequency of Subjects' Self-Reported Consequences for Non-Compliance with Customer Loyalty Directives**

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Manager counseling	5	13%
Verbal warnings	5	13%

Written warnings	7	18%
Termination	16	42%
Other	5	13%
Total	38	100%

Subjects' verbatim comments descriptive of compliance failure consequences were noted. Eighty-nine percent ( $n = 16$ ) of 18 subjects reported awareness of termination as a consequence for compliance failure. The 16 subjects aware of termination as a compliance failure consequence worked in different hotel brands, which is indicative that termination for compliance failure represents a common practice in the hotel industry. Subjects revealed an eagerness to assist hotel managers in identifying employees non-compliant with directives.

*N5: When I see employees fail to deliver great service, I either talk to them myself or I report them to the manager. The other employees know I won't tolerate laziness or failures. And the manager is good about getting rid of bad employees.*

**(5) Customer Complaint Experiences.** Babakus et al. (2011) cautioned that work stress derived from customer complaint handling coupled with employers' demands often instigate frontline employee burnout, an antecedent of employee turnover. Study subjects indicated through their interview responses that customer complaint experiences positively affected intention to remain working at current hotel employment for 50% ( $n = 9$ ) of the subjects. Forty-four percent ( $n = 8$ ) expressed negative influence regarding intention to remain working at current hotel employment resultant from customer complain experiences. Customer complaint experiences resulted in neither a positive nor a negative response for 6% ( $n = 1$ ) of the subjects, producing a neutral response. Included in Table 6 is the frequency and percentage of subjects' responses regarding the influence of customer complaint experiences on employee turnover intention.

**Table 6. Frequency of Subjects' Attitudes toward Continuing Work at Hotel after Customer Complaint Experiences**

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Positive	9	50%
Negative	8	44%
Neutral	1	6%
Total	18	100%

Positive attitude toward current employment: subjects with a positive attitude toward current employment expressed intention to remain employed with their current hotel employer after one or more customer complaint experiences. Personality traits of these subjects included resiliency and optimism. Fifty percent ( $n = 9$ ) of the 18

subjects' turnover intention was undeterred by customer complaint experiences. Such subjects exhibited resilience when confronted with complaining customers and expressed belief that customer complaints served as an opportunity for personal and organizational improvement.

Negative attitude toward current employment: subjects with a negative attitude toward current employment expressed intention to terminate employment with their current hotel employer after one or more customer complaint experiences. Personality traits of these subjects included cynicism and tactlessness. Forty-four percent ( $n = 8$ ) of the 18 subjects' turnover intention was increased by customer complaint experiences. Subjects with a negative attitude toward continuing current employment displayed frustration with complaining customers.

*N3: Sometimes I just want to hang myself. When you are feeling bad and not energetic, at that time if you have complaints after complaints and there is nothing you can do about their problems, then you are frustrated. Sometimes it's too frustrating. I want to quit.*

**(6) Customer Loyalty Experiences.** Study subjects indicated through their interview responses that compliance with customer loyalty directives experiences did not affect intention to remain working at current hotel employment for 56% ( $n = 10$ ) of the subjects. Forty-four percent ( $n = 8$ ) of the subjects expressed increased influence regarding turnover intention resultant from compliance with customer loyalty directives. Included in Table 7 is the frequency and percentage of subjects' responses regarding the influence of compliance with customer loyalty directives on employee turnover intention.

**Table 7. Turnover Intention Affect of Customer Loyalty Directives Compliance**

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Unaffected	10	56%
Increased	8	44%
Total	18	100%

Unaffected by customer loyalty directives compliance: verbatim comments from subjects whose turnover intention was unaffected by required compliance with customer loyalty directives are included in this section. These subjects exhibited trust in and agreement with the appropriateness of customer loyalty directives. Fifty-six percent ( $n = 10$ ) of 18 subjects' turnover intention was undeterred by customer loyalty directives compliance. Subjects unaffected by customer loyalty directives compliance expressed confidence that such directives are beneficial to improving customer loyalty.

*N5: You must understand that I embrace the directives that improve customer service and customer satisfaction. And, therefore, customer loyalty. I want to do everything possible to compel my guests to return to my hotel. I don't think about quitting my job. I plan and prepare to be promoted at my job.*

Increased turnover intention resultant from customer loyalty directives compliance: subjects with increased turnover intention resultant from customer directives compliance exhibited distrust in managers' motivations for instituting customer loyalty directives and disagreement with the outcomes of such directives. Forty-four percent ( $n = 8$ ) of the 18 subjects' turnover intention was increased resultant from customer loyalty directives compliance.

*N3: Sometimes I want to quit. There are so many tense situations that you have to fight everyday; when people are trying to fraud you and you catch them and they don't like that. Managers make decisions to increase customer loyalty, but they don't consider how much work it makes for front desk associates.*

*N12: Yeah, I had trouble at first when they told me to give free stuff away and I didn't think I should. I thought that was making it okay for them to complain about stuff that really wasn't wrong.*

**Summary.** Subjects revealed that a majority (72%) of the study sample were front desk associates and servers. Employees with tenure of one-to-three years comprised the largest segment (39%) of study subjects. A majority of subjects (71%) received formal training in their current roles. Subjects revealed that directives mandated by hotel employers comprise two categories: customer directives for all hotel guests and customer directives for loyalty program guests. Seven (39%) of the subjects exhibited a high level of customer orientation. Though 100% of the subjects experienced customer complaints, nine (50%) of the subjects were positive that they would continue current employment. Of the 18 subjects in the study, 10 (56%) responded that their turnover intention was unaffected by required compliance with customer loyalty directives.

### Discussion and Conclusion

Frontline hotel employees are expected to comply with hotel leaders' customer loyalty directives to advance and promote customer commitment. The purpose of the interpretive qualitative phenomenological study was the exploration of the lived experiences of frontline hotel workers to learn the role of customer loyalty directives on employee turnover intentions. Information gained from data analysis of subject interview responses was applied to address the core research question and two sub-questions.

The focus of the study was the central research question: How do the lived experiences of frontline hotel employees' compliance with customer loyalty directives influence turnover intention? Ten (56%) of 18 subjects responded that compliance with customer loyalty directives did not affect their turnover intention. Many of the subjects unaffected by customer loyalty directive compliance expressed a desire to follow the employers' directives to satisfy customers and promote customer loyalty.

Some of the subjects expressed agreement with customer loyalty directives and believed the directives would increase customer loyalty if followed by frontline employees. Combining the responses of 13 subjects whom the coders rated as possessing high or moderate customer orientation, the turnover intention was unaffected by compliance with customer loyalty directives for 77% (10) of the subjects. Analysis of research study data is indicative that in hotels with 150 or more rooms in the continental United States, compliance with customer loyalty directives does not play a role in employee turnover intention for 56% of the frontline employees interviewed. Sub-question 1 was: How do the lived experiences of frontline hotel employees relative to customer orientation influence employee turnover intention? The level of customer orientation of subjects in the study was rated by three coders who reached consensus. The ratings that were assigned included *high*, *moderate*, and *low*. Of the 39% (7) of subjects whom the coders rated as possessing high customer orientation, six of the subjects' turnover intention was unaffected by compliance with customer loyalty directives. Of the same seven subjects possessing high customer orientation, five subjects' turnover intention was unaffected by customer complaints.

For the subject group rated as possessing high or moderate customer orientation (13), 62% (8) of subjects' turnover intention was unaffected by compliance with customer loyalty directives. Twenty-eight percent (5) of the study subjects were rated by the coders as possessing low customer orientation. Four of the subjects with low customer orientation reported increased turnover intention in response to customer complaint encounters. Every subject with low customer orientation (5) reported that compliance with customer loyalty directives increased turnover intention. Analysis of subject responses is indicative that high or moderate level of customer orientation is not an antecedent of employee turnover intention. Low customer orientation is an antecedent to turnover intention. Sub-question 2 was: How do the lived experiences of frontline hotel employees' customer encounters while delivering customer loyalty directives influence employee turnover intention? Of the 18 study subjects, 50% (9) of the subjects' turnover intentions were unaffected by customer encounters experienced in delivering customer loyalty

directives. Eight (44%) of the subjects reported increased turnover intention resulting from encounters with complaining customers. One subject (6%) remained neutral regarding turnover intention after an encounter with a complaining customer. Customer complaint encounters experienced when delivering customer loyalty directives are not an antecedent to employee turnover intention. The conclusion was indicative of a narrow margin of nine employees whose turnover intentions were unaffected by customer complaint encounters versus eight employees whose turnover intentions were increased by the same type of customer encounters.

The study findings are significant because there is limited research on the effect of compliance with customer loyalty directives on employee turnover intention within the hospitality industry. Organizational leaders acknowledge the financial value of managing customer relationships (Chan & Wan, 2012) and hospitality industry leaders employ customer loyalty directives to promote positive economic benefit (Câter & Câter, 2009). Leaders expend human, financial, and technological resources to reduce employee turnover in the hospitality industry (Kim & Jogaratnam, 2010). Awareness of the influence of compliance with customer loyalty directives on employee turnover intention could augment existing knowledge of turnover intention antecedents.

The high rate of employee turnover in the hospitality industry of 61.6% in 2011 (United States Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012) is a threat to customer loyalty (Câter & Câter, 2009) and reduced personnel costs (Maier, 2009). Leaders may effectively and strategically address employee turnover intention with an understanding of its causes and costs (Kochanski & Sorensen, 2008). Data in this study are indicative that 44% of the subjects experienced increased turnover intention resultant of compliance with customer loyalty directives. Comprehension of employee turnover costs coupled with an understanding of the influence of compliance with customer loyalty directives on turnover intention could be informative for hospitality industry leaders who seek to reduce turnover rates and costs.

Based on subject responses to research study interview questions, hospitality leaders should hire frontline employees who possess a high level of customer orientation. Evidence is indicative that employees with high and moderate customer orientation are significantly less likely to increase turnover intention as a result of compliance with customer loyalty directives. Of the seven (39%) study subjects deemed to exhibit high customer orientation, six subjects were unaffected in their turnover intention by customer loyalty directive compliance. The turnover intentions of most customer-oriented employees are not increased resultant of handling customer complaints.

The current study included only the lodging segment of the hospitality industry. Future research may expand the subject focus beyond the hospitality industry. Repeating the study with employees of large retail establishments may enhance the knowledge of the influence of customer loyalty directive compliance on turnover intention. Conducting a similar study with clothing or service industry employees may derive dissimilar findings that could supplement existing knowledge of turnover intention antecedents.

Inherent limitations exist in the research study findings. Study findings include insights to frontline hotel employees' deeply held beliefs regarding the influence of compliance with customer loyalty directives subject to limitations with (a) small sample size, (b) time constraints, (c) researcher subjectivity, and (d) subject honesty (self-report). Strengthening the current study may result from subsequent research in a global environment with subjects from outside the United States and from customer service segments exclusive of the hospitality industry. The purpose of the qualitative phenomenological study was the exploration of the lived experiences and deeply held beliefs of frontline hotel workers to learn the role of customer loyalty directives on employee turnover intentions.

New information for leaders was derived from the study data analyzed. The major themes included training, directives, customer orientation, compliance failure consequences, customer complaint experiences, and customer loyalty experiences. Compliance with customer loyalty directives did not result in increased turnover intention for slightly more than half of study subjects. Employees with high customer orientation are unlikely to experience increased turnover intention resultant from customer loyalty directive compliance. Half of the study subjects' turnover intentions were unaffected by customer complaint experiences; 44% of subjects reported increased turnover intention resultant from customer complaint experiences.



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