THE SPITZHORN

SERVICE PLAYBOOK

Welcome, complaints, wow moments, team rules. The standards of Michel Wichman's hotel in Saanen-Gstaad, written down for any team that serves people.



NO. 1

The Spitzhorn has been ranked number one among Switzerland's 125 best three-star winter hotels for more than ten years, and number one in the hotel ratings of the NZZ am Sonntag.

MICHEL WICHMAN

THE ATTITUDE BEHIND EVERY STANDARD

WE DON'T HAVE TO. WE WANT TO.

Standards are easy to write on a wall. What matters is what is put into practice. Our real work begins where marketing ends: in our daily service to our guests. That is why this playbook starts with an attitude, not a checklist.

Service comes from the verb serve.

ch. 11

Serving is not a weakness. It is a chance to make a real difference in other people's lives through your work, your time and your dedication.

We are selling emotions.

ch. 12

Guests can have beer and meat at home, much cheaper. What they come for is the feeling of being noticed, of being important.

We don't have guests.

ch. 14

"We just have friends who come back home." Many guests return year after year, some because of one particular member of the team.

We earn our stars anew every day.

ch. 14

Or rather, we don't have to, we want to. Even after a bad night's sleep. Even when the last review was excellent.

WHY A THREE-STAR HOTEL CAN SURPRISE

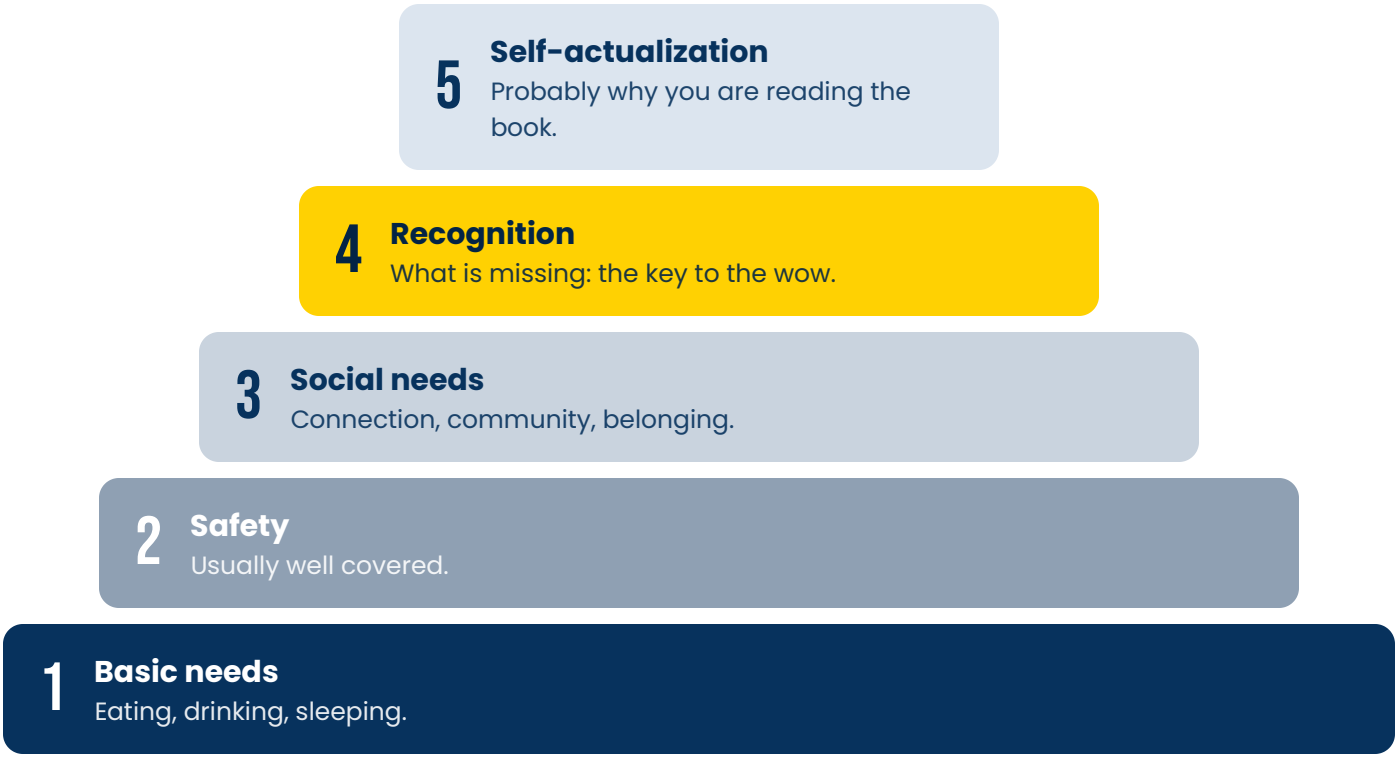
The Spitzhorn is a three-star hotel in a region where four- and five-star hotels set the standard. Expectations for a three-star hotel are modest, and that is the opportunity: guests enjoy four-star amenities in a five-star setting, with a level of service usually found only in the ultra-luxury sector. Prices are higher than at most three-star hotels. Guests keep coming back anyway.

Chapter 45, Always Exceed Expectations

WHAT EVERY GUEST IS LOOKING FOR

RECOGNITION IS THE KEY TO THE WOW

Comfort, good food and a nice room are taken for granted today. What truly stays with guests, and keeps them coming back, is the feeling of being valued as a person. That need never goes away, no matter how much someone has or how successful they are.



After Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, as in figure 21 of the book. Most guests are well covered up to level three.

Expectations are exceeded when someone fulfills a wish the guest may not even have thought of yet.

They are also exceeded when someone works with enthusiasm and pride, rather than simply fulfilling a duty.

STANDARD 1

1 THE WELCOME

Service begins right at the front desk. The first impression stays with a guest for a long time.

- [ ] Be there when guests arrive: close to them, not in the office and not at the bar. ch. 15
- [ ] Greet every guest personally. ch. 12
- [ ] Take their luggage. ch. 12
- [ ] Make them feel welcome from the very first moment. ch. 12
- [ ] At the front desk, don't just check people in. Listen and offer help. ch. 13
- [ ] Greet people and call them by name. ch. 23
- [ ] A friendly greeting in the morning, genuine attention, a sincere smile. ch. 45
- [ ] One personal word. A compliment on a nice sweater tells a guest: "I matter here." ch. 14
- [ ] Anyone on the team helps with anything. No guest should have to hunt for "the right staff member." ch. 13

YOUR WELCOME STANDARD

How do the people you serve feel welcome in your business, in your team, at your table? Write down three things you will do every single time.

STANDARD 2

2 COMPLAINTS

Honesty and clarity aren't always comfortable, but they always pay off.

THE TEN-DAY COUPLE

A couple had booked ten days and complained about everything from the start. After dinner, Michel told them frankly: "If you don't feel comfortable here, you don't have to stay. You're free to leave at any time, and all charges will be waived." The facade crumbled. They had lost their son shortly before. What followed was a long, honest conversation. They stayed longer than planned and became friends.

Chapter 24, Honesty and Clarity Always Pay Off

- [ ] Take every concern seriously and stay until there is a solution, no matter what. ch. 45
- [ ] Speak openly. Never sweep an unpleasant truth under the rug. ch. 24
- [ ] Offer an honest way out, and mean it. ch. 24
- [ ] Look for the person behind the complaint. ch. 24
- [ ] Tackle problems early. Find the root cause before you fix the symptom. ch. 38
- [ ] Act within seventy-two hours. What waits longer usually never happens. ch. 34
- [ ] Turn the mood with a little humor, a few honest words or a smile. ch. 27

Honesty sometimes means drawing a line. When a distraught guest kept expecting the worst on a late-night drive to the hospital, Michel told him clearly to stop focusing only on the negative. The clarity gave him the grounding he needed. (Chapter 24)

STANDARD 3

3 WOW MOMENTS

Small gestures make all the difference, and they have a greater impact when no one is expecting them.

A glass of water

ch. 12

When a cyclist stops for a break in front of the hotel, someone brings out a glass of water. It costs almost nothing. Often that cyclist comes back as a guest.

The little box

ch. 48

Instead of pens with a logo, guests find an elegant square box: “Thank you, please come again.” Everybody expects peppermints. There’s a condom inside. First surprise, then laughter.

The 1971 Fiat 500

ch. 48

On the driver’s door, the silhouette of a man on the toilet, completed by the driver’s head. On the back: “Anyone who drives around like this definitely needs a vacation.”

The fussy goats

ch. 27

At the front desk hangs the rule “No complaining here,” illustrated with a picture of famously fussy Swiss goats.

A name at the desk

ch. 45

Some guests book because they want to be greeted by Nathalie at the front desk or look forward to chatting with Dirk.

The small gesture

ch. 12

True service professionals don’t just serve coffee. They add a small flower, arrange the plate with care, offer a friendly word.

- [ ] Surprise guests anew on every visit. Expectations grow each time. ch. 45
- [ ] Stay authentic. Innovation, yes. A show for its own sake, never. ch. 45

MY WOW MOMENT THIS WEEK

STANDARD 4

4 TEAM RULES

Success in a hotel is always a team effort. It only works if everyone takes responsibility for their own tasks.

- [ ] **We want to work.** "And if you don't want to work, stay home." ch. 12
- [ ] **A bad day is no excuse.** Say it: "I'm not at my best today. I didn't sleep well." Then strike up a conversation. The relationship with guests must not suffer. ch. 14
- [ ] **Nobody watches the clock.** Waiters don't go home while guests are still at dinner. ch. 13
- [ ] **Every role is connected.** Breakfast cook, housekeeping, front desk, technical staff, laundry, gardeners: every single person is important. ch. 13
- [ ] **No complaining here.** Focus on the positive and celebrate small successes. ch. 27
- [ ] **If something is on your mind, say it.** Openly, to the person concerned. Secret moves break trust. ch. 24
- [ ] **Respect goes both ways.** Team and guests treat one another, and the house, with respect. ch. 15
- [ ] **Quality breeds quality.** One dedicated person lifts up the entire team. ch. 14

"When the whole team works together and succeeds, no one wants to hold back or let the others down. Positive energy is contagious and inspires everyone."

Chapter 14, Living Up to a High Standard

13 years: that is how long many of the Spitzhorn's employees have been part of the team, fully committed from the very beginning. In a team like this, people who only watch the clock tend to leave on their own after about a month.

STANDARD 5

5 THE HOST LEADS

A fish rots from the head down. If you expect high standards, you have to set them yourself, day after day.

	WHEN THE HOST IS MISSING	WHEN THE HOST LEADS
The host	In the office or at the bar, far from the guests.	**Close to the guests. Leads by example, day after day.**
The team	No direction. Standards become empty words.	**Clear direction. Everyone feels responsible.**
The guest	A frosty welcome, the bare minimum.	**Genuine hospitality, and the wish to come back.**

After figure 10 of the book, chapter 15

THE CONDUCTOR

"As the boss, I see my role simply as that of a conductor, bringing all the different elements together." Lead and harmonize, inspire, and correct when necessary.

HIRING WITH YOUR GUT

How someone talks about their family says more than their résumé. Real will matters more than experience. Then give people responsibility.

- [ ] Practice what you preach. If you aren't committed to service, how can your team be? ch. 15
- [ ] Speak up kindly when a standard is broken, even with guests. The ashtrays in the parking lot are there to be used. ch. 15
- [ ] Give the team room to breathe. When the standard lives in the team, the host can step away for a few days. ch. 14

ONE PAGE TO PRINT AND PIN UP

EARN YOUR STARS ANEW EVERY DAY

A daily checklist built from the five standards in this playbook. Tick it off for one week and see what changes, for your guests and for your team.

BEFORE THE FIRST GUEST

- [ ] I came because I want to, not because I have to.
- [ ] I know who arrives today, and their names.
- [ ] I tell my team if I'm not at my best today.
- [ ] I know my one wow moment for today.

DURING THE DAY

- [ ] I am where the guests are.
- [ ] Every guest is greeted personally, every concern is taken seriously.
- [ ] I do what the guest needs, not only what my job requires.
- [ ] I say unpleasant things clearly and kindly.
- [ ] No complaining. Requests and solutions instead.

AT THE END OF THE DAY

- [ ] Nobody goes home while guests still need us.
- [ ] Every open problem has a name, an owner and a date within 72 hours.
- [ ] I thanked one person for something specific.
- [ ] Ten minutes of reflection: what went well, where did I lose energy?

YOUR TURN

YOUR OWN PLAYBOOK

What works in a hotel will also help you get ahead in life. Your goal is what you want to achieve. Your standards are what you are prepared to deliver.

MY WELCOME STANDARD

Three things I do every single time someone arrives.

MY COMPLAINT PROMISE

What people can count on when something goes wrong.

MY TEAM RULE

One rule my team agrees on, starting this week.



Experience it in person

Michel's seminars and talks, and the Spitzhorn in Saanen: swissglobe-group.com · michelwichman.com/talks

Questions about your team: contact@michelwichman.com