

# GUEST EXPERIENCE THE MAGNOLIA WAY

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How Chip and Joanna Gaines do hospitality and customer service



Anyone who watched HGTV's "Fixer Upper" got to know Chip and Joanna Gaines and their approach to renovations and interior decorating. It wasn't until they opened Magnolia Market, a bakery, bed and breakfast (and the list goes on) that audiences got to see their approach to customer service and hospitality play out as an example for businesses to follow.



Photo courtesy of Magnolia

At CCCA's 2019 national conference, BEYOND, Jordy Barksdale, guest experience senior manager at Magnolia in Waco, Texas, presented a seminar that explained the Magnolia approach to creating the ideal guest experience. ►



Expansion of the shopping experience at The Silos.



Wiffle ball field to be included in the Silos expansion project.

Images courtesy of Magnolia (Rendering by David Nisbet, AIA with CP&Y Architecture)

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Based on the way things are done at Magnolia, Barksdale said three things need to be determined:

1. What do you want guests to experience?
2. How will you ensure your team is meeting these expectations?
3. How will you stand out?

### Cornerstones of Guest Experience

There are four cornerstones that Magnolia holds up as the building blocks for what they want a guest to experience at their properties.

#### Honor the individual

The Magnolia team believes humans are worthy of honor and of being treated kindly. They view each guest as someone who chose to be there, and therefore, is worthy of being celebrated.

Staff members are reminded that they are never too busy to help a guest because people are more important than any task or process. They're taught to make eye contact and actively listen.

#### Host with enthusiasm

Barksdale encouraged camp and conference center leaders to define what enthusiasm looks like for their contexts, saying to be specific with expectations.

At Magnolia, they role-play enthusiasm with the team and are urged to match the guests' enthusiasm. Knowing that the majority of guests have traveled hundreds of miles to be at Magnolia, there is a lot of enthusiasm. Barksdale said to "be the gas on the fire of their excitement."

Knowing that first impressions are formed within seven seconds, it helps to control or program what those first impressions are. You can be in charge of that moment by making sure it's thought out and planned.

#### Get the story

Everyone has a story worth telling. According to Barksdale, you should try to get a guest's story in a way that shows you intentionally care. They've come to your property, so you are now part of their story. Take that role seriously, he advised. Be curious about what's important in people's lives. Choose to pause and care about your guests and their stories.

#### Serve wholeheartedly

Barksdale explained that humble service leads to memorable experiences. He encouraged staff members to consider it a privilege to go the extra mile to meet guests' needs. At Magnolia, they aim to create an experience for guests, fix problems with sincerity and serve as if nobody will ever thank you. ▶



Photos courtesy of Magnolia

The phrase that is used throughout Magnolia as it relates to guests is “surprise and delight,” according to Barksdale. The goal is to go above and beyond, making any visit memorable and meaningful for guests.



## Magnolia through the Pandemic

*Encouraging creative digital engagement*

■ by Jordy Barksdale

During the stay-at-home order in Texas, we certainly wanted to find creative ways to engage our followers. We were able to take a line from the Magnolia Manifesto, “We believe in home,” and roll out a campaign that gives folks an opportunity to be creative with their quarantine friends and family.

For example, we challenged people to film their own cooking show in their kitchen, check in on someone they haven’t talked to in a while and to rearrange a space in their home and document it on social media. The thread that flowed through the entire campaign was #webelieveinhome, which created a community of individuals being creative together from around the world. We weren’t able to welcome people to Waco, but we could certainly create a sense of community that was founded on unique shared experiences.

## Meeting Expectations

Barksdale said the first step to ensure your team meets expectations is to clearly explain to your leaders what the expectations are. Be sure that your team knows how you define the expectations and what they might look like in specific scenarios.

Barksdale asked the audience, “Does your team feel empowered to actually serve the guests or do they need permission?” At Magnolia, they give staff as much freedom as needed to do what is expected of them. Barksdale said they give walls and parameters that are empowering, essentially saying to their team, “We trust you to make the experience for the guest right.” If your team doesn’t feel like they can own the tasks you give them, why not?

A second way to measure expectations is to equip your leaders to hold each other accountable. If you’ve done your job well, you have created a safe environment where your team members can role-play tough conversations. Barksdale explained that at Magnolia, they role-play everything!

Finally, Barksdale suggested mapping out the process for “pulse checks” in the future. At Magnolia, 60 days after employment, an employee gets his first informal check-in. You may consider asking, “Have you made a friend at work?” Magnolia has found that longevity is dependent on people having a friendship there and feeling connected. At six months, a more formal check-in takes place, which is still a two-way conversation. Leadership also hosts focus groups and open-forum chats with employees to get a feel for what’s going on in the organization and the lives of the team members.

Barksdale shared the “feedback framework” that has been put in place at Magnolia:

- Lead with curiosity. If you’re giving hard feedback, make an observation and ask a question.
- Address the issue quickly and respectfully.
- Share expectations. Moving forward, what is expected? Develop a road map for success.
- Ask for a commitment — not a “yes” or “no” question. Ask, “What can I expect you to do differently if you are in that situation again?”

Barksdale reminded people that feedback is not mean; it’s helpful. The more you put feedback into your culture, the easier it will be to give and receive.

## Standing Out

The phrase that is used throughout Magnolia as it relates to guests is “surprise and delight,” according to Barksdale. The goal is to go above and beyond, making any visit memorable and meaningful for guests.

At Magnolia, everyone on the customer service team is given a dollar amount each month they can use to bless, surprise and delight guests. For example, if a guest comes in and tells an employee that she and her mother drove several days to visit Magnolia for a milestone birthday, that employee could surprise the mother and daughter with free cupcakes to celebrate the occasion. Or perhaps the staff member will offer to take a photo of the guests somewhere on the property and give them a free frame to put it in.

Barksdale said they encourage their team members to get creative. This ties back into the cornerstones of the guest experience at Magnolia. Because they honor the individual and hear their story, team members get insights into what might surprise and delight that person as they serve with enthusiasm. ■



*Jen Howver was once a camp kid who later spent two summers working at a camp in Michigan, where she met and later married her husband, Jay. Fast forward more than 25 years and now Jen works as a marketing consultant and editor of InSite magazine. She and Jay live in Monument, Colorado, with their daughters, Noelle and Chloe, and way too many pets.*



*Jordy Barksdale serves as the guest experience senior manager for Magnolia in Waco, Texas. He focuses on ensuring the guests at each of their business entities have a memorable, one-of-a-kind experience that will meet and exceed initial expectations. He hails from Baton Rouge, Louisiana, but is currently living in the booming city of Waco. He joined the Magnolia family in 2016 and has seen firsthand the hard and thrilling parts of a brand that has gained an international audience and draws 1.5 million guests to the Silos annually.*