

CONTROLLING EXPECTATIONS AND SERVICE DELIVERY STANDARDS: THE NINE PRINCIPLES OF WAITING

1. *The length of a wait is perceived and is a function of the emotional climate as well as the actual duration. Hence anxiety makes waits longer*
2. *Uncertain waits are longer than known, finite waits of the same chronological duration*
3. *Unoccupied waits are longer than occupied waits*
4. *Pre-process waits (i.e. waits before the start) are longer than process waits (i.e. waits after things get started)*
5. *Unexplained waits are longer than explained waits*
6. *Unfair waits are longer than equitable waits*
7. *Inconsistent explanations for a wait cause all of the above negative forms of waits and dramatically lengthen the wait*
8. *Solo waits always are longer than group waits*
9. *The more valuable the service, the more the allowable wait, but the greater the potential anxiety during the period of the wait*

The best example of a lateral approach to turning an unoccupied wait into an occupied wait was the introduction of mirrors on the outside of lifts in New York skyscraper lift lobbies by Edward deBono. As a result the wait for a lift ceased to be evident to the building's users - who, as part of their American culture occupy themselves by taking advantage of mirrors.

Two of the more stressful waits in daily life involve food in a restaurant (especially when hungry), and taxis to airports. The first involves a pre-process wait (prior to the order being taken) and then a process wait but of uncertain duration (while the meal is being prepared). The second is a high anxiety pre-process wait before the arrival of the taxi and then an anxiety and uncertain wait if rushing to the airport.

Communication and generation of a diversion or opportunity for participation can play a significant role in the management of anxiety attached to any wait.

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