

DO GUESTS ALWAYS CALL THE SHOTS?

WHEN CUSTOMERS OPPOSE YOUR DIVERSITY POLICY

Ted Rogers Leadership Centre

You are head of banquets at the Lux Hotel & Spa Toronto, which has been chosen by a prominent local family to host their daughter's wedding for 400 guests. Leading up to this event, the family books an evening at the hotel to "test-run" the food, wine, table settings and the service that will be offered at the wedding reception. For this purpose, you and your staff set up a special dining room for 20 family members and guests. Three of your staff are asked to work this event: two servers and a bartender. To make sure the evening goes well, you assign experienced and knowledgeable staff, including Richard, one of your most valued full-time servers.

As the evening develops, family members begin to engage staff, first about the food, the wines and the hotel, and then about more personal matters. The atmosphere, to this point, is warm and open. Richard is very handsome and one of the family asks, in a joking manner, "Richard, are you available? Are you married?" Richard answers, "Yes!" The guest then asks, "Lucky woman! What is your wife like?" Richard answers, "David is intelligent and accomplished, with a very good sense of humour. We have been married ten years."

Nothing more is said that evening, but the next morning you receive a phone call saying the family enjoyed the evening, approved of the food, wine and table settings, but needed to be clear that they will not tolerate being served by LGBT employees. "Homosexuality is a sin. The Archbishop, along with the family priest, will be attending the wedding celebration. Will you guarantee us that there will be *no* LGBT staff serving at the wedding? This is critically important to us."

What decision do you make? How do you manage this with all stakeholders? What is your step-by-step plan?

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The Twist

Banquet staffs in Toronto hotels are a combination of full-time, dedicated employees employed by a specific hotel, and a contingent of contract employees who move around and work for all hotels. Somehow, the banquet employees in Toronto find out about this family's prejudice against the LGBT community and banquet staff in the city stage a protest outside of the hotel in anticipation of your decision. They have invited the press to report on the protest. What do you do?

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