WORKING MATERIAL · SUBCHAPTER 4.14

What the Certificate Does Not Prove

GUIDING QUESTION *A client asks whether your certificate proves that your service is good. Write the honest answer in three sentences, and then decide what you would put in the same email so that honesty does not cost you the account.*

Property: _____ Completed by: _____ Date: _____

How to use this sheet: work through the four parts with the people who own the process. The left-hand text comes from the book; the empty columns are for what is true in your property.

1. Verification Pact: what the market says, what actually holds, and your property

What the market says	What actually holds	In our property
"ISO 9001 certification evidences a satisfaction level."	No. The standard requires the organisation to monitor customers' perception of the degree to which their needs and expectations have been fulfilled, to determine the methods for doing so, and to analyse and act on the results. It sets no threshold, so the certificate says nothing about whether the index is 6.4 or 8.7.	
"A certified hotel is better than an uncertified one."	No. The intended results of the standard are the consistent provision of services that meet customer and applicable statutory and regulatory requirements, and the enhancement of customer satisfaction. Consistency and enhancement describe a system, not a level; the certificate supports no claim of superiority over an uncertified competitor.	
"The certificate covers everything we will experience on the premises."	No. The certificate applies only to the scope stated on it, which the organisation determines with its boundaries and applicability. A concession spa, a leased restaurant or a contracted transfer may lie outside it, or fall inside only as an externally provided process that the hotel controls.	
"A certified hotel has no service failures."	No. The standard expects nonconforming outputs and nonconformities to occur and requires them to be identified, controlled, corrected and, where needed, acted on at the cause. A system with no recorded failures is more likely to be failing to record them.	
"The certificate is a quality mark we can put in our own supplier communications."	No. Marks and references to certification are governed by the certification body's rules, which the client accepts in its agreement. A management system certification may not be presented as a product or service certification or as a guarantee of quality, and marks may not be used in a way that suggests one; their use is examined at surveillance, and misuse can lead the body to act.	
"It was verified, so it is verified continuously."	No. The certificate rests on audits of a sample of activities on particular days: the initial audit, surveillance at least once a calendar year and recertification before expiry. Between visits, assurance comes from the hotel's own monitoring, internal audits and management review; 4.7 discusses where audits fall in the year.	

2. Objective evidence: what an auditor would examine

Line	What to examine	Found? (Yes / Partly / No)	Notes and location
Document	The certificate itself, with its scope statement, the standard and edition, the body and the accreditation mark, read as a limit rather than as a decoration.		
Read	The property's own external claims: website, brochures, tender library, listings and signature blocks, checked against what the certificate and the rules on marks actually permit.		
Record	The satisfaction data with its method and its population stated, the complaint response times with their definition, and the corrective actions raised on service failures in the last twelve months.		
Seen	A service that a guest experiences as the hotel but that falls outside the certified scope, observed as delivered: the concession spa, the leased outlet, the contracted transfer.		
Told	What the commercial team believes the certificate says. In most hotels this is the widest gap in the building and the cheapest one to close.		
Re-performed	One tender answer about certification traced from the question to the evidence actually supplied, to see whether the property answered what was asked or what it wished had been asked.		
Absence	No statement anywhere of what the certificate does not cover, and no prepared evidence to offer a client in place of the claim it cannot support.		

3. Common mistakes: self-check

Mistake	Why it matters	Present here? (Yes / Partly / No)
Letting the market read the certificate as a rating.	In hospitality the confusion with a star classification is automatic and has to be corrected explicitly, because the guest has been trained by the industry to read wall-mounted certificates as statements of level.	
Answering the question that was written rather than the one that was meant, in either direction: a bare yes that overclaims, or a bare correction that reads as an evasion.		
Treating the scope line as administrative text.	It is the operative limit of everything the certificate says, and it is where a client's expectation and the hotel's obligation come apart.	
Presenting an absence of failures as strength.	A system with no recorded nonconformities tells an experienced reader that nothing is being recorded, not that nothing is going wrong.	
Keeping the honest inventory inside the quality function.	The people who need it are in sales, and they need it before the tender arrives rather than in the hour before it closes.	

4. Action plan

Position from the book / gap found	Action in our property	Owner	Deadline

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In brief

A management system certificate proves that a hotel does what it says it does. It does not prove that what it says is good. The level of service is determined by the property and its customers; the standard requires the level to be determined, delivered under control, monitored and improved, and sets no threshold anywhere. In hospitality this is misread more reliably than in other sectors, because the industry already has a certification scheme, the star rating, that does grade the level, and a second certificate on the same wall is read as more of the same.

Source: The Helm and the Lens, Volume 2b: The Lens, subchapter 4.14. This sheet does not reproduce the text of any standard; work with your own copy of ISO 9001:2026 from an authorised source.