



Housekeeping

by William D. Frye, Ph.D., CHE

Twelve housekeeping sins that should never be committed by room attendants

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Throughout the course of my travels I am constantly shocked to find room attendants committing the same egregious errors. It could be a different day, in a different hotel, in a different city, yet it seems that the same handful of transgressions is committed by most room attendants at whatever hotel I might be temporarily residing, regardless of geographic location, service level, or room rate paid. Violating any or all of these basic housekeeping tenets will likely increase maintenance and repair costs to furniture and fixtures, pose a health and safety danger to the room attendant or guest, or, in the case of the first one, create a disturbance upon the guest.

Presented here is a list of twelve basic room cleaning errors that every room attendant must avoid committing at all costs:

1. NEVER knock on the guestroom door when a DND is present.

That's right! That Do-Not-Disturb sign hanging from the doorknob means something to the guest that put it there. All too often though room attendants show disregard for guests' requested privacy and knock on the door anyway to service the guestroom. Whether it is because some housekeepers do not have full command of the English language and hence do not understand the meaning of the sign, or because the room attendant believes in error the guest has already checked out can be debated endlessly. Housekeepers should honor all DND signs until at least the check-out hour on the date of scheduled departure. When in doubt, defer to a floor supervisor.

2. NEVER knock on a guestroom door using the room key.

Both metal room keys and the sharp edge of magnetic strip card keys will cause small indentations to the surface of the guestroom door if used to knock and announce. Additionally, it produces a shriller and more acute noise that may scare the guest in the room and can easily be heard by guests in adjacent rooms or even down the hall. For some reason, many room attendants refuse to use their hand to knock on the door, despite being trained otherwise. Perhaps it is fear they will bruise their knuckles or damage their manicure.

3. NEVER spray glass cleaner directly onto mirrored or glass surfaces.

Glass cleaning chemicals should be sprayed directly onto the cleaning cloth that is dedicated to this task and not onto the glass or mirrored surface. This will prevent the room attendant from using too much chemical and risking that streaking glass cleaner will seep behind the edge of mirrored surfaces or damage the frame of pictures and mirrors. This technique also helps minimize the chemical overspray that will be suspended in the air as the cleaning cloth will hold and absorb the cleaning agent instead of it bouncing off a hard surface.



4. NEVER dust the guestroom after vacuuming. Always dust first.

The difference between dusting and vacuuming is simple; the task of dusting pushes dust and dirt around (hopefully onto a treated dust cloth) while vacuuming sucks it up into a bag or canister. Room attendants generally only vacuum floor surfaces, and perhaps upholstery and draperies. Because dust will fall due to the effect of gravity, always dust by working your way from the top of the walls toward the floor. This should be the last step completed before a room attendant turns to the bathroom. While cleaning the bathroom, any dust that is still airborne will settle to the ground. After cleaning the bathroom, the room attendant can then vacuum the entire guestroom.

5. NEVER use the same rag to clean furniture, glass, and bathroom fixtures.

Room attendants should work with four different sets of cleaning cloths: one for dusting furniture and fixtures, one for cleaning glass and mirrored surfaces, one for cleaning the exterior of the toilet, and one for disinfecting all other bathroom fixtures and the phone and television remote control. In order to avoid cross-contamination, each rag should be color-coded so that there is no confusion what that cloth should be used to clean. Obviously, using the same cloth to clean the toilet and the telephone receiver can present disastrous health problems. Each room attendant should be issued sufficient color-coded rags to clean her daily allotment of assigned guestrooms without risking cross-contamination.

6. NEVER attempt to move heavy items by yourself. Always get help.

We have said it before and will repeat it again: Back injuries are the number one workplace safety problem for hotel workers. Room attendants should never attempt to lift, flip or rotate a mattress alone. Always use at least two employees for this task or to lift other heavy items. And always bend at the knees when lifting heavy objects; NEVER bend at the waist!

7. NEVER stand on furniture, the commode, or the edge of the tub to reach high places.

Beds, chairs, and toilet seats were not designed to be used as ladders. Their construction will often not safely support a room attendant who is seeking to dust high areas, adjust draperies, or re-hang a shower curtain. Slips and falls from these temporary pedestals can injure employees and damage these fixtures and furniture. Provide each room attendant with a small, foldable step-ladder that can be stored on their housekeeping cart so they will have a stable platform to enable them to reach high areas. Don't forget to provide each attendant with a feather duster or roller duster on the end of a telescoping extension pole so they may dust high areas.

8. NEVER, EVER mix ammonia with bleach or chlorine!

Mixing ammonia with bleach or other chlorinated chemicals is like putting a match to gasoline, it will produce devastating effects. Most glass cleaners and general purpose cleaners are ammonia-based, while most disinfectants are chlorine-based. Mixing the two will produce deadly chlorine gas that will burn the room attendant's lungs, if inhaled, and will render her (and others) unconscious, or worse. This is the worst mistake a room attendant can make. Ensure that all chemical containers are properly labeled so there will never be any confusion as to what is ammonia-based and what is chlorine-based. Train and remind all room attendants about this most important consideration.

9. NEVER fail to use personal protective equipment when working with chemicals.

Room attendants should always wear protective rubber or latex gloves and safety goggles when working with chemicals. Because most guest bathrooms are enclosed and lack immediate ventilation, the use of a respirator is highly recommended when spraying disinfectants and applying bowl cleaners. Under OSHA law, it is the hotel's responsibility to provide this personal protective equipment, train their housekeepers how to use the equipment properly, and to ensure that they do use the equipment correctly to protect themselves and others.

10. NEVER leave dangerous chemicals accessible on an unsecured housekeeping cart.

We have already established that cleaning chemicals are dangerous if misused. But they are also dangerous if left unattended or unsecured. Sort of like leaving a loaded gun unattended; if someone finds it, they may not know what to do with it. They might not even know



what it is intended to be used for, but they may likely hurt themselves or someone else. For young children, this would be labeled an “attractive nuisance”. Never leave chemicals sitting unattended on a housekeeping cart. All spray bottles containing chemicals must be placed in the tray-caddie and carried into the guestroom by the room attendant or locked up inside the housekeeping closet. For this reason, never leave housekeeping closets unsecured.

11. NEVER leave housekeeping carts unsecured and unattended.

Housekeeper carts should be placed across the front of the guestroom door to prevent a person’s entry while the room attendant is servicing the guestroom. In addition to serving as a visual warning, it enables the room attendant to better access supplies on the cart and to keep an eye on these supplies so guests don’t steal them. But if the attendant must leave the floor for any reason, the cart should be removed from the hallway and stored in the locked housekeeping closet or an unoccupied but locked guestroom. In the event of a fire or other need to evacuate the hotel, an unattended housekeeping cart that is blocking a hallway will impede the safe and timely evacuation of that guest floor.

12. Never forget to secure the guestroom door.

While all guestroom doors should have a self-closing and self-locking mechanism, it is still the room attendant’s responsibility to ensure that the door is completely closed and locked before departing the serviced guestroom. If in the midst of servicing an occupied (or stayover) room the attendant must leave that room, she must ensure that the guestroom door is locked while away from the room, even if just stepping away for a few seconds. Guests expect that hotel employee negligence will never be the cause or means by which an intruder or thief might access a guest’s hotel room. Yet, I cannot begin to recount how many times I have wandered upon my hotel room to find the door open (and the room being presumably serviced) but the housekeeper was not nearby. Scenarios such as this are not acceptable under any circumstances. ✧

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