

Housekeeping

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

Guestroom doors open or closed?

TRC staffers have witnessed everything from soiled rags placed under the lip of the guest door and wooden hangers wedged in the crack between the door and frame to implements ranging from flip latches to large metal housekeeping carts used keep hotel doors from closing and locking. So this prompted the editor to ask, how do you do it?

In the most recent issue of *The Rooms Chronicle*, TRC asked its readers to share their hotel's policy regarding whether guestroom attendants were required to keep the guestroom door open or closed while the room was being serviced. If the hotel's policy was indeed to keep the door open, what means were employed to ensure that the room door did not shut. The e-mail responses were several and disparate.

Propping doors open

Half of the respondents indicated that their hotel's policy was for room attendants to prop the door open while inside the guestroom. While it is nearly a universal practice for attendants to position their housekeeping carts directly in front of the door to provide housekeepers easier access to linens, amenities, and cleaning supplies, their techniques used for holding open guest doors was nowhere near as standardized.

One general manager required her property's housekeepers to carry a rubber doorstop in their tunic pockets and use it as they move from room to room. Doorstops are small in size, mobile, inexpensive (often less than \$1), and professional looking. They come in a variety of colors and can blend with the décor of many wooden and laminated doors. But because of their small size, they can be easily misplaced, and require that the attendant bend down to retrieve them after each use. Also, inserting a hard rubber wedge under the bottom edge of a guestroom door could possibly mar the door and result in loosening or misalignment of the door on the door frame after repeated uses.

Another general manager advocated that placing the vacuum cleaner in front of the open door was a sturdy method to prop open the door. This practice eliminates the need to bend over and pick up a rag or doorstop. It also has the added benefits of closing the door while the attendant is vacuuming the room to prevent disturbing guests in other rooms while reminding and permitting the housekeeper to vacuum behind the guestroom door. However, unless the edges of the vacuum are rubberized, scratches may result on the door.

Several managers who responded stated that they utilized beanbags as door stops. Beanbags can be created by the hotel's seamstress or housekeeping personnel out of a variety of materials and fabrics or purchased commercially. Dave Palmer at the Walking Eagle Motor Inn contributed that one of his housekeepers used fabric from discarded bedspreads and a pound of dried white beans to create a stylish door stop that matched the rooms' interior decoration.

Andrew Anderson from the Residence Inn by Marriott in Appleton, Wisconsin volunteered that they used 5 lb. "beanbags on a leash" that were procured commercially. The leash is really a strap and handle that fits around the door knobs to keep the door open while not requiring the room attendant to bend over to retrieve the bag.

Gwynn Noble, Chief Engineer at the Watertown Hotel in Seattle, submitted that he purchased 5 lb. weight bags from a local scuba diving shop. The weight bags are approximately 4 ½" x 4 ½" and come in a durable enclosed neoprene bag. Each weight bag was subsequently sewn into a similar sized outer bag made of non-skid material similar to the material that is placed under floor rugs to prevent them from sliding on hard flooring. A nylon leash, 1" in width and 38" in length, with a 3" loop for the door handle is then sewn into the outer bag. Each housekeeping cart is then equipped with one door holder bag. Gwynn states that the non-skid material hold equally well on tile entries as well as carpeted areas.

Keeping them closed

The remaining half of the respondents indicated that their hotel's policy was for housekeepers to close the guestroom door while servicing both stayovers and check-outs. This helps to keep both the room attendant and guest's personnel property safe. Recently, a room attendant was attacked in a full service hotel in Houston while cleaning a guestroom. While attacks on housekeeping personnel are not an everyday occurrence, guestrooms certainly posed an inviting environment for potential crimes against hotel workers.

According to Raymond C. Ellis, Jr., director of the Loss Prevention Management Institute at the University of Houston, it is essential that management take proactive steps to minimize such risks to employees. Having room attendants close the self-locking door behind them after entering the guestroom will help to minimize the risk of assault. As most potential attackers tend to look for easy targets in areas that afford more privacy and minimal threat of being seen or caught, a closed guestroom door is one more obstacle they would need to overcome. Furthermore, a closed guestroom door does not allow a potential criminal to survey the persons or guest's belongings that may be inside the room.

Jesse Denton, manager of loss prevention for Starwood Hotels and Resorts concurs with Professor Ellis' recommendation. Denton adds that keeping the guestroom door closed helps prevent potential issues that may arise when a guest attempts to access the hotel room while the door is open. Now the burden is no longer on the housekeeper to query the guest about their rightful possession to the room or to ask the guest for their room key and to check it in the door lock.

Both Ellis and Denton recommend that a magnetic sign or laminate door hanger be placed on the exterior of a stayover guest's door to advise that the housekeeper is inside servicing the room. This warning can help prevent awkward situations from occurring, such as when a guest accesses the hotel room with their room key and the housekeeping who is in the bathroom does not hear the guest enter.

Finally, Denton adds that housekeepers should either keep the hotel room door propped open if the guest is already present in the room or offer to return and make up the room later at a time convenient for the guest. Regardless of the choice, employee safety should always be the first and foremost focus when it comes to guestroom cleaning.

Summary

As has been presented herein, hotels today employ a variety of techniques to prop guestroom doors open, while others choose not to engage in the practice. Is one practice better for a hotel than the others offered? That is for each hotel to determine based on their resourcefulness, priorities, and management policy.

(Bill Frye, a former resort general manager, spends an average of 45 nights a year in hotels and other lodging establishments throughout the world. wfrye@roomschronicle.com)