



# Housekeeping

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

## Motivating room attendants to clean better and pay attention to detail

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Every housekeeping manager realizes that probably the hardest part of their job is to motivate their staff to pay attention to detail so that the highest levels of cleanliness can be maintained and guest expectations will be met. Given that cleaning guestrooms is repetitive and strenuous work, and realizing that many room attendants are often paid at the lower end of wage scales, how can a housekeeping manager motivate his or her employees to pay attention to detail, or to work harder?

There are several techniques that can be implemented; some require small investments, others are free. But one thing is certain, guests expect cleanliness, and they are willing to pay for it. Probably no other factor accounts for a guest’s willingness to pay a higher room rate or for management to command a higher room rate from guests than the appearance or perception of cleanliness. Studies have revealed that perceived cleanliness is the most important factor for men and the second most important factor for women when choosing a hotel. Presented here a several strategies for each housekeeping manager to consider implementing to boost morale and motivate their room attendants.

### Train to standard and inspect to standard

As the last issue of *The Rooms Chronicle* revealed (“Determining why Housekeeping guest service scores are low”), poor guest service scores for the Housekeeping department are often the result of improperly or inadequately trained guestroom attendants. Most individuals believe that housekeeping tasks aren’t difficult to learn or implement, and for the most part, this is true. It really isn’t rocket science. Most hotels expect a room attendant to clean 13-17 guestrooms or guestroom credits in an eight hour shift. Cleaning an average of 75 guestrooms a week can be boring and result in standards being compromised.

Another problem that comes into play is that hotels employ multiple individuals to clean their large inventory of guestrooms. The work ethic, cleaning styles, and perceptions of what constitutes clean and orderly can vary drastically from new hire to new hire. Much like the military who trains raw recruits from all walks of society to a uniform standard, so too must the housekeeping manager.

Think about it. The U.S. Army and Marine Corps will invest well over 500 hours and tens of thousands of dollars per recruit just to bring that individual to a common understanding of what is expected of him or her. How much time does your hotel invest in educating new hires about guest expectations and how much time is invested in training them to learn the standards established by the hotel and Housekeeping department?

The last issue of TRC presented a 63-component comprehensive Technical Skills Training checklist for room attendants. Consider developing a similar checklist to train and evaluate new housekeeping hires that would be appropriate for your hotel’s service level and standards. To ensure consistency among all employees, train all newly hired room attendants, even if they are experienced from other properties, in the same manner and using the same technique to the same standard. And train all supervisors to inspect guestrooms according to that same standard. One of the greatest frustrations that many housekeepers experience and ultimately causes many to quit is when they are evaluated by different supervisors who themselves have

### Sample Reward Redemption Program

Item	Price
2 Movie passes .....	10 Housekeeping bucks
Lunch for two in hotel restaurant.....	16 Housekeeping bucks
Small basket of upscale toiletries.....	20 Housekeeping bucks
\$50 gift card at local merchant.....	25 Housekeeping bucks
2 tickets to local sporting event.....	35 Housekeeping bucks
Large basket of upscale toiletries.....	40 Housekeeping bucks
Dinner for two in fine dining restaurant.....	50 Housekeeping bucks
Two paid days off from work .....	75 Housekeeping bucks
A day at an upscale spa .....	100 Housekeeping bucks
Romantic weekend getaway hotel stay .....	125 Housekeeping bucks
One paid week off from work .....	175 Housekeeping bucks
Have the Housekeeping manager work your shift for a day cleaning guestrooms .....	300 Housekeeping bucks
Have the hotel general manager work your shift for a day cleaning guestrooms .....	500 Housekeeping bucks

different standards or perceptions of cleanliness. This just results in lack of work consistency, employee frustration, and the onset of indifference among room attendants.

### **Reward excellence**

Assuming that excellence means the adherence to room cleaning standards, recognizing housekeepers on a frequent and recurring basis will go a long way to motivate top performers and encourage under-performers. Make it fun, but make it worthwhile for each room attendant. *Every* housekeeper welcomes praise, recognition, cash and non-cash awards. So reward *everyone* as an individual that deserves it, and not just your one or two best performing employees. Avoid naming an employee of the month for your department; this just frustrates the others who do not receive the award. Chances are that more than one employee deserve such a recognition anyway.

Try this technique instead. Announce a plan to conduct impromptu inspections of newly serviced guestrooms. Once a week, randomly pick one guestroom assigned to each room attendant and refer to it as the “cash room”. When the room attendant completes cleaning the guestroom, inspect the room with her present. Before starting, place ten \$2 bills on the bed. For each cleaning deficiency that is not met, point it out to the housekeeper and take away one of the \$2 bills. Once the inspection is complete, the room attendant is permitted to keep the remaining cash as a weekly bonus. Cash bonuses really do motivate. Since the room attendant will not know what room or when the inspection will occur, they will make a conscious effort to pay greater attention to detail in all their room cleaning assignments.

Want to kick this cash incentive program up another notch? Create a subsidized award redemption program where housekeepers may exchange their \$2 bills for “housekeeping bucks”. Yes, most room attendants are ladies and most ladies like to shop, even from the comfort of their employee break room. Allow room attendants to buy miscellaneous items such as house wares, movie tickets, dining experiences and gift certificates that they normally couldn’t afford or wouldn’t spend on themselves with their “housekeeping bucks” (see inset box). Imagine how motivated each room attendant will be as they envision themselves earning days off with pay, enjoying a day at a spa, experiencing a romantic getaway weekend, or even earning enough housekeeping bucks to have a hotel manager work their shift for them! And all they have to do is meet the standards of excellent housekeeping.

### **Recognize improvement**

Recognizing the same handful of employees every week or month in a public forum gets stale after a while. Every Housekeeping department will have its share of superstars. But they are not the individuals that drag down guest service scores or result in inspection deficiencies. It is the under-performing associates that need to be motivated. Often, for whatever reason, these employees have not experienced the sweetness of success. Make it a practice to publicly recognize an employee’s improvement in her inspection scores at a morning lineup briefing. This will motivate her to try harder and reach for the next achievable level of recognition. Yes, baby steps eventually lead to leaps and bounds in performance improvement. Such is the mantra...”praise in public, condemn in private.”

### **Have room attendants take personal ownership**

This is accomplished through a multifaceted approach. First, to the extent possible, assign a room attendant to the same floor, same housekeeping closet, and same section of guestrooms for a prolonged duration of time. Only rotate housekeepers through various floors and guestroom sections if absolutely needed. This will permit each room attendant to feel sense of pride and ownership as her guestrooms will represent her. It will also make it easier to conduct an investigation of any claims of missing guest property from hotel rooms.

Place a notification card on the desk or credenza in each guestroom that states, “This guestroom was cleaned by *Sally*. Please direct any compliments or concerns to the Director of Housekeeping at Extension 1234.” Make sure the notification cards are clean, spot free, and not worn, torn or ragged. In lieu, some hotels permit housekeepers to place tip envelopes in guestrooms with a similar notice appearing on the outside of the envelope. Always allow housekeepers to keep 100% of the tips from the guestrooms that they serviced. Tip sharing or tip pooling compromises the guest’s intent of leaving a gratuity and wreaks havoc on room attendant morale. Remember, gratuities are meant by guests to serve as a token of their appreciation for excellent service. And management relies upon gratuities from guests to serve as a means to motivate employees.

Another psychological tactic to motivate room attendants to take ownership is to create personalized name plates for their housekeeping carts, housekeeping closets, and doors of the guestrooms that they are cleaning. Consider having magnetic signs or hangtags that read:

- “This housekeeping cart belongs to *Sally*.”
- “This closet is proudly maintained by *Janine*.”
- “For your comfort, your guestroom is being proudly being serviced by *Keisha* at this time. For security reasons, your guestroom door is kept closed during this process.”

Realize that since room attendants are not managers, they do not have an office with a name on the door or a desk with a nameplate on the front. Allow them in this subtle way to feel important by displaying their name in the rooms they clean and the carts they use.

When discussing guestrooms with a room attendant, always refer to any guestrooms in a housekeeper's section as "your room" or "your section" or "your area". Never refer to it in the third person as this sounds too neutral and eliminates any sense of personalization or personal ownership for the condition of the room. Keep in mind that employees with a strong work ethic and commitment to high standards want to claim ownership for their hard work.

As specific comment cards, phone calls and letters are received from guests, always share the positive comments that pertain to housekeeping issues with all room attendants in a public forum. Address any negative issues associated with a single employee in a subtle, positive and confidential manner as may be warranted. Focus on performance improvement and not on penalizing the room attendant. If there was a room cleaning deficiency, the responsibility must be born by the department and management as much as by an individual employee. This is why inspections are imperative.

### **Thank your staff**

The best managers take every appropriate opportunity to thank their staff. Make it a practice to always thank your room attendants at least twice every day, once in public and at least once in private. At the conclusion of the every morning lineup or briefing, take ten seconds to thank the staff for coming to work and participating in the briefing. Let them know that you value their efforts and that the Housekeeping department's success would not be possible without the dedicated efforts of everyone who is in attendance.

Walk the hotel floors and spend a minute or two visiting with every housekeeper on an individual basis everyday, no exceptions. Ask each employee how she is doing, compliment her if the guestroom looks great, ask if she needs any supplies or special assistance, listen to her concerns and then take action to address those concerns. In other words, let them know YOU CARE! And finally, thank them for their time and efforts before you walk away. This two minute conversation costs you nothing...except two minutes of your time. But it will pay huge dividends every day.

Finally, want to really wow your guestroom attendants? At the end of the week (maybe on payday), wait for your staff members near the employee entrance or time clock as they punch out from their shift. Present each with a small token of your appreciation. It might be a carnation, a \$1 lottery ticket, mardi gras beads, or perhaps just a handshake. Whatever the gesture, it will be remembered by every employee for the coming week. Can you think of a more earnest way to say thank you and win the hearts of your staff? ✧

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