



People Skills

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Hotel common sense – Orientation for all staff is essential for lasting success

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The sad truth is that opportunity doesn't knock twice. You can put things off until tomorrow but tomorrow may never come. Where will you be a few years down the line? Will it be everything you dreamed of? We seal our fate with the choices we take, but don't give a second thought to the chances we take. ~ Gloria Estefan ~

If one were to ask almost any hotelier their most important asset, the response will likely be their “people.” For years, Ritz-Carlton Hotels defined it most specifically – “Ladies and Gentlemen serving Ladies and Gentlemen.” Today, this brand is evolving its training to remain true to its foundations as it is updating its messages to address the current workforce. While Ritz-Carlton caters to the luxury segment of lodging, their interpretation is appropriate for all markets: We are a service industry.

Progressive, realistic hoteliers today realize that while technology plays a growing role in the hospitality industry, the “people” and personal-touch side of the business inevitably determines the long term success.

An old saying states there is one opportunity to make a good first impression. While most of us recognize there are high costs associated with staff turnover, too many of us don't make the connection between how we might contribute unintentionally to that turnover by how we expose “our most important asset” to our hotel and company.

Too many hotels “throw” their newly hired staff into jobs with little or no orientation. It is assumed that since they worked at Brand X that they understand the industry and “how-to” do whatever their job title says. Too often is it assumed that the hotel down the street treats their guests the way we want to, when in fact, their techniques or values may be why our newly hired staff member left them.

A comprehensive orientation process for new employees can alleviate bewilderment, instill confidence in new hires, and put all new employees on the same sheet of music. In short, a standardized, but thorough, new employee orientation can reap big dividends in employee retention, staff productivity and employee job satisfaction. Here is a list of various points of information that should be incorporated into every hotel's new employee orientation session.

Essential Information

- Orientation overview – Tell your new staff what the program will be about.
- Services/products – A full-service hotel can have as many as 20 departments and dozens of services. Give your new people an overview of the property's offerings and where they fit in. A rooms-only property has at least six areas of activity (front desk, housekeeping, laundry, en-



gineering, accounting, sales, security, transportation, breakfast, etc.) that merit enthusiastic and detailed overviews.

- Property philosophy – Hoteliers have different ways to communicate commitment to their customers and staff. Turn-of-the-20th century American hotelier Ellsworth Statler had a service code he required his staff to memorize. There are hotels and companies who use this concept on business cards, lobby plaques and other public places to pay more than “lip” service to their commitment. What is your philosophy?
- Policies/general procedures – Procedure manuals and employee manuals must be precise and worded in a fashion that is both legal and understandable. Orientation is an excellent time to review these manuals with all new hires. Have new employees sign a receipt that the materials in the manuals was covered and that they received copies of each manual.
- Benefits – All hotels do not or cannot give extensive benefits. Review the coverage your property does have and include all items such as workers’ compensation, social security and other matching taxes paid by the employer, etc. Review other benefits such as discounted or free meals, uniforms, free or discounted parking, educational grants, tuition reimbursements, free or discounted rooms at other hotels, etc.
- Dress code/grooming standards – Explain what is considered permissible and impermissible attire for the workplace. Point out where employees can obtain clean uniforms and change out of and into their street clothes. Explain the hotel’s policy on taking or wearing uniforms off property. Clearly illustrate the grooming standards for all hotel employees.
- The chain of communication – While many of us traditionally called this a Chain of Command, today’s hotelier might rethink the concept and make the two synonymous and thoroughly understood at orientation.
- Smoking policy – Is tobacco use permitted by employees and guests on hotel grounds and where and under what conditions?
- Performance appraisals – The who, what, where, and how often. Explain how employee performance appraisals are conducted and what criteria they are based on.
- Training Programs – Initial and ongoing programs should be explained, including outside community or industry programs the hotel may support.
- Community/professional growth – We all like to know where we can grow. Not everyone wants to be a GM or an owner, but we do all want to continue our personal skill development on some level.
- Termination procedures – Employment separation procedures including the all important exit interview should be explained.
- Healthcare options and insurance availability – If there isn’t some kind of medical program, this needs to be explained. Options might include HMOs, credit unions or other potentials in the community.
- Holidays/Vacations/Time off – Be specific about what is or is not covered. Remember that our work force is much more diverse than a generation ago. There are many other religious and international days to take into account. If you allow “bonus” or personal days, clearly state the guidelines for qualification.
- Communication – How will management disseminate general information for employees? What are the hotel’s policies for posting notices on the bulletin board in the employee break room? How will position openings and promotions be communicated to the hotel’s staff?
- Drug-free workplace – Clearly explain the hotel’s policy on illegal drug possession, use and/or distribution while on property, to include use of alcohol on the job. Explain the hotel’s policy on drug testing and whether it is a condition of ongoing employment.
- Courtesy on the phone – What is the hotel’s standards for phone etiquette and taking messages?
- Job safety – Job safety standards and emergency evacuation procedures should be conveyed. Point out the location and procedures to obtain “Right to Know” information, OSHA Injury Logs, and MSDS sheets.
- Attitude – Enthusiasm needs to be reinforced regularly and from Day One.
- Recognition programs – Some chains and many independents have some kind of program to demonstrate the value of recognizing people for a job well done. These programs can be very meaningful if they are consistent, held in esteem by senior management and welcomed as a positive reinforcement.
- Security procedures – Everyone on every staff MUST be aware of providing reasonable care to our guests and to each other. This needs to be stressed.

Follow-up

After 90 days, you may wish to do a follow-up orientation. The 3,000-room Opryland Hotel in Nashville for years has had a structured, follow-up program at which new benefits are extended to the now presumed permanent staff, as well as some old fashioned “cheerleading.”

For orientation to be effective there needs to be:

1. a consistent time
2. mandatory attendance for all new hires at all levels
3. a regular agenda
4. a tour of the entire facility
5. a greeting from senior management.

Orientations can be held by Human Resources (if your hotel has this department), a department head, or a qualified administrative assistant.

The critical element of orientation isn't just completion of paperwork, but the comfortable and enthusiastic greeting that your new hires receive. How well they feel on that first day may very well dictate how they treat their guests and fellow staff. ✧

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