



# Housekeeping

by Angelo Calbone

## The pros and cons of outsourcing housekeeping positions

*Another great article from The Rooms Chronicle®, the #1 journal for hotel rooms management! \*\*\*Important notice: This article may not be reproduced without permission of the publisher or the author.\*\*\* College of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Niagara University, P.O. Box 2036, Niagara University, NY 14109-2036. Phone: 866-Read TRC. E-mail: editor@roomschronicle.com*

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Staffing a hotel's Housekeeping department with reliable personnel can be rather difficult at times. It can require a detailed hiring process to bring unfamiliar associates on board, and usually an entire Human Resources staff to handle any needs or requests they may have.

One alternative solution that many hotels are embracing is outsourcing some or all of the various housekeeping functions to non-hotel staffers. This entails the hotel bringing in a third-party business to supply the staffing needs.

Typically, as a part of this service, the third party firm handles all recruiting, hiring, employee paperwork, and any of the other human resources needs of their employees. This approach can greatly simplify and cut down on the "busy" work performed by the actual hotel management team and allows them to focus more on cleanliness standards, guest satisfaction, and achieving assigned goals and objectives.

While outsourcing a hotel's housekeeping function provides several benefits, there are also some negative aspects that must be considered. Here is a non-exhaustive list of pros and cons that any hotel should contemplate when considering if outsourcing is right for them.

### Pros

- There is a greatly simplified hiring process (to the hotel) as compared to going through an in-house HR department. The third-party firm handles all recruitment, interviewing, background checks and processes the required paper work and documentation of new hires.
- The financial savings to the hotel can be substantial when taking into account all of the additional costs of employee benefits, which seem to increase at double digit rates each New Year. Outsourcing allows the hotel to pay an invoice at the end of the pay period. While some additional costs are included in the hourly rate remitted to the third party than the hotel would pay directly to its own associates, this amount will still be less than the overall costs of a full-service hotel's benefit system and the expense to administer it.
- Outsourcing can separate the hotel from liability for certain aspects of the job including benefits and injury. This can be very advantageous to hotels in geographic locales where extensive and onerous workplace and employee benefit regulations may prevail.
- A third-party company may be able to better source employees in some locations. If there is not a large labor pool at the location of the hotel, it may be necessary to look outside the local market. An outside company may have better connections, resources and experience finding new employees.

### Cons

- There needs to be a strong emphasis on training since the new employees that are brought in may not have all of the experience necessary to allow them to do the job. Having a training program in place is necessary to assure quality standards are not lost. Clear and constant communication is needed in order to ensure that the third-party employees carry out the mission and goals of the hotel. By holding all employees to the same standards, regardless if they are in-house or outsourced staff, is essential.

- By sourcing employees from outside the local labor market and areas that the hotel's HR staff does not recruit from may result in hiring employees that do not speak English. This can create a language barrier not only among employees, but with guests as well. A constant focus on basic English and other means of communication will likely be needed.
- When sourcing a portion of the staff from an outside company there is the possibility that a two-tiered system will be created when dealing with the two staffs. Assimilating both staffs together to create one team rather than two separate groups allows everyone to work together and focus on the same goal.
- In some situations, hotel management may be required to only interact with the supervisory staff of the third-party company on disciplinary and remediation matters of outsourced personnel. Because outsourced employees are technically contracted to the hotel, the hotel can only identify the work and set the standards that it wants performed. It is the responsibility of the third-party to determine how to accomplish the work, as long as it does not conflict with the hotel's established standards. For this reason, and because of potential unionization concerns, housekeeping managers usually must direct all employee-related performance concerns through a third-party supervisor and not directly to the outsourced employee.

As one can see and imagine, there are many pros and cons when discussing the option of outsourcing parts or the entirety of a hotel's housekeeping operation. This approach can be greatly beneficial for resorts or other seasonal properties where staffing needs can change by as much as 50% depending on the time of year. If done well, outsourcing can also provide a great working relationship that allows the property to provide the level of service their guests expect while honoring the financial obligations to the owners of the hotel. ✧

*(Angelo Calbone is the Executive Housekeeper of the 400 room Hyatt Chesapeake Bay Golf Resort, Spa and Marina in Cambridge, MD. Previously he served as the Front Office Manager of the Grand Hyatt Seattle and Assistant Executive Housekeeper of Hyatt Regency Coconut Resort and Spa in Naples Florida. E-mail: [angelo.calbone@hyatt.com](mailto:angelo.calbone@hyatt.com).)*