



# Stressed out about hotel inspections?

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Hotel inspections are a regular and much anticipated occurrence for both chain hotels and franchised properties. They are performed for a variety of reasons, and can be a harrowing experience for all involved if they are not approached in the proper fashion.

There are several types of inspections that a hotel manager can expect to encounter. For the purposes here, there will be two general types discussed — internal and external. An example of an internal inspection would be the kind that a hotel franchisor performs for its franchisee. An external inspection would be, for instance, when a representative from AAA enters a hotel to rate the property and its services. The representative uses his or her own set of criteria, and collects the information for his or her own customers. Inspections may be announced and scheduled in advance or unannounced and conducted under a cover of anonymity. However, the hotel manager who is confident that he has a well-maintained property and a well-trained and dedicated staff will be able to successfully complete both kinds.

## Differing viewpoints

Each general manager has a different viewpoint on inspections. For example, let's take the case of two general managers who have an inspection scheduled in two weeks. Manager A believes that the inspection is simply not necessary. He thinks that he and his staff do an excellent job at their property and he doesn't need anyone telling them otherwise.

Manager B is ready for the inspection, because he or she has been preparing for it since the last inspection, which went great. Any deficiencies have been addressed, and the general manager knows that everything will go fine.

Like Manager B, general managers should view inspections as a vehicle to obtain constructive third-party advice on how to improve one's property. Managers who view the inspectors as an intrusion on their domain will negate any possible benefits from the process. Inspections should instead be viewed as an opportunity for one to showcase the property and learn from outside opinions.

If an inspection yields negative results, it is doubtful that these results are visible only to the person doing the inspection. Negative results on an inspection relate directly to unfavorable impressions by guests. This in turn relates to every hotelier's worst-case scenario, a decreased bottom line.

The results of any inspection should be taken for what they are, an indication of a guest's impression of a hotel. If the results are positive, a pat on the back and continued effort are all that is required in response. If the results are negative, it is time to focus on what needs to be corrected before the impact is felt too severely.

## Preparation above all else

Having the proper mindset is a necessary first step in making any inspection run smoothly. Preparedness is the key; the amount of effort that goes into getting ready for an inspection will ultimately determine the level of success obtained. This does not mean running around for two hours prior to an inspection, cleaning the windows and vacuuming the floors. If this is how a hotel prepares for an inspection, then negative results are only two hours away.

Proper preparation for any inspection is a long-term process involving all departments of the hotel, not just the housekeeping department. The entire staff needs to be motivated in order for an inspection to yield positive results. Everyone from the general manager to the housemen needs to do his or her part and realize how his or her role contributes to the success of the inspection process. All roles must be defined from the beginning, responsibilities must be correctly delineated, and training must be in place on a continuous basis.

There are two main tasks that are critical in the long-term preparations for an inspection: an effective preventative maintenance program and a thorough schedule of in-house public area inspections. Having both of these programs in place should make any last-second finishing touches easier to accomplish. The preventative maintenance program is normally the responsibility of the engineering or maintenance department, while housekeeping would generally handle the in-house room inspections, whether by the executive housekeeper or someone specifically designated for this role.

## **Preventative maintenance**

Having a proper preventative maintenance program in place is arguably one of the single most effective elements that will determine success or failure in a pending inspection. Provided it is done correctly, performing preventive maintenance on every hotel room once per quarter will keep almost everything in good working order and hopefully will minimize larger scale repairs and replacements. Of course, an effective preventative maintenance program also extends the useful life of furniture, fixtures, and equipment while extending the acquisition costs period over a longer stretch of time.

The deep cleaning of a hotel room works hand in hand with preventative maintenance. The housekeeping department should deep clean a hotel room every time there has been preventative maintenance performed. Upon completion of preventative maintenance and deep cleaning, a hotel room will be ready for any inspection.

## **In-house inspections**

The task of preparing for an inspection actually begins with the training of the hotel's employees from their very first day on the job. The daily process of checking rooms will be made much simpler by showing employees the places that are most often missed when cleaning a guest room (e.g. the tops of picture frames). Looking for patterns of missed items in the hotel rooms will also give an indication of when retraining may be necessary in order to ensure positive results.

Inspections of hotel guestrooms, function rooms and public areas should be performed on a daily basis. Depending on staffing levels and budgetary constraints it may not be possible to physically inspect all rooms every day; however, a representative sample of rooms should always be checked each day.

In addition to the housekeeping staff and its managers performing their own self-checks, it is also necessary for the rooms division manager or general manager to carefully "walk through" several rooms each week. This creates an atmosphere of expectancy and a chain of accountability within the property.

To ensure consistency of finished product, inspectors should evaluate the cleanliness, preparation, and condition of hotel rooms to an established standard. Multipoint checklists are an ideal rating tool. The checklist can be shared with housekeepers in advance so they will realize the scope and extent of their responsibilities and the value associated with each item.

A checklist that separates items that need to be addressed in each part of the room will help to ensure that nothing is missed and that items are attended to and evaluated consistently. Bathroom, bedroom, living area, kitchen and any other distinct areas comprising the room should make up this checklist.

## **Conclusion**

A positive mindset and careful preparations will enable any hotel to do well on inspections, whether they are internal or external. A good team effort will make those last two hours before the inspector arrives a pleasant experience, not the hair pulling and nail biting stressful affair that the unprepared manager will likely endure. How would you rather spend your last two hours?

*(Desirae Zontek is a senior undergraduate student in the College of Hospitality and Tourism Management at Niagara University and is the front office manager at the Comfort Suites at Buffalo/Niagara Falls International Airport in New York. She may be contacted at [editor@roomschronicle.com](mailto:editor@roomschronicle.com)).*