

From our readers

Dear TRC:

Through the years of subscribing to the magazine I realized its value in saving money, generating quality guest service ideas and increasing top line numbers. Now I require all my managers to read *The Rooms Chronicle* and it definitely helps them in their development by being more creative, aware and educated in various aspects of hospitality.

Yair Eldar

General Manager

Radisson Fisherman's Wharf
San Francisco

Dear TRC:

The early issues of *The Rooms Chronicle* were a breath of fresh air giving pertinent, up-to-the-minute, truly helpful information and advice in an interesting format. What's really amazing about the publication is that you have kept it interesting and informative with each and every issue. I always look forward to reading it and passing it on to others, knowing they're looking forward to it, too.

Jean Frick

Human Resources Coordinator
McIntosh Inns, Inc.

Dear TRC:

The energy-saving ideas alone in *The Rooms Chronicle* could save a 60-room property like mine hundreds of dollars per month ... well worth the price of a TRC subscription!

Rudi Rainer

Owner

Super 8 Buffalo/Niagara Falls

Dear TRC:

The Rooms Chronicle's unique focus on issues faced by the front and back of the house has proven to be a rich source of down to earth information accessible to novices and experts alike.

Veronica Palacios

Trainer

Cendant Hospitality

INNVEST

in education and training

With every issue of *The Rooms Chronicle* readers have an opportunity to:

- ✓ Increase Average Rate and Occupancy
- ✓ Decrease Expenses
- ✓ Improve Customer Service
- ✓ Hire and Retain Good Employees

Check the label below for your expiration date. You may use the card on page 15 to renew your subscription to TRC, the #1 journal for hotel rooms management.

Or, PASS ALONG the card on page 15 to your colleagues so they may also start a subscription to this great journal.

Celebrate 50 years with EI

During 2003, the Educational Institute of the American Hotel & Lodging Association is celebrating 50 years of service to the hospitality industry with special offers available only on its Web site, www.ei-ahla.org. Each month, our valued customers can find anniversary savings of 25 percent on selected training videos, skills guides, books, and training modules. Customers can make secure, online purchases using EI's new shopping cart feature, and sign up to receive FREE e-mail updates and notification of product specials. For half a century, EI has been the "gold standard" for hospitality training. Find out why today. Call 800-752-4567 for a free catalog, or visit online at www.ei-ahla.org.

EI is proud to work closely with *The Rooms Chronicle* to provide hospitality professionals with practical, competency-based training resources for every facet of lodging operations. EI's housekeeping textbook and volumes of hospitality management case studies have benefited from the addition of articles from *The Rooms Chronicle* and the expertise of TRC columnists and experts.



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The Rooms Chronicle

P.O. Box 2036

Niagara University, NY 14109-2036



the Rooms CHRONICLE

The #1 journal for hotel rooms management

January to April '03

Route to:

____ Housekeeping
____ Front Office
____ Reservations
____ Engineering
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Volume 11, Number 1

Brand new publisher for TRC, same great content ahead!

On January 1, the College of Hospitality and Tourism Management at Niagara University assumed responsibility for publishing and producing *The Rooms Chronicle*. In the 10 years since TRC's inception, NMRG Publishing and Aleta Nitschke have delivered to thousands of readers, every other month, 16 pages of nuts-and-bolts information pertaining to the complex world of hotel management and rooms division operations.

It is with great pleasure, a feeling of excitement, and even a profound sense of duty as an educational institution that we accept the reins of TRC, and more importantly, commit ourselves to exceed the expectations of each and every reader of *The Rooms Chronicle*.

Niagara University was determined to be an ideal home for TRC for several reasons. First and foremost was Niagara University's liberal arts tradition of broadly educating students

for a global environment by instilling in them the character and values required for responsible decision making in personal and professional activities. NU's liberal arts core develops skills in communications, critical thinking, ethics, interpersonal relationships, leadership, and technology that are applied in the professional courses of the College of Hospitality and Tourism Management.

The college is dedicated to providing a current and high-quality education in preparing students for careers in the world's interdependent lodging, foodservice, tourism, and recreation-related industries.

The professional curriculum and co-curricular activities of the college support this objective by integrating technology, leadership and practical experiences within a global industry context. The college, within the scope of its educational mission, strives to obtain the resources necessary to maintain a leadership role in integrating technology across the curriculum.

As such, all students encounter practical learning opportunities through a required industry experience requirement, broad co-op opportunities, and course work that integrate theory with practice. The college, striving to achieve true internationalization of the curriculum, is a national leader in study abroad.

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Pictured at left: A view of St. Vincent's Hall, home of the College of Hospitality and Tourism Management at Niagara University north of Buffalo, NY.



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Avoid burnout, simplify work, enjoy life

by Aleta A. Nitschke, CHA

In the hotel industry, burnout is a very real problem. Long hours and lack of vacation tend to wear out managers and supervisors at every level of the hotel. Though burnout is not unique to the hospitality industry, it certainly is a costly element of the hotel's payroll. Because the hotel is a 24-hour operation, managers tend to think they are needed on the property at all hours. And recent economic downturns have forced owners to cut even more managers, asking those retained to work longer and harder. In her book, "Simplify Your Work Life," Elaine St. James declares: "decide, right now, that you'll do what it takes to keep your work in balance with the rest of your life." She then proceeds to give smart suggestions of how to scale down and simplify life on the job.

"You can pull the plug on forty-hour-plus workweeks any time you choose," writes St. James. She devotes a few pages of how-to's

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New publisher takes reins\

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Second, Niagara's College of Hospitality and Tourism Management is a recognized leader in hospitality education and research.

- It is one of only four colleges of hospitality and tourism in the country.
- It offered the world's first bachelor's degree in tourism.
- It was the seventh hospitality program accredited in the country.
- It is a national leader in study abroad with 40 percent of its students studying at its partner schools in Engelberg, Switzerland, and Strasbourg, France.
- It is ranked in the top 20 programs in the country — the smallest university included on that list.

The college has many other distinctions qualifying it as a leading national and international program in hospitality and tourism. It is one of the founding schools of The Leading Hotel Schools of the World, an association of leading hospitality programs worldwide that work with the 400 five-star Leading Hotels of the World. There are only three founding schools from the Americas, three from Europe, and three from Asia.

The college was awarded the Institutional Achievement Award in October 2002 by the International Society of Travel and Tourism Educators (ISTTE). This recognition is awarded only every two years.

Additionally, the college is accredited by the Accreditation Commission for Programs in Hospitality Administration (ACPHA). Currently, only 33 baccalaureate hospitality and tourism programs are accredited in the United States.

The faculty, staff and administration of the College of Hospitality and Tourism Management possess a vast array of practical, technical, and research expertise in various facets of hotel, tourism and business operations. Among their accomplishments, six hold doctorate degrees, three were hotel general managers, two were hotel directors of marketing and sales, and two have been recognized internationally for their excellence in hospitality-related research.

The college is firmly committed to supporting and furthering practical, application-oriented research that can best benefit practitioners, such as hotel owners and operators.

With Niagara University strategically located on the American-Canadian border near

Niagara Falls, N.Y., the college is also home to the Center for Community Economic Development through Hospitality and Tourism. The center participates in and sponsors community economic development discussions, provides diagnostic services to struggling hospitality and tourism businesses, conducts feasibility studies and engages in professional consulting, and connects the students and faculty to experiential opportunities locally and throughout the world.

Finally, Niagara University retains the infrastructure needed to support the print edition and online presence of *The Rooms Chronicle*. With an on-campus post office, fully operational print and publishing center, computer and media technology support departments, marketing and proofreading specialists, and a university administration steadfast in ensuring the continued mission of TRC, *The Rooms Chronicle* is in good hands. The synergies among the College's commitment to education, its experienced faculty, dedicated staff, extensive support infrastructure, and a specialized hospitality center made the relocation of TRC to Niagara University a logical choice.

On behalf of Niagara University, I extend our commitment to maintain the same high standards of journalistic excellence and to share all our operational know-how to help readers keep their lodging properties safe, efficient, and, of course, profitable. Be assured, *The Rooms Chronicle* will remain the number one journal for hotel rooms management!

William D. Frye, Ph.D., CHE
Executive Editor



William D. Frye, Ph.D., CHE, Executive Editor
of The Rooms Chronicle



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The Rooms Chronicle™

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URL: www.roomschronicle.com ~ E-mail: info@roomschronicle.com.

ISSN: 1083-7892. ~ ©2003 College of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Niagara University
Published bimonthly by the College of Hospitality and Tourism Management at Niagara University, *The Rooms Chronicle*, created in July 1993, is the #1 source book for hotel rooms-management staff. Focusing on improving quality, efficiency, and profits, TRC speaks to front office, housekeeping, reservations, and related hotel operation issues.
Articles and suggested topics are welcome.

Executive Editor: William D. Frye, Ph.D., CHE; Marketing Manager: Deborah T. Curtis;
Publisher Emeritus and Founder: Aleta A. Nitschke, CHA.

Current Subscription Rate: 1 year = \$109, 2 years = \$169. (Canada add \$15/yr, International add \$30/yr for postage.) Use the form provided on page 15. Master accounts available for companies with five or more properties.

Reprints of previous editions, when available, may be ordered at the rate of \$20 per issue.

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Ideas for fun

A recent question from a TRC reader centered around how to keep work fun for housekeeping employees. This question is raised frequently — asked in different ways. “How do I keep them motivated?” “How can we keep roomkeepers from being bored with their routine job?”

It’s not a question just for housekeeping. In fact, managers around the world understand that happy employees are more productive employees. Several corporations have adopted “fun” measures as part of their bonus systems for managers. In fact, one restaurant company determines 20 percent of a store manager’s bonus by how employees answer: “How much fun is it to work with your boss?”

For some people, keeping things fun comes naturally. For all the others, there is plenty of help available. For instance, check Leslie Yerkes great book, “Fun Works — Creating Places Where People Love to Work.” Or, “Get Weird! 101 Innovative Ways to Make Your Company a Great Place to Work” by John Putzier. Or, “301 Ways to Have Fun at Work” by Dave Hemsath, et al. Plus, there have been hundreds of ideas given in previous TRC journals particularly focused on hotel departments.

But don’t underestimate the fun of thinking up goofy games just for the hotel. For instance, TRC staffers gathered to see if they could put together a new fun idea for the housekeeping manager who wrote us. One person suggested thinking about Easter, since the holiday is near. Another added, “Yes, let’s use plastic eggs for something.” Another said, “Let’s hide the eggs around the hotel.” Another said, “Yes, if guests find them they get something — if employees find them they get something — or something like that.” Why not? Put little notes in the eggs: “Lucky you! Bring this egg to the front desk for a treat.” If guests bring the eggs, give them a beverage coupon or a candy bar. If employees bring them, let them choose from a goodie jar. And reward the employees who bring the most eggs. Maybe Easter brunch for their family! ♦

what’s wrong with this picture?



Pictured below: This vending area is typical of many found throughout hotel hallways. Though the machines fit neatly into the alcove, there is no space for a trash container. Some may argue that trash containers located in these areas are never full, therefore they waste attendants' time to check them. In truth, guests will express with their actions where containers should be located. Watch for litter. When you find it, install a trash container in that immediate vicinity.

The Rooms Chronicle

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Simplify work and enjoy life more\

Continued from Page 1

for each suggestion. For instance: leave the briefcase at work, keep weekends for personal use, eliminate the commute and take vacations. St. James is very specific about how to find more time in the workday to accomplish those suggestions. Here are some examples from her book:

Seize time

St. James recommends asking, "Do I really need to do this now? Or do I need to do it at all?" In other words, schedule selectively. And, she cautions, "Don't forget that work expands to fill the time allotted for it."

Control the telephone. Set specific times to make and return phone calls. Hotel managers may choose to delegate phone coverage to make time for paperwork.

Control e-mail. Check it only once a day. Ask to be deleted from group lists for receiving jokes or forwarded e-mails. Use filters to eliminate junk e-mails. Don't receive personal e-mails at work.

Take five minutes at the end of each day to clean up and organize for tomorrow.

Eliminate junk mail

St. James maintains that junk mail steals precious time. She recommends the following resources for eliminating unwanted mail.

Mail Preference Service, P.O. Box 9008 Farmingdale, NY 11735 – send a postcard to be removed from junk mail lists.

888-5-OPT OUT to request that Equifax, Trans Union, Novas and Experian credit bureaus not use one's name. This will limit the credit card offers received.

Visit www.metrokc.gov/nwpc; click on "Reduce Business Junk Mail" sponsored by a Seattle-based organization, National Waste Prevention Coalition.

When placing orders by phone or mail or when making charitable contributions, ask that the name not be sold or passed along to other organizations.

Minimize paper

"Close to 90 percent of the paper you keep in files is never used or looked at again," St. James advises readers.

Therefore, limit magazines, reduce the number of memo copies, don't print out e-mails and don't print out computer documents to file manually.

She encourages workers to handle each piece of paper only once and provides great details about how to organize mail into priorities.

Be more productive

Another important step to review one's work habits is to analyze ways to be more productive. St. James provides many suggestions.

- Get organized. "A place for everything and everything in its place," she writes. Keep the desk clear except for the project of the moment. Keep work tasks separate, i.e., keep the phone, messages and notes to the side, perhaps on a credenza. Keep the computer and necessary notes on a computer stand to the side. Keep project papers in a file folder, easy to reach in a moment as needed.
- Reduce time spent fighting with the computer. Take a course in basic troubleshooting skills, buy a manual or arrange for someone with skills to assist.
- Make better decisions. Take courses for decision making and learn how to grasp information more quickly and thoroughly.
- Eliminate distractions. This may mean closing the office door sometimes. Or standing up when someone enters so they don't settle into a chair for a long chat.
- Use a timer to limit meetings, provide project reminders, keep the schedule moving.
- Take a lunch break. Use it "to step back a bit each day and gain a whole new perspective on (the) business," writes St. James. If lunch meetings require working through the break period, take a separate break for a brisk walk or even a brief nap.
- "When in overwhelm, stop," warns the author. Take the day off and refocus. Or at least take a quick walk around the block. Breathe deeply, walk fast.

Get a life

Too many young hospitality supervisors and managers create their life around the hotel. St. James advises people to consciously make a break between work and home. She suggests creating a personal life by doing some of the following things:

- Contribute to the community
- Do something for the environment

- Help someone through a crisis or create time for a friend
- Get in touch with relatives outside the immediate family
- Spend time with nature
- Eat well and exercise
- Have a hobby
- Get enough sleep
- Resolve emotional issues
- Add spirituality to your life
- Have fun

"I believe there'll soon come a time when our work schedules of the last two decades are seen as a period of temporary cultural insanity," writes St. James. "In addition to the millions of baby boomers who're cutting back, there are millions of GenXers coming into the workplace who've seen their parents burn out working long hours for companies that didn't value their efforts or treated them as a disposable resource."

St. James continues the book with great tips for being more effective with people, i.e., a boss, the staff, peers; setting boundaries; and giving opinions. She follows with essential tips for living within one's income *plus* how to generate more income. In the final chapters, St. James explains how to create options for work situations including telecommuting, job sharing and flex schedules. She ends with ideas about how to change the way work is perceived, reinventing oneself and changing one's belief system.

St. James asks, "What's to be gained by waiting?" Make changes now. "If you start now, you could be well ensconced in your new profession in five or three or two years or less. Do you want to look back when you're forty, fifty, sixty, or seventy and say, 'If only I'd started back then I could be finished by now?' And in the meantime, do you really want to spend the rest of your life doing what you're doing now? Do you want to spend even another year doing it? Another six months? Another day?" Stop procrastinating. Simplify life now. ✧

Read more about it:

"Simplify Your Work Life: Ways to change the way you work so you have more time to live" by Elaine St. James. Hyperion, 2001.

(Aleta Nitschke, CHA, is publisher emeritus and founder of The Rooms Chronicle. an@roomschronicle.com.)



Effects of overbooking can be costly

All too often, hotel managers find themselves in a quandary as they are “setting up the house” for the coming evening because there are more scheduled arrivals than there are available guestrooms. In other words, the hotel is overbooked. This scenario is not uncommon in hotels today. The hotel manager who is faced with an overbooked house must take quick action to address the problem that may confront him or his employees later that evening — the irate guest with a confirmed reservation.

Overbooking is not as rare an occurrence in hotels as it once was. The lodging industry has learned the yield management business strategy well from the airline trade. Hotels are representing themselves as warm, inviting abodes of accommodation only to counter this characterization by shuffling displaced guests like a deck of cards. Unfortunately, too often it is the individual behind the hotel’s front desk who has to deal with this explosive issue late at night when there is “no room at the inn.”

Today’s travelers are becoming savvier and more demanding. Consumer expectations are running at an all-time high while the perception levels of those consumers regarding service and satisfaction attained continues to dwindle. Up until the tragic events that occurred in the United States on September 11, 2001, the collective hotel industry continued to enjoy record profits. This is no longer the case as hotels fight for occupancy and market share just to attain break-even status, let alone seek to boost profitability.

While calculated and precise overbooking can increase the hotel’s bottom line in the short term, it should be noted that there are long-lasting detrimental effects to this tactic. When choosing to overbook, management should consider the following questions:

- What is the anguish and stress that is experienced by a displaced guest in an unfamiliar city late at night?
- What is the anxiety and stress that a front desk clerk or night auditor must endure on a sold-out night as guests vent their frustration at being relocated?

- While the hotel might make a short-term profit, or at least maximize its revenues for the evening, will it cost more in the long term?

According to Professor Carolyn Lambert of Penn State University, overbooking of guestroom reservations is the most widely used management tactic to minimize financial loss due to cancellations and no-shows. Indeed, no-shows are a fact of life in the hotel business. Not all hotels are faced with the prospect of full houses every evening; therefore, hotels often seize the opportunity to produce greater revenue by ensuring that 100 percent revenue will be collected through overbooking. But this tactic is not without its problems because the costs associated with overbooking are numerous.

First is the monetary expense associated with displacement. If a hotel overbooks reservations, it is customary practice for the hotel to secure and pay for comparable alternate lodging accommodations elsewhere. After adding in the room rate, occupancy tax, transportation costs, telephone charges, and labor costs associated with carrying out this procedure, it can be at least the equivalent, and in many cases, far more than the opportunity cost lost by leaving the room vacant and ready.

Training costs and employee stress must also be scrutinized when a hotel considers the option to overbook. Many front line employees are not trained to carry out a hotel’s overbooking policy. There are monetary and staffing costs to contemplate as well as the morale costs associated with being forced to carry out the unpleasant and often volatile task of walking a guest. Because of management’s decision to overbook the hotel, line employees are often subjected to verbal abuse, open hostility and extreme derision from upset guests. The inevitable result is plummeting morale, decreased job satisfaction and increased employee turnover. Each of these factors has a pecuniary amount attached to them.

Finally, the greatest but most immeasurable outlay associated with hotel overbooking is the cost resulting from ill will and negative publicity. Assuredly, a displaced guest who is

not keen to the idea of being relocated cannot be counted on to positively promote the lodging facility. Remembering the 10-7-3 rule for negative service experiences, each walked guest can be counted on to be the root of 290 negative stories and perceptions about that lodging establishment; 290 potential customers may be lost each time a hotel relocates a reservation holder.

There are definitely two sides to the argument of whether to overbook the hotel. Those who believe in overbooking make the case that not only are revenues maximized, but relocated guests receive adequate compensation and some may even become real fans of the hotel when the relocation is handled with finesse. On the other side, many managers will not overbook because they believe relocations do not result in long-term profits or that the tactic is ethically questionable. Those who do not overbook have found other means to guarantee their revenues, e.g., hefty non-refundable advance deposits. The challenge is for managers to make the most profitable choice for their particular hotel while keeping in mind the effects that their decision will have on guests and employees. ♦

Read more about it:

- In the next issue of TRC, read how managers can maximize profits without overbooking.
- Related articles in TRC Vol. 2, No. 1; Vol. 2, No. 2; and Vol. 5, No. 4 offer the how to’s of obtaining 100 percent occupancy with finesse.

(William D. Frye, Ph.D., CHE, is the executive editor of TRC and an assistant professor of hotel management at Niagara University.)



Public, employee spaces need spring cleaning

Mention the word “spring” to executive housekeepers and they automatically add the word “clean.” Spring and clean are two words that just go together for managers who focus on the housekeeping side of hotels. And the words provoke vivid images. Say “spring clean” and thoughts pop up of airing it out, washing it down, cleaning it up and throwing it out. Dreams prevail of having everything fresh and organized. But how can a manager change this dream into reality? How can spring cleaning really happen?

After all, most year-round hotels do not have budgets for extra spring-cleaning hours. Their budgets are strictly based on productivity measures attached to rooms rented. And, aren't hotels supposed to look their best ALL the time? Yes, the goal of every housekeeping manager is to maintain a perfect hotel. Job descriptions and task lists are written to keep public areas and employee areas clean and organized on a daily basis.

Still, there are some projects that need to be done only annually or biannually. Think chandeliers. Think pool furniture. Then think about projects that seem to get shoved aside because there is never enough time. Like cleaning out linen discards. Like equipment inventories. Like organizing uniforms. Think about paperwork that stacks up until it falls over.

The public and employee spaces of hotels need “spring cleaning.” Whether the housekeeping department accomplishes the work in the spring or at another time of the year, the work must be done. Here's how:

- Prepare the project list and prioritize tasks.
- Work within the budget. Find the necessary hours and money for expenses within the department's budget. Perhaps hotel revenues have been ahead of budget and there's a little

money to use. Perhaps job descriptions can be temporarily reorganized to include the spring-clean project. Perhaps the owner approves a budget for a special project. Whatever the situation, do not overrun the department's budget unless given approval by the general manager and controller.

- If the project involves another department, i.e., scrubbing behind the bar in the lounge, schedule a realistic time period for cleaning.
- Get in the mood. Prepare the staff, make it fun and get the work done.
- Going forward, ensure more of the projects are included in routine task schedules so that next year's spring-cleaning list will not be so long.

Typical spring-clean projects

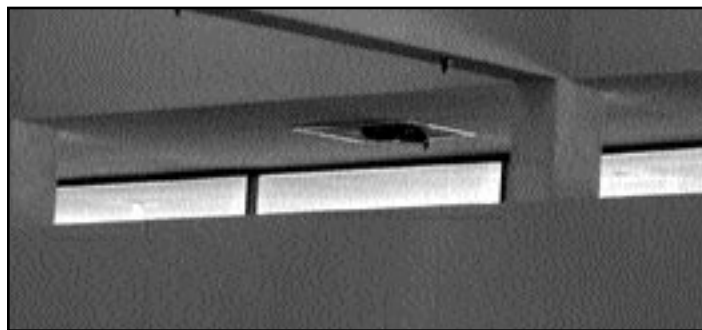
- Clean up the housekeeping office area including outdated bulletin boards, chipped furniture, scratched walls.
- Review job descriptions, task lists and training materials to ensure they are up-to-date.
- Review employee files. Have they been kept current? Are all important papers included? Has employee training and performance been documented?
- Check Material Safety Data

Sheets. Is there one for every chemical being used? Are the sheets readily available to employees?

- Throw out old memos, newspapers, magazines and forms. Use a paper shredder for destroying sensitive information.
- Inspect and clean rollaways, cribs, refrigerators, handicap equipment. Take an inventory. Be prepared to make recommendations for capital expenditures.
- Gather housekeeping equipment (buffers, floor polishers, mop buckets, vacuums, carts) to a central area and scrub them down. Take an inventory. Then take a

➡ Continued on Page 5

Pictured below: Old balloons, especially this one blocking an air vent, should be removed. Try putting gum or another sticky substance on another inflated balloon on a long tether and allow the gummed balloon to “kiss” the old balloon. When they are “stuck,” gently pull both balloons down.



Pictured at right: Artificial flowers must be cleaned. Use a hair dryer to dust them or wash if possible.



Effective leadership motivates employees

Who is a leader in the hotel? The owner? The general manager? The director of sales? How about the front-desk supervisor? The head steward? The restaurant shift supervisor? All of these managers should demonstrate effective leadership qualities. And through their leadership, employees will be motivated to do their best work.

Effective leader traits

Here are a few things managers can do to be effective leaders.

- Make others feel important. If goals and decisions are self-centered, followers will lose their enthusiasm quickly. Effective leaders emphasize employee strengths and contributions.
- Promote a vision. Followers need a clear idea of where they are being led and they need to understand why that goal is valuable to them. For example, a leader could say, "Within the next three months we will improve our guest comment ratings by 20 percent."
- Admit mistakes. If employees suspect that leaders are covering up their own errors, employees will hide their mistakes, too. Effective leaders understand that mistakes provide valuable information for making decisions.
- Criticize others only in private. Public praise encourages others to excel, but public criticism only embarrasses and alienates everyone.
- Stay close to the action. Leaders must be visible to all team members. They talk to people, visit work sites, ask questions and observe how business is being handled. Often leaders will gain new insights into their work and find new opportunities for motivating their followers.
- Make a game of competition. The competitive drive can be a valuable tool when leaders use it correctly. They set team goals and reward members who meet or exceed them. Leaders examine their own failures but celebrate their group's successes. Competition can be fun.

A reoccurring concern for hoteliers is how to keep employees motivated. Many feel turnover occurs primarily within the first month or two of employment or possibly after an employee has become bored. Although a high degree of motivation comes from within, effective leaders give their employees these benefits to increase their motivation: achievement, power, affiliation, autonomy, esteem, safety/security and equity.

Achievement

- Find advancement opportunities for employees — even outside the department. Obviously, it would be better to keep good workers in the department but, if there are no opportunities for them there, actively seek out promotion possibilities in other departments. Loss of a good worker will be offset by the image of goodwill projected. Employees will realize that their leader cares about their future.
- Mix up the workload. Effective leaders don't overload employees with "grunt" tasks only. It's demoralizing. Instead they find out what specialized skills employees may have and take advantage of them. And they stretch their employees by sometimes assigning tasks that are new to the employee.

Power

- Give employees plum assignments. When possible, find special assignments for exceptional workers — assignments that offer a welcome change of pace. For instance, have them be part of the quality team or ask them to represent the department at a safety committee meeting.

Autonomy

- Let employees participate in setting their own schedules. Offer flexible hours. Although the hotel industry has historically had set shift work, such inflexible shifts are not mandatory. With part-time employees, shared job strategies and other new scheduling tactics, employees can be given a say in their work schedules.

Affiliation

- Assign a mentor. Employees will feel more like part of the team and the mentor will feel good about the added responsibility. Important: Pick mentors who are patient and have time to answer questions.

Esteem

- Effective leaders are very specific about what they praise. They don't say, "Frank, you are doing a great job, keep up the good work." Instead they say, "Frank, you did a great job on the association check-out. Keep up the good work."

Safety and security

- Leaders who are good motivators provide safe and secure work environments for their employees. They provide thorough orientation. Job duties are described, as are the basic rules, e.g., safe working habits, employee responsibilities, etc.

Equity

- Employees are motivated by effective incentive programs. For example — if the front office completes a perfect sell-out with no walks, reward front desk, night audit and reservations with a cash payout. If the housekeeping department achieves a quarter without injuries, reward them. ♦

(Deborah T. Curtis' industry experience ranges from ownership of a 60-room Super 8 to sales and marketing director at a 500-room Hilton to national sales director with a convention and visitors bureau. She currently is the program director at The Statler Institute of Hospitality Management at Canisius College and the marketing manager for The Rooms Chronicle.)



Safety culture — what's good for the goose ...

"Is safety something you do or is it how you do everything?" This is a question that should be considered by every manager and every employee of every hotel.

The engineering department of one hotel recently completed 12 years without a lost-time injury. In a brief ceremony honoring the current staff of 20 engineers, the director gave credit to his predecessor (the hotel's original director of engineering) for establishing a culture of working safely. From the first days of the department, safety was not something the employees did in addition to their normal duties — it was the way they did everything. How can a manager make safe work practices the culture of the department?

Training

The safe way of completing a task should be incorporated into every training session the hotel performs. This may sound overwhelming, but as new associates are taught how to perform their normal tasks, they should be taught how to perform those tasks safely. The ideal situation would be to have JSAs (Job Safety Analysis) for all tasks. Realistically, very few hotels have such detail available to their employees. JSAs explain each task in individual steps and provide the correct way to perform each motion. While many managers know to avoid twisting as loads are moved from beside the body to a position in front of the body, most people don't think about each step, i.e., "Move your position 90° to the right, moving your feet as you do so." This detail is included in JSAs.

Documentation

Is a good incident investigation conducted when an injury occurs? Imagine this was the entry into the file: "Jim, a houseman, fell off a guestroom chair in room 413." This entry does not tell the full story. A good investigation would reveal more about what happened

and why it happened. For instance, what was Jim doing that required him to reach higher? Perhaps he was replacing the cover on the smoke detector. Why wasn't a work order written for an engineering associate (qualified for such a task) to make the repair? Why was a chair used instead of a ladder? Are associates taught to work safely or are they allowed to take unsafe shortcuts to complete tasks? The details discovered while documenting the incident will help identify safety procedures for the future.

Consequences

What happened after Jim's fall? Does the entry say, "He fell on the bed and there was no injury. We checked the bed frame, no repairs necessary." Or perhaps the entry says, "Jim went to the clinic, his shoulder was strained. He's learned his lesson; he won't be doing that again." Both are unsatisfactory responses to this incident. Jim's manager and/or human resources director should have conducted a counseling session with Jim. Jim should have been reminded of the safety instructions he received at hiring and frequently thereafter. He should have been reminded that all associates are expected to work safely. The session should have ended with Jim agreeing that he was in error to stand on a chair and wrong to try to perform work outside his field of expertise. A counseling statement signed by both Jim and his manager should have been placed in Jim's personnel folder. The pain and embarrassment associated with an injury should not be the only consequence for the unsafe act. If associates know their only "punishment" will be the injury they incur, they are much more likely to take a chance. They are likely to break or bend the rules of the work situation to do whatever is easy or convenient.

Costs

Room attendants are seldom injured in their last room. Waitstaff are seldom injured at the end of a busy lunch hour. Rather, it seems associates are injured when they are most needed. And it's not just the injured associate who is lost from productivity. Someone has to attend to the injured associate. Someone

has to complete paperwork. Someone has to render first aid or transport the injured party to the medical facility. Suddenly the department has two or three persons who have become nonproductive. In addition, there are costs for the medical attention and pay for time away from work. Of course, workers' compensation insurance will cover some costs, but the claims will eventually be reflected in next year's premium.

What's good for the goose ...

To have a successful culture where safety is an integral part of work practices, all managers, beginning with the general manager, must set the example. They must demonstrate by their actions and their philosophy that unsafe practices and unsafe conditions will not be tolerated. This is the moral attitude to take toward associates. This is also the smart thing to do from an operational standpoint. Establish a culture where everyone has a habit of working safely. It's financially a smart way to do business and will result in happier associates who understand their company cares about staff well-being. ♦

(Jesse Denton is manager of loss prevention for Starwood Hotels and Resorts. E-mail: jdenton@starlodge.com.)

Hot tip

The hotel's risk management spring cleaning might include checking whether responses have been sent back to all insurance recommendations. Even if it is not possible to complete the actions recommended or the staff disagrees with a recommendation, all such reports should have a reply. It may be useful to review the reply with the hotel's insurance agent and/or lawyer. Appearing to have ignored reports sends a very bad message.

Wash it down, clean it up, throw it out!

Continued from Page 4

needed to engineering for checks of belts, brushes, motors, cords, etc.

- Review uniforms. Separate ragged, worn and obsolete uniforms and remove from inventory. Sell to employees, donate to local charities or throw them out.
- Tear into the stacks of miscellaneous linen in the laundry room. Stained pieces that cannot be reclaimed, torn pieces and obsolete pieces should be discarded. Sell, donate, cut-up for rags or toss.
- Conduct an inventory of employee lockers and have a cleanout. Post a notice for

employees to remove personal items. Scrub down the lockers, spray for pests and reissue as necessary.

- Perform regularly scheduled biannual or annual projects such as stripping and resealing marble floors or cleaning lobby chandeliers.
- Walk through the building with a new set of eyes. Recognize all the things that are ignored on a daily basis and add them to the project list for spring cleaning. For instance, the scotch tape bits on meeting room walls or the upholstered furniture in need of shampooing.

- An important annual project is the intensive building walk-through by the chief engineer and the executive housekeeper. The sole purpose of the walk-through is to evaluate furnishings, fixtures and equipment to recommend short- and long-term replacement schedules for the capital budget preparation. Every FF&E item in the hotel should be reviewed, room by room and space by space.

Pictured below: Locker cleanout and equipment cleanup are two important projects that should happen annually.



More tips for spring cleaning

- For Donna Bowman, the executive housekeeper at Arrowwood Resorts and Conference Center in Alexandria, Minn., spring cleaning means preparing an outdoor pool, pool deck, boardwalk and outdoor activity areas. Working closely with the engineering staff, the pool is cleaned and painted, the furniture is brought from storage and scrubbed with bleach to whiten it, and the boardwalk is scrubbed and restrained. Pest control is called to spray all outdoor areas including the exterior of the building. Using long-handled squeegees, the windows are washed. "We wash windows two days of every week," says Bowman, "so we really stay on top of that project all year long."
- Sometimes spring cleaning requires rental of equipment not otherwise used at the hotel. For instance, a cherry picker for high cleaning. A steam cleaner for upholstery, drapes and walls. A pressure washer for driveways and dock areas. And don't forget to rent a big, open dumpster to handle the trash if the whole hotel staff signs up for a "spring-cleaning" day.
- Find a worthy charity for hotel discards. Work with the general manager to identify a charity organization that will gladly accept discarded hotel furniture and linens. Recently, a large hotel in Minneapolis changed from incandescent to fluorescent light bulbs. Thousands of lightbulbs were given to a charity organization that was thrilled to pass them along to needy families.

With a good plan in place and a spring-cleaning mindset, it is possible to create a perfect hotel and achieve the goals of the housekeeping manager. Whether the clean-up and clean-out is accomplished in a day or a month or over the course of a year, spring cleaning is necessary. ♦

Emergency Preparedness

At presstime, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security had increased the terror alert to orange/high and warned the nation of possible attacks against "soft targets." On the list of potential soft targets are hotels.

To protect guests and employees, hotel managers have an obligation to prepare their facility and staff for the possibility of a terrorist attack. Here are a few web sites where managers will find the necessary information to plan their strategy:

- www.fema.gov. FEMA's web site has instructions and ideas for natural and man-made emergencies. In particular, their "Are You Ready?" section has complete procedures for cyber attacks, building explosions, bomb threats, suspicious parcels, chemical, biological, nuclear or radiological attacks.
- www.whitehouse.gov/homeland. At this site, managers can find the names of their state's homeland security officials.
- www.redcross.org/. The Red Cross gives sound advice for emergency preparation for businesses as well as individual, family and school safety tips. Easy to understand suggestions are given.

(Mary Friedman, executive housekeeper of the 575-room Radisson Hotel South in Bloomington, Minn., has been featured in housekeeping textbooks published by the Educational Institute of the American Hotel and Lodging Association.)



Spring cleaning can bring success in '03!

As the first quarter kicks off a new year in reservations, it is a good time to do some spring cleaning to ensure the hotel is positioned for success.

- A good place to start is cleaning out files of old reports and paperwork. It can be easy to accumulate information and paperwork over the course of the year and lose sight of the trees for the forest. Things that can be thrown away include the following: group files older than two years if they are not returning or recurring groups; duplicate copies of old occupancy forecasts; old call conversion sheets; daily revenue summaries if they are maintained on the computer; department schedules from previous years; and VIP lists from previous years. Recap the previous year by pulling any reports that will be of use to the hotel when making rooms inventory decisions and archive all others that are not needed. And definitely dispose of things that are duplicates of files the sales office maintains.
- Then clean out the computer files. Company profiles that are obsolete can be discarded. Group resumes no longer in use can be deleted. Old interoffice memos that are irrelevant should be trashed.
- Clean up the office. Wash the fingerprints off the computer equipment and filing cabinets. Update the bulletin boards. Change the furniture layout. Have a paint party to liven up the walls. Do the little things that will help give a fresh, spring-clean feeling to the office.
- Promise to meet with local hotel reservation managers and follow through with real meetings. Knowing the competitors can keep managers sharp.
- Review all the guest information that is obtained by the reservation agents and determine what has been learned from the data collection.

Should different information be collected? Has the hotel staff gleaned valuable data about client preferences? If not, why?

- Review the rate schedules. Every hotel will find miscellaneous rates that were offered at one time but are no longer used. Clean them out.
- Ensure that the entire reservations team is fully comfortable with the rates that are being quoted. Be sure that everyone "believes" in the product and can sell with confidence to close a deal. This can mean doing updated market research to be sure that the hotel has the most current information on what the marketplace is doing in regard to rates for the various seasons. Then meet as a team to review how the rates are quoted. With confidence and belief in the product, staff will achieve a higher closure percent and higher ADR.
- Be sure everyone has the tools to succeed. Evaluate staff abilities to be sure they have a good understanding of the basic selling skills required to effectively convert inquiries into bookings. Discuss as a team the common obstacles or objections they receive and brainstorm how to effectively overcome these issues. Role-play the strategies and responses. When all are on the top of their games, everyone will be able to outsell the competition.
- Make sure there are strategies in place to keep the reservations team motivated throughout the year. Highly motivated employees have higher closure rates and higher ADRs. Remember, motivation does not have to be connected to money. There are many creative ways to motivate. For example, set up trade-outs with local restaurants and hotels. The service traded can be given away as an award. Create certificates or honor an employee of the week for doing a job well, handling a situation well or doing a great job of upselling. Often verbal recognition either one-on-one or in front of peers in a meeting can be very motivating. Telling someone he did a great job can make his day.

There are plenty of fun cards to give an employee for doing a great job: thank yous, encouragement or congratulations on an achievement. People like to know that their efforts are recognized and they will take great pride in this recognition. Motivated employees will achieve more.

- Set tangible goals. While the hotel may have budget goals for the year, creating steppingstones of smaller goals that are tangible and measurable will help keep everyone on track throughout the month to meet month-end budgets. These steppingstone goals are measured and recognized in the short term as goals are met. For example, the staff might establish a weekly goal of how many rooms to sell at a specific rate category, versus at a discounted rate. Or, establish a goal for the number of "upsells" to close in a particular week or month.

Most hotels are eager to increase revenues over the previous year. Many are hoping to make up any deficits experienced in 2002. It will take more than having a budget in place to achieve these objectives. Adopt a spring-clean attitude in reservations for the office and the staff, put a plan in place, motivate the team to follow the plan, make the plan tangible and measurable, track success and recognize results! A good spring cleaning will help 2003 be a successful year! ♦

(Reservation tip provided to The Rooms Chronicle by Lisa Richards, principal of Hospitality Softnet, (617) 854-6554 or TRC (866) READ TRC.)



Pictured at right: Use the spring-cleaning fever to get rid of piles like this.



Indoor air quality improved by new products

Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) is an issue for the traveling public and the hospitality industry. As recently as 10 years ago, most hotels offered fewer nonsmoking guestrooms than smoking rooms. Now, however, in most hotels, guestrooms available for smoking guests have decreased as a percent of inventory over the past decade. This industry trend of fewer smoking rooms is related to the hotel industry reaction to social trends and the increasing public awareness of the health hazards of smoking.

The hotel industry-wide average is now more than 80 percent smoke-free rooms except for casino hotels where 40 to 50 percent of the inventory is usually smoking guestrooms.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) report tobacco smoke by-products in the blood stream of Americans have fallen dramatically in the past decade. Cotinine, a breakdown product of nicotine, is measured in the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (HNANES), conducted periodically by the CDC in Atlanta. Cotinine in the blood of nonsmoking

adults has fallen 75 percent in the past decade, from .20 nanograms per milliliter of blood in the 1988-1991 survey to .050 nanograms in 1999. This decline reflects the drop in exposure to secondhand smoke though indoor smoking bans and decreased smoking overall.

This is good news for the public, but there are still issues regarding smoking that remain for the hospitality industry.

1. With fewer smoking guestrooms available, there is a concentration of use for the smoking rooms because smokers are not spread throughout the property.
2. Hotel operators report it is more typical to run short of nonsmoking rooms because of increased demand.

The above circumstances raise several operating issues:

- Maintenance of heavily used smoking guestrooms.
- Converting smoking rooms to nonsmoking status on short notice.

- Concern for room attendant's working environment.

Current design exacerbates these operating issues because many hotels do not have operable windows that allow fresh air ventilation. In addition, most heating-ventilating-air-conditioning (HVAC) designs call for only 40 to 80 cubic feet per minute of make-up air for ventilating a guestroom. This low quantity of fresh make-up air causes the exchange rate to be less than once per hour, limiting the unit's ability to improve air quality.

To overcome the above limitations of guestroom odor control, several companies have developed products that work by neutralizing amine ions and sulfur-based ions, the two main contributors of noxious odors caused by smoking. These products are not chemical based but contain all natural, organic ingredients to bond with or encapsulate odor molecules. Thus, these products neutralize odors rather than mask odors with a substitute odor.

Also, these products are nontoxic, nonhazardous, biodegradable and environmentally safe. In addition to being safe, they are easily applied with atomization or by a room attendant using a spray bottle. Employees simply spray the room when they enter, and the air is freshened while they work.

These new products are being manufactured by several companies, including Green Suites International and Bio-Science Environmental Services. Managers should seek products with the qualities listed above, request user references, review Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS), test the product, especially on installed room fabrics, and most important, give the room attendants an opportunity to comment and approve. ♦

(Hugh Allen Smith, CHA, has extensive experience as vice president of operations for several hotel companies with a strong background in development and construction.)

Energy savings\

Continued from Page 10

rooms via digital programmable thermostats and the set-back of temperatures during unoccupied periods via the motion-sensor temperature controls will both save energy and improve the space comfort of the room.

There are several good-quality thermostats and motion-control systems available. For instance, in the United States, a partial list of vendors include:

- Green Suites International Programmable Thermostats
- Hotelstat Programmable Thermostats
- Inn Comm Remote Thermostat and Motion Sensors
- Lodging Technology Remote Thermostat and Motion Sensor
- Energy IQ Motion Sensors

- Energex Motion Sensors

Experts always recommend that managers evaluate both types of systems from at least two different companies. The prices can vary substantially, therefore affecting the return on investment. Managers often obtain an analysis from an independent consultant because these purchases can be a major investment for the hotel, ranging from \$30,000 to \$100,000. And managers involved in renovation or construction of a new hotel should weigh the guest comfort benefits and energy savings benefits of purchasing good-quality, easy-to-control thermostats and sensors for guestrooms. ♦

(Phil Sprague is a member of the AHLA Executive Engineers Committee and president of PSA Consultants, Minneapolis, Minn. (952) 472-6900.)



Space comfort versus energy conservation

Most reputable hotels are constantly trying to improve the guest experience in a variety of ways: facility renovations, guest service programs, free giveaways and bonus options. Some hotel chains are even incorporating guarantees of 100 percent guest satisfaction including money refunds. Yet there is one area of the guest's experience that is too often overlooked when managers are investing in improvements — the control of space temperature in the guestroom. This important guest comfort issue has become an essential element of creating satisfied customers.

Except for relatively new hotels, most temperature control devices in guestrooms are of very poor quality. For example, many controls for through-the-wall units have only a knob indicating “warmer” or “cooler.” These through-the-wall unit controls are easily fooled by infiltrating cold or warm air from outside the unit to the thermostat location. It is not unusual to observe a guest turning these knobs to maximum cooling or heating in an effort to correct uncomfortable space temperatures.

Similarly, in older hotels with central heating and cooling systems, most wall-mounted thermostats are relatively inaccurate. The inaccuracy forces guests to use maximum settings to try to find comfort.

Both situations for temperature control typically result in unhappy customers. Another consequence of inefficient controls is wasted energy. Guests generally set the thermostats in their maximum position and then leave the room for the day.

Over the past five years, there have been considerable improvements in the design and operation of guestroom temperature controls. The through-the-wall heating/cooling units are now provided with much better barriers between the inside and outside wall, significantly reducing air infiltration that can trick the thermostat. And all of the major units on the market today have elec-

tronic digital controls as part of the unit. However, since the in-unit digital control is still somewhat inaccurate, experts highly recommend remote thermostats for through-the-wall units. Here's why:

1. A remote thermostat, located on a guestroom wall, is better positioned to give a true room temperature report.
2. Remote thermostats can be programmed to set back temperatures in the room during normally vacant periods.
3. If the guest finds the temperature uncomfortable, he/she need only touch the thermostat control to bring the room to proper temperature settings.
4. Remote thermostats typically have a large digital readout that makes it easy to read and understand the room's temperature. The ease of operation is important for an aging population that may have difficulty with miniature numbers on thermostats or unclear directions for in-unit control knobs.

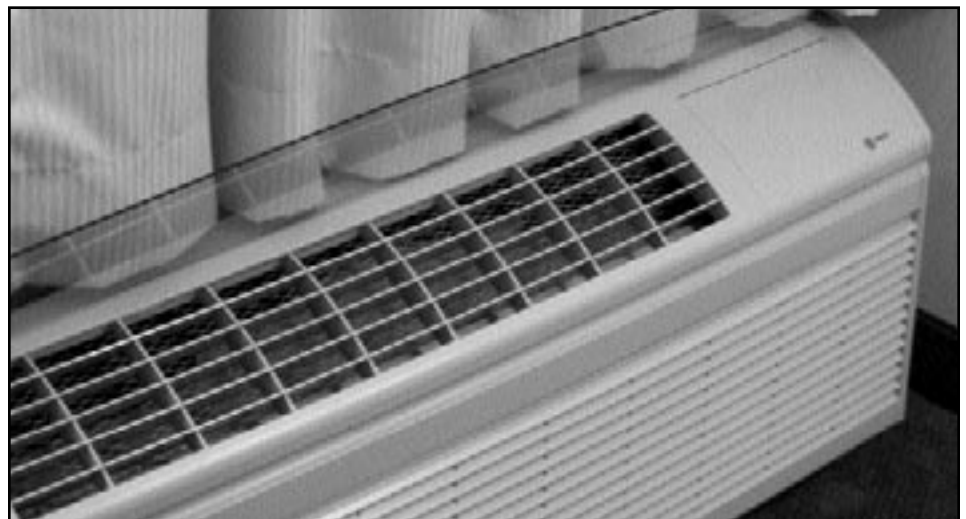
The cost of an acceptable remote thermostat should not exceed \$75, is simple to install (at a cost likely less than \$25) and should generate enough energy savings to pay for itself in less than two years.

As discussed in previous TRC articles, guestroom temperature and setbacks can also be controlled and monitored by ultrasonic or infrared motion sensors. These devices allow for more accurate setbacks of guestroom temperatures during unoccupied periods. The motion sensors are typically activated by some type of door switch. New designs incorporate signals from the hotel's electronic locking system to allow for even deeper setbacks during long unoccupied periods. Note that these motion sensors require professional installation because wiring must be threaded through the walls from the door to the motion sensor and to the through-the-wall unit. The cost of such a motion sensor system, depending on features included, can range from \$300 to \$500 per guestroom. Experience has shown that the return on investment is from three to four years, depending on occupancy and personality of the hotel. Although these devices can be used in hotels with central systems, the recognized energy savings may not be as great.

What about hotels with a central boiler and chiller type of system that utilize fan-coil units in the guestroom? These hotels can also benefit from high-quality thermostats or motion-control systems. The collection of accurate temperatures in occupied guest-

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Pictured below: A new, efficient HVAC unit such as this can be equipped with a remote thermostat and motion-control system.





Brooms sweep up as basic, useful tool

Imagine standing in the middle of a cornfield, the breeze blowing the tassels of the stalks, the sun warming the body, the smell of the rich, fertile earth. A hand reaches out for a plump, full ear and peels back the husk. But instead of the expected golden corn, there is a green, perfectly formed branch of hurl, the basic ingredient of a corn broom. And, rather than central Iowa, this field is located in central Mexico, where a large portion of the world's broom hurl is grown.

Corn brooms

The creation of a corn broom begins when the broom hurl is harvested and turned over to a processor. The processor moves the hurl to a processing plant, where it is dried, measured and graded. Hurl is then formed into giant wheels and delivered to a broom manufacturer where the wheel of hurl is broken down by an experienced worker. He uses the hurl to create a core for the broom around a connector. The worker has likely been doing this for so many years that he has no need for a scale but knows from heft and feel that he is selecting the exact amount of hurl required. The completed cores are passed to a winder who attaches a handle and winds a large handful of hurl onto the outside of the core with wire winding. After winding for the specified number of turns, he anchors the wire, cuts it and passes the broom to another worker. This final worker processes the broom through a machine that sews rows of stitches (the more rows, the higher the quality of the broom) and trims the ends of the hurl.

Broom hurl is nature's best sweeper. The naturally split ends are perfect for collecting even the finest dust and dirt. One hundred percent corn brooms are one hundred percent hurl and therefore are relatively expensive. A less expensive product is made by forming the core from grass and winding hurl only around the outside of the grass. Managers can tell the difference by standing a broom on end and running their hands through the business end. If all the material has split ends, it is one hundred percent corn. But if the center of the broom contains wider, unsplit fibers, it is a mixed grass and hurl construction.

Poly brooms

Corn brooms are excellent for dry floor maintenance. But for wet floor maintenance, the tool of choice is an upright poly broom. The poly fibers will not absorb liquids and can be rinsed clean of food residues. Poly brooms (so called because the fibers are polypropylene) may be split and flagged, creating the same dirt-catchers that nature provides in broom hurl. Splitting the poly fiber, as the name implies, is accomplished by cutting into the fiber at its end. Flagging is a process that abrades the side of the fibers to create a rough surface to catch and trap dirt. Or, poly brooms may be crimped or untreated to create a stiffer bristle. Many upright poly brooms are cut at an angle, to allow the brush to get into corners more effectively.

Push brooms

When heavy-duty cleaning tasks are encountered, the housekeeper's solution is a push broom. For relatively simple jobs, a medium duty push broom consists of a head and a handle. The heads are either wood or resin blocks that are drilled with polypropylene fibers staple-set into the head. Either a wood or metal handle is screwed into the head. The fiber used in the head may be soft, medium or heavy grade. For finer cleaning, such as smooth marble floors, a soft fiber that has been split and flagged is best. For coarse cleaning, such as dimpled concrete, select a heavy fiber that has been crimped and will move larger volumes of heavier debris.

- Basic push brooms are sold with the head separate from the handle. In general, the heads will wear out much faster than the handle.
- Store push brooms in an upright position with the head up. This will prevent the poly fibers from being crushed and rendered less effective in their cleaning operation.
- The life of a push-broom head can be extended by periodically rotating the handle to the opposing side, evening out the wear on the bristle.

For truly heavy-duty cleaning, push brooms are available with metal braces (referred to as tee-pee braces) that connect from the head to the handle and reinforce the anchoring of the handle. Braces allow for significant pressure to be applied to the broom without twisting the head. There are many specialty push-broom heads that are manufactured for heavy-duty cleaning, such as those containing a center row of steel wire for cleaning very coarse material. There are also push-broom heads that incorporate a squeegee to remove standing water and provide an "all-in-one" tool. A good vendor will provide advice for selecting the exact fiber and bristle combination for a hotel's specific needs.

Brooms have been used for cleaning since man first decided it was time to clean out his cave. Today brooms remain a basic tool — and one of the most useful — of the housekeeping trade. Remember, a humble corn broom has a wonderful history. It was created by highly skilled artisans who pass their craft down from generation to generation. When it's cold and frosty outside, imagine the sun and smell of the field where the corn broom got its start. ♦

(About our guest columnist: Joe Rook, MHS, a 25-year lodging industry veteran is vice president, industrial sales, for Quickie Mfg. Corp., a leading manufacturer of cleaning tools. He is happy to answer your questions. jrook@quickie.com.)





Pros and cons of rooms special cleaning

Spring cleaning in hotel guestrooms is something that occurs all year long. While there are seasonal resorts that begin their year by deep cleaning all guestrooms, most commercial hotels must perform spring cleaning all throughout the year. The challenges for an executive housekeeper are many.

Find the money

Most housekeeping budgets allocate payroll based strictly on projected occupancy. Just as there seldom is a budget line for training, there is never a line for spring cleaning. So it is the executive housekeeper's responsibility to find flexibility within the budget to perform the necessary tasks. The money must come from within the payroll lines with employees and tasks rearranged to get the necessary projects done. Most executive housekeepers are constantly reviewing their productivity schedules against their budget against the current occupancy as they "borrow from Peter to pay Paul."

Organize the tasks

The list of tasks required for spring cleaning guestrooms varies from hotel to hotel depending on room types and other cleaning schedules. But generally, a list of tasks would include items that are not reasonably included in a daily routine. For instance:

- Rotating mattresses
- Shampooing carpet and edges
 - Washing walls, baseboards, woodwork and doors
 - Washing windows
 - Freshening the air of the room
 - Washing or drycleaning drapes and sheers
 - Dusting high and hard to reach areas
 - Cleaning vents and fans

- Vacuuming under furniture
- Cleaning lampshades
- Stripping/resealing bathroom floors
- Steam-cleaning tub/shower walls
- Restocking the printed materials
- Applying scratch cover to wood furniture
- Cleaning sliding door tracks

Choose a method

There are three basic methods of accomplishing spring cleaning.

1. Deep-cleaning team
2. One room per room cleaner every day
3. Special project assignments

While some housekeeping executives prefer one of the three methods, others employ a combination of the methods in order to keep the hotel clean. There are definite pros and cons to consider about the different spring-cleaning methods.

Deep-cleaning team

Generally two room cleaners and one houseman comprise a deep-cleaning team. They receive special training to enable them to accomplish the specific tasks required. They are assigned rooms to deep clean whenever the executive housekeeper has the budget and enough availability of rooms. The team has responsibility for the entire hotel and maintains a chart of completed rooms to facilitate even rotation of cleaning.

PRO — The group works as a team and feels an ownership/responsibility of the building.

PRO — The team becomes very efficient with its work. The team members have a routine, they have the tools and they work well as a group.

PRO — The team members discover the condition of other room cleaners' sections and they coach and work with those cleaners to raise the standard of their work.

PRO — Labor costs for the team can be coded according to budget availability.

PRO — Engineering can be given the room assignment list and complete many of its projects in the rooms at the same time.

CON — Regular room cleaners may become lazy, deciding to let the deep-cleaning team perform certain tasks.

CON — A team may spring clean six to eight rooms per day, perhaps not a fast enough rate to get through the entire hotel often enough to keep the hotel's standards high.

CON — A team is most effective when a block of rooms in proximity to one another are blocked for cleaning. Sometimes finding enough adjacent rooms is difficult.

CON — It is not easy to find employees to do the tasks necessary for spring cleaning. First, workers who are excellent cleaners are required for deep cleaning. If the department is going to invest the money in completing this thorough cleaning, the result must be immaculate rooms. It will not be worth the effort if cleaners who cut corners are employed for these special tasks. Second, the workers must want to do the special tasks. They will have to move furniture, reach, stretch and perform other difficult tasks. The executive housekeeper's challenge is to recruit the best workers who are also willing to join the effort.

One room per room cleaner per day

Each morning of an average day, a room cleaner checks his/her checked-out room list against a master list of rooms needing to be deep cleaned. A room is selected and the room cleaner strips that room first. Linens are sent to the laundry to be processed and returned later in the day. The houseman receives a list of the room numbers selected by each room cleaner and he visits the room to move furniture or assist the cleaner.

PRO — Room cleaners who have responsibility for a section of the hotel take pride in deep cleaning the rooms of their section.

PRO — Rooms are deep cleaned frequently.

PRO — The laundry incorporates the linen requirements into their daily schedule.

CON — Not every room cleaner performs deep-cleaning tasks adequately.

CON — The labor involved can negatively impact productivity on the room-cleaner budget lines.

CON — Deep-cleaning rooms are usually not assigned on days of heavy check-outs or days when early check-ins are expected.

CON — Even with this system, some projects require special equipment, i.e., steam cleaner or carpet shampooer, that is best handled by an expert.

Special project assignments

Some hotel executives are comfortable using special project assignments to keep their rooms thoroughly cleaned. With this format, a project is given each morning for every room cleaner to accomplish in every room they are assigned for the day. For instance, one day's assignment might be to vacuum the drape valances while the next day may be to wash the entry doors.

PRO — Daily special project assignments seldom require extra payroll.

PRO — The executive housekeeper can assign projects that are timely based upon his/her knowledge of the rooms' condition.

CON — Paperwork to track project accomplishment can be onerous.

CON — Equipment must be purchased for each cleaner, i.e., high-dusting tools.

CON — Some projects still must be accomplished separately, i.e., shampooing carpets, moving furniture.

Getting the job done

Yes, it's important to have a very clean hotel at all times. Yes, it's important to clean each room well every day. But, yes, there are often projects that are not and should not be performed every day. For those projects, the executive housekeeper must implement special cleaning schedules. Keeping within the department's budget and using the housekeeping staff advantageously, the manager must devise ways to accomplish the necessary tasks. ♦

(Gail Edwards, CHHE, has participated in writing the AHLE's Educational Institute's housekeeping textbook.)



Signage, inventories and rub rails top the list for Gail

Dear Gail:

I have a question that I hope you can answer. We are redoing the signage on the back of the guestroom doors. What exactly do I need to have on the sign? Thank you.

CM
Garden City, N.Y.

Dear CM:

The law cards posted in guestrooms (usually on the back of the entry door) are required by STATE law to contain certain language. Contact the state hotel association or perhaps find the specific paragraphs on the state's web site. Another resource is the American Hotel Register Company (800-323-5686). The company sells preprinted law cards for each state.



Dear Gail:

We are struggling to start an efficient and accurate linen inventory process. Can you briefly outline a recommended process?

BG
Kingbridge Centre, U.K.

Dear BG:

First, be regular in the timing of your inventories. Next, be sure to use the same persons to count. Often it's a good idea to involve someone from the accounting office to help count. Next, use the same procedure each time. Since the linen inventory of a hotel is a "moving target" with linen dispersed throughout the building, it requires holding as many factors constant as possible. Be sure room attendants place an exact amount of linen in each guestroom so you can assume a number "in circulation." Make sure all dirty linen is in the laundry to be washed. Stop the movement of all linen. Count the storage rooms and carts and other locations and seal each one to prevent linen from being moved. Count the linen in the laundry room. Report the numbers on the hotel's forms. If you are having large discrepancies between inventory counts, perform the inventory more frequently until the system is understood and the

counts make sense. Be sure to determine the loss factors and ascertain whether they are within normal usage ranges. For more detailed information, check TRC's article, "How much linen does the hotel use?" Volume 8, No. 6, Pg. 8 and refer to the Laundry Operation Guidelines published by the National Association of Institutional Linen Management (NAILM).



Dear Gail:

We are discussing the installation of rub rails in our hallways. So far we are considering oak or other hardwood rails but cannot agree on the finish. Can you advise whether painted or stain and varnish is most durable and easiest to maintain? Hopefully this topic has been discussed in a TRC article.

DP
Rocky Mountain House, Canada

Dear DP:

Scott McLean, our engineering expert, recommends stain and varnish to provide a great decorative look, plus easier maintenance than painted surfaces. Use either a gloss or semigloss, possibly a marine type, durable finish varnish. He highly recommends that you use sample wood pieces to test the stain and finish to get exactly what you want. Don't forget to keep the lines of the rails simple to make cleaning easy.



Dear Readers:

Looking for information about how long hotel files and records must be kept? Visit www.hospitalitylawyer.com, "Forms/Checklists/Procedures" page. Sort by checklist and search for the item: "Document Retention."