



## Front Office

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

# Five immediate turnoffs that will negatively impress arriving guests

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

Notice: The ideas, opinions, recommendations, and interpretations presented herein are those of the author(s). The College of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Niagara University/*The Rooms Chronicle*® assume no responsibility for the validity of claims in items reported.

First impressions really do matter to guests! Everyone knows this but it seems that not every hotel fully embraces this concept.

In the early 1990's, Marriott hotels pioneered a concept known then as "First Ten". The intent was to streamline the check-in process so that waiting time would be virtually eliminated. The premise was that the first ten minutes during a guest's stay would determine whether the arriving guest would be satisfied or dissatisfied upon departure. It was theorized that inevitably some things will go wrong during a guest's stay, but these deficiencies could be overlooked or compensated for by the guest if everything went perfect during the guest's first ten minutes after arriving at a hotel. So, if the hotel could deliver perfect service for the first ten minutes, a guest would still be happy by the time they checked out of the hotel, even if one or more service failures occurred after the initial ten minute period.

Yet, in my extensive travels, I continue to see several service deficiencies within minutes of arriving at many hotels. Now might be a good time for you to check your own property through the eyes of an arriving guest to see if these negative impressions exist.

1) *The overly crowded porte cochere*: Too many cars or guests at the hotel's entrance leads to chaos, gridlock, and impatient guests. This situation may be the result of understaffing doorpersons and parking valets, lack of available parking, not enough taxis readily available, not enough bell carts for incoming luggage, or inclement weather. While you can't control the weather, your hotel can control the other variables. If guests cannot arrive under the covered porte-cochere because of too much traffic or they are forced to navigate a maze of cars, suitcases and people just to get inside, they probably are not going to be too happy once they do get to the front desk.

2) *Unightly outdoor appearances*: Here I am referring to overflowing trash cans, cigarette butts littering the main entrance, unshoveled sidewalks, foreign debris in flowerbeds and planters, and burned out lamps in exterior lighting. All of these deficiencies convey that the hotel does not care about its image to the community. Need I say more?

3) *Long queues at the front desk*: Long lines of people waiting to check in usually are the result of inadequate staffing at the front desk, onerous and lengthy check-in procedures, or not enough clean and vacant guestrooms in the inventory to accommodate the arrival flow. Again, while the hotel may not be able to manage the flow of arrivals, it has the ability to modify its staffing, scheduling and check-in procedures to better meet anticipated demand.

4) *Improper staff appearance*: Employees who are distracted talking amongst each other, who are poorly groomed, who communicate with guests using slang, jargon, or incoherent phrases are immediate turnoffs for arriving guests. In a similar fashion, guest service clerks who do not look up and make eye contact and greet guests as they approach the front desk send the message that their task at hand is far more important than the presence of the guest that makes their salary possible. Such an uncaring and dismissive attitude will be long remembered by the guest for the duration of their stay, especially if the front desk was not busy when the guest arrived.

5) *Poor signage and accessibility*: The goal should be to get the guest to their room as soon as possible; certainly in less than ten minutes. If the guest must ask the desk clerk where the elevators are, something went wrong. Did the clerk fail to point out the correct elevator that would deliver the guest to their floor in the most expedient manner? Or was there inadequate or poorly visible signage? Perhaps the elevators were too crowded to handle the flow of guests? No matter the reason, if the correct path to their guestroom is not readily apparent to the guest, the hotel has failed to meet the guest's expectation.

Undoubtedly, there may be other things that can adversely impact a guest's positive perception about a hotel upon arrival. The five areas presented here are the most common deficiencies that hoteliers should examine first. Looking at the first ten minutes of a guest's stay from their perspective and not yours will go a long way to increasing overall satisfaction.✧

(Dr. William D. Frye is a former resort general manager and conducts research on guest and employee satisfaction in the College of Hospitality and Tourism Management at Niagara University. E-mail: [wfrye@niagara.edu](mailto:wfrye@niagara.edu))