



Housekeeping

by Tim Burns, CHA, CHT

Missed opportunities to ensure quality and consistency - A day in the life of a bed sheet

*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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When I am channel surfing on TV, it becomes apparent to me how much reality television shows dominate the line up. Reality TV makes an attempt to record real people doing stuff in real life, but shows usually turn out to be aspiring actors being set up for conflict by manipulative producers. Although they are easy to make fun of, there are some reality TV shows that I found fascinating.

So, what if you could have that at your hotel and really see what is happening in your operations? In a case study of how things can go wrong in hotel operations, let's entertain the idea of "A day in the life of a bed sheet".

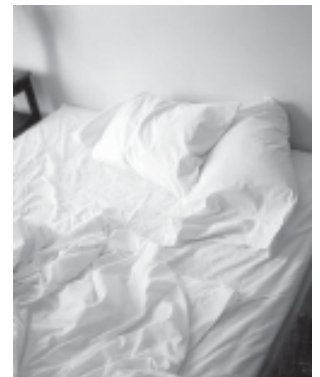
In the morning, the sheet is on a bed in a dirty room, waiting for the housekeeper to arrive. Unfortunately, when the room attendant strips the bed, she did not inspect the sheet for issues. If she did see a stain or damage she could have tied the sheet with a simple overhand knot to let everyone else know that this sheet needs special cleaning attention. This is the first inspection opportunity missed as the room attendant simply pulls sheets off of beds and takes them out of the guestroom.

Once outside of the guestroom, the attendant looks for a laundry cart, but it's not to be found as someone has taken it to another section of the hotel. The room attendant was going to put the sheets on the floor in the outside walkway, but she is smart, so she decides to throw them over the railing of the exterior corridor down to the ground floor walkway. Even though some sheets land on the asphalt parking lot, she thinks of how much time and effort has been saved by not having to walk up and down the stairs each time a guestroom is stripped of its linens.

Eventually, another housekeeping attendant returns with the laundry cart. She knows the sheets should not be on the ground so she scoops them up fast and stuffs them into the cart. Nobody saw this, so that is good for the staff not getting in trouble, but it was another opportunity for the sheet to be viewed when it was picked up.

Once in the laundry room, the sheet is taken out of the cart and put into the laundry extractor. Too bad the laundry worker was watching the small black & white TV while they were suppose to be diligently sorting and inspecting linens for condition and stain treatment. Another inspection opportunity is lost as the sheet is moved with efficiency from the cart to the washing machine.

When wash time is over, the sheet is now transferred from the washer to the dryer. Although you cannot view the entire sheet during this transfer step to the dryer, it is important to inspect what you can see. It's all too easy to just grab the wet stuff in the washer and toss it in the dryer without a second look, and that is what happened this time.



Frequently, drying times are usually set to dry too fast and the temperature is set too high. And since the laundry person is rushing their work, they do not let the linen cool down before folding. This places stress on the linen's threads and reduces its use life.

If you have ever worked more than two laundry shifts yourself, you know that you get to be an expert folder relatively quickly. Not only can you make the pretty fold, but you are consistent and fast, even with your eyes closed. This is not always good for the sheet as it comes out of the dryer. Instead of being inspected thoroughly, another opportunity is lost as the sheet is folded quickly and rushed back out into inventory.

Back on the housekeeper's cart, the room attendant grabs the sheet to make the bed. The room attendant trusts that the laundry person did a good job washing the linen so

they do not have to check it. "Why would a sheet be allowed back into the linen supply if it didn't meet the quality standards?" The bed is quickly made and the room attendant passes on the most important inspection opportunity when the bed is finally prepared for the guest.



The next day when the bed covers are pulled back and viewed by the guest bad news prevails. The “guest” turns out to be not a guest, but the hotel inspector during an official property assessment. The inspector sees the stained sheet and takes a picture. With a bewildered look, the owner turns to the executive housekeeper, who turns to look at the room attendant, who turns to look at the laundry attendant. The laundry attendant looks at her watch as if to say, “I need to go home early to inspect if my son did a good job cutting the grass before it gets dark because I am not going to pay him unless it’s done right!”

The moral of the story is that every employee who touches a sheet or towel has the responsibility for its condition. If all staff members are trained to be mindful of the linen standards every step of the way, these double and triple quality checks will ensure that the end user, be it guest or lodging inspector, will not face disappointment at the moment of truth. In the eyes of the guest, there is no excuse for staff complacency or such oversights. ✧

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