



# Housekeeping

by Gail Edwards, CHHE

## Communication between F&B and housekeeping departments critical to avoid costly mistakes

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Ineffective communication between a hotel's food & beverage and housekeeping departments can have detrimental consequences. Such miscommunication often results in excessive overtime for employees, increased replacement costs for table linens, broken or damaged laundry equipment, cross-contamination of laundered linens, delayed service to guests, and flared tempers for all involved.

While F&B is a front of the house, revenue-generating center, it relies extensively on the actions and abilities of back of the house support centers such as the housekeeping department to enable it to meet its goals of providing memorable F&B service experiences to the hotel's guests. Indeed, without clean table linens, how could most full-service F&B outlets survive? Hence, accurate, effective, and timely communication between the departments is vital for the smooth operation of both.

Presented below are various means by which an F&B department's failure to communicate effectively or follow standard linen procedures can result in detrimental consequences.

### Linen specifications

It's no surprise that F&B directors often have a preference for table linens that are comprised of high polyester content. Linens can be comprised of as much as 100% woven polyester. These permanent press linens are extremely durable, can withstand several repeated launderings, offer greater resistance to staining than high cotton-content linens, and incorporate a soil-release advantage that makes them easy to launder and maintain. However, unlike 100% cotton fabrics, high polyester-content linens can be difficult to shape because they don't hold starch well, are subject to increased fading due to repeated washings, and may scorch or melt due to extreme temperatures in the drying or pressing phase of the laundry cycle.

Many an executive housekeeper has been forced to summon the hotel's chief engineer to clean and repair a damaged flatwork iron roller due to melted synthetic napkins and table linens. If F&B management purchases synthetic linens without consulting the executive housekeeper or laundry supervisor, meltdowns with drying and pressing equipment will become commonplace. In addition, inoperable laundry equipment will result in increased maintenance and repair costs, delayed delivery of hotel linens to their respective departments, possible overtime pay, and increased frustration.

Not all linen contents are best laundered by the same pieces of equipment, and some fabrics are better finished using steam-heated pressers than gas-heated ironers. Hence, the executive housekeeper and laundry supervisor should be included in all linen purchase decisions in order to ensure that linen inventories can be maintained at optimum levels using the hotel's existing laundry equipment.

Pictured below: Housekeeping staff should communicate the procedures for using and recovering table linens in order to lengthen the use life of this major hotel expense item.



### Getting out of sorts

Since housekeeping and laundry personnel are removed from the F&B table linen collection process,

it is imperative that F&B employees be trained to comply with standardized linen collection procedures before delivering their dirty table linens to the hotel laundry.

All tablecloths, napkins, and double-cloths must be separated according to linen type and degree of soiling. This should be done by F&B personnel prior to delivering linens for laundering. Mixing table linen types may result in the misapplication of cleaning chemicals, increased or decreased time for laundering, or cross-contamination from excessively stained cloths. Moreover, by having F&B personnel sort the linens, they will likely discover overlooked silver and china, as well as errant food and beverage items that would continue to deteriorate table linen fabrics or might harm laundry equipment.

Never put linens in closed plastic or synthetic bags for transporting to the hotel's laundry. Wet or moist linens sealed in plastic bags spawn mildew and breed mold that can't be removed from affected linens. Mildew and mold can appear in linens in less than 24-hours. Once these unsightly black specks appear on table linens, the cloths are destined for the rag pile.

Keep all table linens off concrete floors and brick surfaces. It is not uncommon for a banquet server to deliver a sack of laundry slung over his shoulder to the hotel laundry on his way out the door. If no laundry workers are present, invariably the sack of soiled linens ends up on the laundry room floor. Unfortunately, the limestone that leeches from untreated or worn concrete and brick can immediately bleed into the fabric of the linens. Once this occurs, the staining cannot be removed from the fabrics. It is essential that F&B departments be provided dedicated laundry hampers and well-maintained transporting equipment. This will help protect the useful life of the linens and the F&B workers' backs. Transportation carts should allow the air to freely circulate (providing resistance to mold and mildew), and be dedicated exclusively to 'soiled laundry' or 'clean laundry' in order to prevent cross-contamination.

### **A napkin is not a rag**

To every executive housekeeper's annoyance, there are F&B employees that will use napkins as service cloths or to clean up spills. The result is the induction of excessive moisture onto the napkin and increased staining, wear and tear. More likely than not, these 'napkins of convenience' cannot be salvaged by laundry personnel, except for use as rag cloths in the true sense of the word. Servers and culinary personnel must be cognizant of potential misuse of dedicated table linens and the consequences. Table linens are a major expense for hotels. Typically, a food & beverage department may only possess two or three pairs of table linens. Misuse of table linens drives up replacement expenses and decreases the resources available for meeting guests' needs. ✧

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