



Housekeeping

by David M. Green

Communication tips for Housekeeping personnel

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Communication is something we use everyday; at home, at work and in our communities. In the housekeeping profession there are several methods of communication that we employ on a daily basis. We use telephone, voicemails, memos, letters, cards, faxes, emails, pagers, walkie talkies, PDAs, newsletters, bulletin boards, websites, signage, training materials, podcasts, web videos, etc. As you can see, the list is never ending and requires us as leaders to understand how to use each of these tools effectively. Social networks, such as *Facebook*, *LinkedIn*®, and *myspace.com* are even becoming a fast and exciting way of communication.

When you look at communications, often we think of two main categories: Written communication and oral communication.

Which communication method is more appropriate?

Oral communication is more appropriate when the emotions are high and the conversation allows the individual to let off steam and cool down, which can create more of a climate for understanding. Also, when one may need feedback, oral communication is easier to observe body language and ask questions throughout the conversation. If details and issues are complicated and cannot be well documented on paper, oral communication can be effective. It also allows for more flexibility and chances to listen and address resistance with peoples' attitudes.

Written communication is appropriate when a manager needs to record the communication for future reference. It also allows others to refer to the documentation later to refresh their memory, learn specific details about what was discussed or agreed to, and to address and follow up on details that might need to be changed later. Lastly, use written communications if you are communicating something with multiple parts or steps. This will help prevent communication breakdowns that can lead to oversights or misdirected attention.

Listen in order to communicate effectively

As part of effective listening it is important to be an active listener. It is often said that one should, "Listen with your eyes as well as your ears." Make sure you are listening for content and try to hear exactly what is being said. Active listening combined with effective communication is a two-way street. Oftentimes, communication (or lack thereof) is the number one complaint amongst associates or team members in a Housekeeping department. Sometimes the associates do not accept responsibility on their end for effectively listening and responding accordingly. Training or teaching your team about effective listening is time well invested. Here are a few additional guidelines for active listening:

- Listen for content and hear exactly what is being said.
- Listen for the feelings that are being conveyed with the words that are spoken. Respond to these signals letting the person know their feelings are being recognized.
- Recognize any verbal and non-verbal expressions and repeat back in your own words what you think you are hearing.

One example of a Housekeeping department situation is when a task or assignment is being delegated; it is important that you clearly explain the task, along with the expectation, and then ask for clarification.

One scenario is when you have asked a team member or associate to go clean the carpet in room 612 and that is all you tell them. So, what exactly have you asked them to do? Are they going to....

- Bonnet the carpet?
- Extract the carpet?
- Spot clean the carpet?
- What chemicals are they using?

When you reexamine the above scenario and follow the correct steps, it would be more appropriate to say, “I need you to”

- Pre-spot and extract the carpet in room 612.
- If any spots or stains do not come clean, let me know. The carpet needs to be perfect for our next guest.
- Please make sure you allow ample time for drying because the room will need to be rented in two hours.
- Can you briefly explain which tools and chemicals you are going to use for this?
- Thanks for taking care of this!

Again, just a few extra seconds of communication will eliminate the possibility of the task not being completed or possibly having a dissatisfied guest when they return to the room only to find the carpet wet or spotted.

With most Housekeeping departments you need to remember that several team members may not speak English as their primary language, or some may have problems communicating in English. Perhaps the most powerful method to communicate in Housekeeping is through visuals.

“A picture is worth a thousand words”

The use of photos and pictures on bulletin boards, newsletters, departmental signage and training material can help break down language barriers and can visually show the process, standard and the expectations. Just a few simple steps (listed below) using a PowerPoint application can produce powerful visuals for your department:

1. Decide on your message or training topic to be communicated.
2. Plan your shots and take photos with your digital camera.
3. Import the photos into your computer, then cut and paste into a PowerPoint slide.
4. Add text or other clip art to photo or to the slide, save the slide/slides to jpegs (in your “save as” drop down box).
5. Open jpegs in a program like Microsoft Office Picture Manager, and crop and edit accordingly.
6. Your photos are then ready for newsletters, bulletin boards, training material, etc.

There are obviously more expensive software programs that can achieve higher quality results with your visual programs, but you’ll be impressed with the results you can get with the two programs described (which are already programmed on most computers).

Self-evaluation

Maybe it is time to self-evaluate or have your department evaluate the effectiveness of all your communication methods within your department. During the next departmental meeting ask what works best and what could be improved upon. Consider these important points:

- Does your voicemail portray what you want your audience to hear?
- Does your website provide training information for your team members or members of your leadership team?
- Would audio podcasts be of value to the training process?
- Do you need customized videos for training?
- Is departmental signage up to date with current information?
- Do emails have a tagline with perhaps ways to *Go Green* in the hotel?
- Do your walkie talkies or Nextels work? Do they work in all parts of the property?

An experience from the field: Recently I was visiting a hotel where they had handheld devices which appeared to be working just fine, only to learn after speaking to some of the associates that in certain parts of the hotel the reception was poor and they were unable to communicate. The company that provided the handheld devices was called in to resolve the issue.

Ask your team to make a list of all methods of communicating in your department. See what is working best for you! As leaders, communication it is a topic that should be visited frequently. ✧

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Pictured below: Because the Housekeeping department at the Park Hyatt Toronto is comprised of room attendants of various nationalities and cultures, the executive housekeeper has developed a series of pictures that illustrate the cleaning standards that room attendants are expected to meet. Since introducing these easy to understand color photographs, cleaning scores have risen dramatically.

