



## Front Office

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

# Keeping the night auditors productive during slow periods saves money

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Every hotel manager realizes that time is a function of money. Employers compensate employees for their time and individual contributions to achieve high levels of productivity. The premise is that the more productive an employee is, the more they contribute to a unit's top line revenue and/or bottom line profitability.

A team of highly productive front desk clerks enables Management to staff at optimal levels in order to achieve such profitability through the minimization of labor hours paid. This is also known as "gainsharing", or just plain smart scheduling.

Yet, there are periods in the life of a hotel when occupancy hits rock-bottom, the number of check-ins or departures is minimal, or little activity is occurring at the front desk or near the hotel lobby. As a front office manager, it might be so slow one almost wishes they could just close down the front desk to save some labor costs. But this is not practical as the occasional phone call, arriving or departing guest, or minor emergency needs to be attended to. The overnight shift is one such example in many properties, especially for limited-service and select-service hotels, where front desk personnel can often be found wiling the time away waiting for the next service encounter to emerge. More than likely your hotel's night auditor is reading the newspaper, watching television, playing online games, posting on Facebook or Twitter, or working a crossword puzzle in the middle of the night to pass the time until their relief arrives at 7am. Obviously, the front desk must be manned on the overnight shift, but such behaviors do not increase the productivity or efficiency of the hotel or its profitability.

If activity is really that minimal on the overnight shift, consider assigning the following additional tasks to your night audit personnel as time permits. Of course, some hotels may already have their overnight desk staff performing some of these duties:

- **Load and/or fold terry.** It seems that there are never enough towels to go around in limited- and select-service hotels. Most of these properties usually only have approximately two par of linens. Hence, one par is in the guestrooms and the second par is being laundered. Many of these properties also have their hotel laundries located behind or near the front desk. It is not unreasonable to ask the night auditor to load linens in the extractor, transfer them to the dryer, or fold laundered towels behind the front desk when times are slow. If every night auditor spent only one hour folding towels on the overnight shift, the hotel could save approximately \$4,000 in labor costs each year.
- **Miscellaneous side work.** Consider asking night audit personnel to perform miscellaneous tasks on a nightly or monthly basis that really need to be completed at a time that does not interfere with daily operations. These tasks could include:
  - Cleaning and sanitizing the front desk, back office, computer keyboards and phones, and other front office equipment
  - Refilling housekeeping chemical spray bottles for room attendants (assuming the housekeeping supplies are kept near the front desk)
  - Placing room numbers on newspapers or folios for guestroom delivery
  - Preset the complementary morning breakfast area with utensils, paper products, condiments and food items
  - Set up the morning coffee and tea in the breakfast area



- Wipe down and sanitize menus and table tents from the hotel F&B outlets
- Replace table tent holders with current collateral materials
- Restock lobby and front desk collateral materials
- Take inventory of or prepare requisition requests for front desk collateral materials and office supplies
- Refill all printers/copiers/fax machines with appropriate paper and supplies
- Conduct inventory of safety deposit box keys, master keys, electronic fail-safe keys
- Assist the sales/catering office with making signs and charts, preparing tracking reports, assembling mail-out packets, etc.
- Clean the lobby area and public area restrooms
- Polish the bellcarts in the lobby
- Perform high-balance reports on in-house guests and secure additional credit authorization, as needed
- Update the coming day's weather forecast that is posted near the lobby
- Polish the brass or stainless steel doors and hand rails in elevators
- Price items and restock the hotel's convenience pantry
- Clean and vacuum the interior of the hotel's shuttle van (assuming that more than one auditor is working the overnight shift)
- Clean the hotel pool area and/or sanitize the workout facility equipment (also assuming that more than one employee is working this shift)

In summary, any time an employee is left unsupervised for prolonged periods of time and business is slow, chances are they will find unproductive ways to pass the time. But if kept busy and assigned a list of ancillary duties that need to be accomplished, the employee is forced to perform these to justify their position and paycheck. Always create a list of additional duties for night auditors to perform when times are slow. Check on their progress daily, provide appropriate feedback in a timely manner to encourage continued adherence to this program, and realize the cost savings benefit that can materialize from keeping your overnight staff busy. ✧

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