



Housekeeping

by Elizabeth Kozlowski

Top ten problem areas to watch for when room attendants service guestrooms

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Although, as managers, we'd all like to think that our employees are doing exactly what they're supposed to be doing at all times, this is rarely the case, even amongst the best employees. The Housekeeping department, generally the largest in the hotel, can easily fall victim to a loss of control and along with it – quality.

Whether intentionally or by accident, there are some common mistakes made by employees in each position. By recognizing these weaknesses, managers can save time by doing quick spot checks in the different areas of the hotel and share reminders in staff meetings about these focus points.

Welcome to the first of a series of articles highlighting the most commonly observed deficiencies among the different positions of the housekeeping team. We begin with the largest group within the Housekeeping department: room attendants.

The job of the room attendant is arguably the most taxing in the Housekeeping department. Besides being very physically demanding, room attendants also face time constraints and the accompanying conflict of producing a flawless room. Late checkouts, DND's, extra messy rooms, linen shortages, and employee complacency can all compound these issues. Given these factors, it is no wonder why some details are either purposefully neglected or innocently overlooked by room attendants. Presented here are the top ten problem areas that room attendants frequently fail to meet standards when servicing guestrooms:

10) Notepads - The issue here lays in the lack of attention paid to whether the previous guest used the notepad or not. If the paper is missing, room attendants will usually replace it; but if the current pad looks full enough, the attendant must then flip through the pages to actually determine if it is sufficient to meet the next guest's needs. Oftentimes there is writing on a page other than the top one that could contain important information that the previous guest left behind. Another point to watch for is if the pad only has a few pages left; thus warranting replacement with a full pad.

9) Replacing items to standard - If it has to be counted, one can be fairly sure that it's not. Every hotel has a different standard for items such as number of hangers in the closet, number of pieces of loose stationery/envelopes, number of chocolates per bed, amount of cotton swab tips in the bathroom, etc. But if it merely looks like it is all there, many room attendants assume that it probably is.

8) Mirrors/picture frames/windows - Fingerprints on these surfaces are far too often overlooked. Some are obvious but others are not seen at eye level. This is typically because room attendants will not bend to dust vertical areas below eye level. A good trick to detect these oversights is to bend down and look upwards,





then some marks start to appear. In the same sense, dust can be another issue with mirrors and the tops of the picture frames. Room attendants generally dislike reaching over their heads to clean surfaces. Make sure to always have enough high dusters on hand to eliminate excuses and to minimize injuries associated with extended reaching.

7) Sofa/chair cushions - It is imperative that all cushions are pulled out and vacuumed to clear any crumbs and loose change. A bigger implication of not clearing the crumbs is attracting vermin to the room. Finally, failure to remove and inspect cushions might cause the next guest to find unexpected items such as candy wrappers, hypodermic needles, dirty socks, or even adult-related materials.

6) Minibar/bathroom drinking glasses - Even when the glasses are clean, room attendants must make sure there are no water spots, otherwise they look dirty to the guest. More significantly, some room attendants might not even replace the glasses at all but merely rinse them out in the sink and wipe them out. This is unacceptable and violates all health code standards and guests' expectations. This is difficult to monitor. One option is to only provide plastic-wrapped drinking cups instead of glassware inside the guestroom. For more upscale hotels, make it mandatory that room attendants submit the glassware from their assigned guestroom at the end of each shift to their supervisor. This will compel the room attendants to swap out existing glassware for clean glasses every day.

5) Under the bed - For those hotels with open space under the bed, items can easily be kicked underneath by the guest without them even realizing. The use of bedskirts easily masks what lies underneath and room attendants don't like having to bend down or crawl on hands and knees to look. A wide range of items can be found from slippers to washcloths to pizza boxes and even, although gruesome, a dead body (it's happened before!).

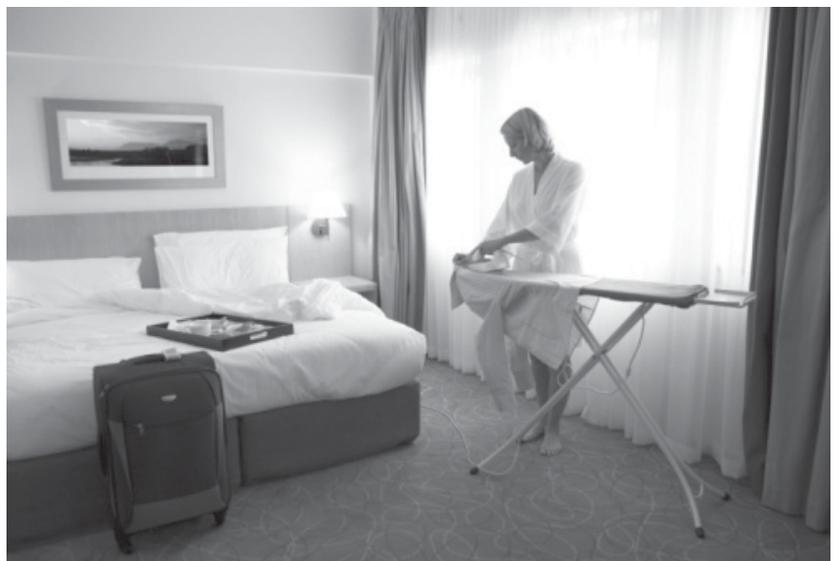
4) Drawers/liners - Nightstand and closet drawers are often not checked when room attendants are in a hurry. They accumulate dust and hairs, and the liners inside (if used) might need to be changed if they are visibly soiled or in poor condition through normal use, not to mention the belongings that a previous guest might have left behind that need to be turned in to Lost and Found.

3) Bathroom floor - One of the deadly sins of housekeeping is hair in the bathroom, and this is the most likely spot where it will be found. It is important for bathroom floors to both be vacuumed to catch loose debris and then wiped. One key spot is to check under the sink for hair and dust; it is the most difficult spot for room attendants to reach. The use of microfiber rags and microfiber mops with extended handles can aid both the reaching issue as well as more efficiently catch loose hairs.

2) Shower/tub - In hotels where the shower and tub are combined in one this tends to be less of an issue because it's not as easy to get away with. However, in hotels with a separate shower and tub, the tub tends to be neglected because the majority of guests take showers versus baths. If the tub looks unused (or even if it was very obviously used), room attendants often won't even go near it. It's necessary to feel along the far wall of the tub (not the front because that's easy to reach and may be the only part that the room attendant did wipe) for soap scum or dust. Even if the tub wasn't used, it can accumulate dust. In the shower, soap scum and mildew can also be an issue if the shower isn't cleaned properly. If there is a glass door, make sure it was wiped dry; otherwise, the water spots will show.

1) Vacuuming - The carpet can be tricky because it is not always obvious whether it was vacuumed or not, especially when it has designs instead of a solid color. Many room attendants will try to get away with not vacuuming it in order to save time, especially for stayover rooms. Just because dirt or debris are not visible on the carpet surface doesn't mean that the carpet is clean. Depending on the thickness and material of the carpet, it will show lines when vacuumed. If it doesn't then it is important to look in some less obvious places such as under the desk chair and behind the curtains. If these spots are clean, then it is a good sign that the room attendant has thoroughly vacuumed.

Now that your team's housekeeping inspectors/floor supervisors have learned the top ten problem areas, they will know where to check first to ensure that the room attendants are taking care of the small details and upholding quality cleaning standards. As a manager, hold both room attendants and floor supervisors jointly accountable for maintaining all cleaning standards. If they know you will always check these areas, they will always clean them right the first time. Then you can move on to improving in other housekeeping areas and positions. ✧



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