



Front Office

by Samantha Marks

Interdepartmental communication can make or break a guest's stay

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The success of a guest's stay at a hotel hinges on the communication of the hotel departments and its staff members. From the second that the guest makes his or her reservation to the minute they check out, the Front Office, Housekeeping, and Engineering departments must be in constant communication in order to ensure the guest's stay goes smoothly. The object for most hotels is not to show the guest how much effort and work goes into making sure his or her stay goes off without a hitch; rather, the intended objective is for it to appear to the guest as if the delivery of service is seamless, easy, natural and instantaneous. The delivery of service should appear effortless, with no flaws perceptible to the guest.

Here is an example to illustrate the need for effective interdepartmental communication in order to achieve seamless service delivery. Consider a guest, Mr. Smith, who has never stayed at Hotel XYZ before, but due to word of mouth and all the excellent reviews, he has decided to give the hotel the opportunity to gain his business. Typically, when a guest books a stay, a room attendant would be assigned their room and begin preparing it for their arrival. While the room attendant is cleaning the room, they may notice that the light bulb in the floor lamp is out or that a room service tray is sitting in the hallway from a previous guest. Since a hotel's success is based on teamwork, it is the room attendant's obligation to call the hotel operator or front desk so that the proper department can respond and attend to the needed service of replacing the light bulb and retrieving the tray.



The Engineering department has the same obligation when they are repairing something in a guestroom. Before the room can become available for Mr. Smith to check-in, Engineering must fix whatever may be wrong and then inform Housekeeping that they are finished with the room. Some tasks can be very detailed and may leave a mess behind. In this case, the same rule applies. Engineering would have to inform Housekeeping that maintenance is complete so that the room attendant may return to the room and tidy up prior to Mr. Smith arriving at the hotel. This is a very important step because it can be very difficult to explain to a guest why he was checked into a room that was dirty or still in need of repairs. Especially in today's economic climate, these kinds of mistakes are ones that hotels cannot afford to make (at the risk of alienating guests), and can be easily prevented through effective interdepartmental communication.

Communication is imperative when preparing for a guest's arrival, but it is not the only time that departments should communicate with each other. These departments should remain in contact throughout Mr. Smith's entire stay. Mr. Smith may arrive and check-in without any problems. His room may be vacant, clean, and to his satisfaction until something breaks or he is in need of something else. Who should he call? Mr. Smith would call the hotel operator, front desk, or guest hotline and inform the hotel of the problem, whatever it may be. At that point, the staff member answering the phone should perform one-stop service and make it their responsibility to inform the appropriate department instead of transferring the guest's call throughout the hotel. It should be noted that it is not just the hotel operator that has responsibility for guests' request for service, but everyone in the Front Office should be trained to notify the various departments of an issue. Mr. Smith may not call the operator but instead stop by the front desk to mention a concern on his way to the restaurant for dinner. The front desk would take the same steps to notify the necessary departments to get the issue resolved while Mr. Smith enjoys a nice meal.

The hotel should also have a system in place for the purpose of tracking these requests for service. This log would provide proof that: a) the guest did call/stop down and inform a staff member of a problem or concern, b) that the front desk clerk did forward the request for service to the appropriate department, c) note the time the request was received by the front desk, d) at what time the



service task was reported as completed, and most importantly, e) at what time was the follow-up courtesy call made to the guest to ensure that their problem or request had been resolved to their satisfaction. The follow-up courtesy call is probably one of the most important actions that can be performed by the Front Office as it ensures that they speak to the guest after the hotel has resolved their issue. It also allows the opportunity to find out if there are any other concerns the guest may have at that time.

True hospitality begins with caring about our guests by delivering seamless, focused guest service that meets and exceeds their expectations. Since each employee cannot be everywhere at all times, “seamless” delivery cannot be achieved without effective communication between employees and departments behind the scenes. While it is true that hotel employees may not be able to anticipate everything that can go wrong during a guest’s hotel stay, they should be able to anticipate everything that should go right. Such expectations from guests can be predicted and planned for in advance, but it will require teamwork and communication between staff members and departments. ✧

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