



Front Office

by Todd Seiders, CLSD

Exercising judgment at the front desk - Sometimes you just HAVE to say “NO”

Another great article from *The Rooms Chronicle*®, the #1 journal for hotel rooms management! ***Important notice: This article may not be reproduced without permission of the publisher or the author.*** College of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Niagara University, P.O. Box 2036, Niagara University, NY 14109-2036. Phone: 866-Read TRC. E-mail: editor@roomschronicle.com

Notice: The ideas, opinions, recommendations, and interpretations presented herein are those of the author(s). The College of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Niagara University/The Rooms Chronicle® assume no responsibility for the validity of claims in items reported.

The one word everyone who works in hospitality hates to say to a guest is...“No”. We are all trained in fact to never say “no”, and to try and accommodate our guests’ every request or need. But, in the real world there are those rare occasions that one should say “no”, one must say “no”, and one must absolutely positively scream “no”, if the situation requires it.

Here is an actual case in point that hotel front desk personnel may likely experience:

A full service hotel in the greater Los Angeles area received a visit from the Los Angeles Police Department’s (LAPD) Vice Division. A plainclothes male vice officer and an undercover female police officer came to the hotel to look for violations of California Law 316 PC:

“Every person who keeps any disorderly house, or any house for the purpose of assignation or prostitution, or any house of public resort, by which the peace, comfort, or decency of the immediate neighborhood is habitually disturbed, or who keeps any inn in a disorderly manner; and every person who lets any apartment or tenement, knowing that it is to be used for the purpose of assignation or prostitution, is guilty of a misdemeanor.”

Every state in America has a similar law, which makes it a crime to knowingly allow prostitution inside your establishment.

The two officers approached the front desk and asked to rent a room. The front desk clerk asked for a credit card, but the vice officer said he only had cash to pay for the room. The vice officer went on to say, **“I don’t want to use a credit card, because I’m here with a prostitute, and I don’t want my wife to find out.”** This was the “bait” of the police “sting”, and now it was up to the front desk clerk to say “no”, and not allow prostitution inside the hotel.

The front desk clerk clearly heard what the vice officer said (that he was with a prostitute), and knew he wasn’t going to rent him a room. But, the desk clerk did not directly say “no”. Instead, the clerk tried to find a more “hospitable” way to refuse to rent the room. The front desk clerk knew the vice officer did not want to use a credit card for the room, so he thought he could use this fact to politely deny him a room.

The desk clerk told the vice officer that a credit card was required to rent the room, but that he could pay cash at the end of the stay, if he chose to. The desk clerk said if he did not have a credit card, then he could not rent him a room.

Here’s what the LAPD vice officer heard: “If you had a credit card, I would rent you a room.” Isn’t that what the front desk clerk said? Instead of saying, “No, I’m sorry, but we don’t allow prostitution in this hotel, please leave”, the vice officer heard, “If you had a credit card, you *could* rent a room.” The vice officer issued the front desk clerk a citation for “keeping a disorderly house”, and left. The desk clerk now has to appear in court to defend his actions.

The desk clerk later said he was confident that demanding a credit card for the room would have foiled this man’s attempt to use the hotel with a prostitute. The desk clerk said if the vice officer had produced a credit card to use, he would have still denied him a room, and would have summoned the General Manager to ask the man and prostitute to leave the hotel. The desk clerk knew NOT to rent the room to a prostitute.



As one can see from this incident, all of the legal proceedings, court appearances, and possible bad press from the sting could have been avoided with one simple word...“No”.

Generally, Innkeeper Laws in all states allow hotels to refuse renting a room under these following conditions (amongst others):

1. To preserve the innkeeper’s property from potential damage
2. To prevent a violation of the law
3. To maintain the premises so as to preserve the peace and tranquility of the other guests
4. To protect the guests’ physical safety
5. Because of the hotel’s previous bad history with the guest

Yes, front desk attendants can say “no” to a guest seeking accommodations if the guest falls under any of the above situations. These situations are very broad, so you can get creative with their interpretation and use them to keep bad guests from renting a room. Just make sure that the belief for denying registration is well-founded and defensible and that potential guests are not being excluded based upon protected class status (e.g., race, gender, religion, ethnicity, etc.)

Front desk managers must train their staff to say “no” when it is appropriate to do so, and tell them you will support their decision to refuse accommodations if they have “just cause”. Discuss possible situations that may occur, and how to properly deny service or a room. Hotel managers may also want to contact their hotel brand’s corporate loss prevention or security departments for outside training and help. Similarly, the hotel’s insurance carrier or broker may also provide risk management staff that can help educate and train the front desk team on these matters.

Sometimes, you just HAVE to say “NO” ! ✧

(Todd Seiders, CLSD, is director of risk management for Petra Risk Solutions, which provides a full-range of risk management and insurance services for hospitality owners and operators. Their website is: www.petrarisksolutions.com. Todd can be reached at 800-466-8951 or via E-mail at: todds@petrarisksolutions.com.)