

Impact of Front Office Operations on Guest Satisfaction

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Abstract: *This article is meant to explain the importance of the front office department in the hotels and how it contributes and influences the guest experience and satisfaction. It is already known that Front Office department is the “Face of the Hotel” and every guest comes in contact with the Front Office as soon as they reach the hotel. The guests who reserve their rooms are connected with the Reservations team of the Front Office Department even before they reach the hotel. Moreover most of the services and facilities for the in-house guests are given either by or through this department. Hence there is no doubt of the huge impact of Front Office Operations on guest satisfaction. First impression is mostly the last impression in the minds of a human anyhow.*

The guests might get excellent food, services and facilities in the hotel during their stay but they are unlikely to forget a bad experience in the beginning at the front office. Therefore the Front Office employees must be trained efficiently so that they can create an exemplary first impression on the guest.

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Every hotel has four core operating departments namely, Front Office, Housekeeping, Food Production and Food & Beverage Service which operate 24/7 for the guests. Front Office and Housekeeping together known as Rooms Division work for selling, maintaining and cleaning rooms and providing basic facilities and amenities to the guests. Food & Beverage Service and Food Production or the Food & Beverage Division deals with preparation and service of food and beverages to the guests in the rooms and other Food & Beverage outlets. Though all the departments work together to put across the best experience for the guests, Front Office will surely have the most impact on the guest satisfaction as it is the first department with which the guests interact. All the sections of the Front Office department leave an indelible mark on the guest stay and experience.

I. SECTIONS OF FRONT OFFICE

There are generally five sections of Front Office department in most hotels as listed below:

1. Reservations
2. Front Desk (or reception)
3. Concierge (or information and travel desk)
4. Telecommunications
5. Uniformed Services

Every section of the department has its duties defined clearly for the assistance of the guest.

RESERVATIONS

The major duties of the reservation team is to attend to all guest queries or requests and get as many bookings as possible for the hotel. The team members therefore must be thorough with the number and types of rooms available, their current rates, the discount categories, current promotions, offers and packages, and the facilities and benefits provided with the



rooms. They should also be adept in the knowledge of all the outlets of the hotel and the products and services provided there to maximize revenues for the hotel. The reservation agents must take all the necessary information while creating the reservation records correctly. This information must be duly shared with the front desk for a smooth check in process.

FRONT DESK

The front desk or reception (as commonly known) is the first point of communication for the guest at the hotel. Any guest who wants to stay at the hotel has to register himself / herself at the front desk for getting a room issued. The guests who have already booked directly complete their registration process whereas the walk-in guests (guests who do not have a prior booking) have to choose a room before the same. The registration process has to be completed by all the guests before the room key is issued. The front desk employees must be polite, patient and efficient in the handling of the check-in guests. Complete information about the rooms, offers or packages chosen by the guest must be provided. The facilities, benefits, and other amenities provided with rooms must be informed to the guest. Also if the guest has a meal plan included with room, he / she must be guided about the outlet where the meals would be served and the timings of the meals.

The check-in process includes the filling of the guest registration card also known as the GRC or reg card for all guest rooms. For the foreigner guests, C Form must also be filled in addition to the registration card. Identity proof documents must be collected from each and every guest residing at the hotel and attached to the GRC. Rooms are assigned as per the guest's booking or choice. The rates are explained and payments are cleared if possible. The entire check-in process must be done efficiently and calmly so that the guest has a wonderful first impression of the hotel. Welcome drinks, hot or cold towels, or refreshments are given to enhance the welcoming experience. Special attention must be given to the foreigner guests as they are guests of the country too. The front desk agent has to check and update all bills, settle them and issue the copy of the bill and money receipt to the guest. For the financial transactions to be smooth, the front desk agent or cashier should be confident about the payment methods that are accepted and how to process them. In case of international guests, foreign currency or alternative methods of payment must be known to avoid any hassle or unnecessary delay. Guest feedback and lasting impression is also very important. Then the guest is guided to the room by a bell person.

CONCIERGE / TRAVEL DESK

The travel desk or Concierge Desk is the main source of information about hotel, city, events, activities or any other travel or transport arrangements for the guests. The concierge also makes bookings on behalf of the guests for travel, sightseeing, entertainment or meals. This team is especially helpful for the foreigner guests or even domestic guests who are not well versed with the local language and need help with the bookings. All queries must be responded politely and correctly therefore a good knowledge of the hotel and city is necessary. Concierge also delivers parcels or messages to the guestrooms if necessary. The foreign currency exchange facility for the foreigner guests is also handled by the concierge if available in the hotels. Translator or interpreter facility is also offered to foreigner guests who are not confident of the local language or even English.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

This section is as important as the others though the guests might not come face to face with this team. Guest calls for queries or bookings are attended by them initially and therefore they should be able to transfer the calls to relevant departments without delay. Basic information if requested by guests might be provided on call by the telephone operators. The telecommunication must also be careful for all in house guests who have requested DND status (Do Not Disturb) for their rooms. Wake up calls requested by patrons must be given promptly.



UNIFORMED SERVICES

This section under Front Office includes the bell attendants, door attendants, valet parking attendants and transportation personnel mainly. They give the most personalized service to the guests and hence are also known as guest services in some hotels.

The bell attendants help the arrival guests with their luggage inside the hotel and till the guestroom. The luggage must be handled in a proper way so that there is no damage. Fragile or smaller items must be handled carefully and luggage trolleys should be used if the number of luggage is more. They familiarize the guests with the hotel's facilities, amenities, services and features while escorting till the guestroom. They also provide information about the hotel's outlets and their timings of operations, events, activities or any functions at the hotels when they are helping the guests till the rooms. While giving information, bell attendants are making an impression the guest and may also be the key to higher sales in the hotel's outlets. The bell attendants are responsible for delivering mails, messages or parcels to guestrooms. They also help the guests in getting any emergency items such as medicines from outside the hotel if required. All these duties must be done with professionalism and care.

The door attendants welcome and assist the guests in entering the hotel by opening the glass doors. They help the guests to load and unload the luggage from the vehicles if required. A well groomed smiling polite door attendant is someone a guest might remember from his / her stay.

Valet parking attendants are specially trained employees who help the guests who drive themselves to park their vehicles in the parking area. They save the guests from walking to and back from the parking area especially if the weather is not good.

Transportation personnel or drivers are in direct contact with guests during car drops or pickups from airports or courtesy rides given to guests anywhere in the city. They should also be well groomed, polite, informative and efficient in driving so as to leave a good image of the hotel.

II. GUEST CYCLE

The complete interaction and experience that a guest has in a hotel is called the guest cycle. It is divided into four stages – Pre Arrival, Arrival, Occupancy and Departure.

PRE ARRIVAL

This stage starts when the guest starts searching for a hotel. Whenever any person wishes to travel, he/she looks for a comfortable place to stay. Generally guests find and book hotels online. Guests who book directly with the hotel are called Free Individual Travelers (FIT). Groups or businessmen book through travel agents, tour operators or corporate bookings. There are several other sources of reservations for the hotels too such as airlines, embassies, government offices etc. For FITs, the lead time (duration between reservation and arrival) is less maybe ten days to one month or lesser. Groups however book much before the arrival dates, mostly three months to even a year before. The reservation team must communicate with the guests about their requirements, changes in the bookings or any requests associated with the reservations. All requests and requirements must be informed to the front desk so that they can be fulfilled in a proper way.

The reservation information must be correct and complete. In order to ensure that, the reservation agent must repeat the information to the guest and also spell the name to avoid any errors in the record. The reservation agents also help the front desk agents in the pre-registration process which is another important activity during the pre-arrival stage. Pre-registration is completing few activities of the check-in process before the guest arrives in the hotel, such as filling up of guest registration cards, assigning rooms etc. It is done to fasten up the registration process. The check in process therefore takes less time and the guests can be issued rooms faster. This is very helpful during peak seasons when many guests come for check-in at the same time and have to wait in queues for their turn. If registration cards are partially filled up already (with information given during reservation), the guests only have to check and sign. Also if the rooms are also assigned, the guests may be given key cards as soon as the documentation is done. During peak seasons, payments are



also taken in advance at the time of reservation in the pre arrival stage, thereby saving more time during the registration process. The main focus of all core departments is to make the guest connect with the hotel as smooth and comfortable as possible.

ARRIVAL

This stage starts with the arrival of the guest at the hotel. The guests are helped by the valets, door attendants or bell attendants as soon as their vehicles reach the porch. The valet attendants help with the car parking in case of personal vehicles and the bell attendants assist with the luggage while guiding the guests to the front desk for the check-in process. All the uniformed service personnel must be well groomed, courteous, polite and prompt so as to make a good first impression upon the guests and make them feel welcome in the hotel. They must be trained by the Lobby Manager / Duty Manager since most of the might not be professionally trained or qualified. First impression often leaves a last impression and therefore a guest must always be given a warm welcome.

The bell attendant keeps the luggage near the bell desk and escorts the guest to the front desk. The front desk agents welcome the guests and help them to check-in to the hotel smoothly without any unnecessary hassle. The registration card must be filled, checked and signed by the guest and identity proof should be taken. C Form must be filled by all foreigner guests and copies sent to the nearest police station and FRRO (Foreigner Regional Registration Office). Proper documentation is very important for the safety and security of the hotel and country. C Forms are important for the tracking of foreigners in our country. The C Form copy must generally be sent to the police station and FRRO within a week of the guest arrival but for Pakistani guests it must be done within 24 hours of the guest arrival for security reasons. Few exemptions are there for foreigner guests who do not have to fill up the C Form. Citizens of Nepal, NRIs with green cards, diplomats etc. do not need to fill up this form. The guest should be guided for the documentation and all help given so that guests do not face any difficulty.

A copy of the identity proof document has to be taken from every guest residing at the hotel. The front desk agent must check and verify original documents. The copy should then be attached to the guest registration card. All the information recorded in the GRC must be cross checked with the guest and then signatures taken.

If payment is already done at the time of reservation, it should be confirmed to the guest. Bills and receipts are generally issued to the guest at the time of check-out. If payment is not done, the guest is requested for the same and given options for the payment methods. Once the payment is done, the room is assigned to the guest on the basis of his/her reservation. The bill and charges must be explained to the guest if required.

Upselling is also an important feature practiced by the front desk employees at the arrival stage. Guests may be encouraged to go for a higher priced room or a package which includes other hotel products, services or meals with the room. Generating highest possible revenue is a major function of the front office employees hence upselling is very important and must be practiced. Guests may be encouraged to opt for meal plans which include one or more major meals with the room. There are several meal plans which are generally offered in luxury hotels such as Continental Plan (Room with breakfast), Modified American Plan or MAP (Room with breakfast with either lunch or dinner) and American Plan or AP (Room with breakfast, lunch and dinner). The meal plans are beneficial to the guests as the meal prices are lesser than what the guests would have been charged if rooms and meals are bought separately. Also since the meals are served in one of the outlets of the hotel, the guests do not have to go outside the hotel. Moreover most of the hotels serve table d'hôte menu which means the guests may choose from an elaborate spread of dishes and unlimited servings too. The meal plans bring in revenue for the Food & Beverage department of the hotel. The operation hours of the outlets, and the meal timings has to be informed to all guests for their convenience and to ensure they do not miss out on any meals.

The guest is then assigned a room as per his/her choice. The bell attendant escorts the guests till the room with their luggage. While going to the room, the bell attendant tells the guest about all the outlets of the hotel and their location with the directions, the timings for the outlets and also about the products and services available in the hotel. After reaching the room, the bell attendant must show how the key works while opening the door. The bell attendant then enters the room first and turns on the lights and air conditioner. The guest must be shown the console and remotes for



convenience. If the guest is happy with the room, bell attendant wishes a good day and leaves the room. If however the guest is not satisfied with the room, bell attendant informs the front desk agent who will then provide alternatives for the guest.

During low seasons, complimentary upgrades are given to repeat guests, families or single female travelers. Arrival stage is very important as the guest stay and experience is highly affected by the way the check-in is handled. If proper information is not given to the guests, they might miss out on something and feel dissatisfied with the hotel. For example, if a guest expecting complimentary breakfast reaches late at the outlet, he might have a bad image of the hotel and the employees.

OCCUPANCY

Occupancy stage is when the guests will have an actual experience and opinion of the hotel. The guests are staying in the room, enjoying food and beverages, and other products and services in the various outlets of the hotel. The front office employees must monitor the guest stay to give them a beautiful experience in coordination with the other departments. Though the products and services are served by the other departments, if the guests are dissatisfied, they generally call the front desk to complain. It is the responsibility of the front office employees to coordinate with the other departments and provide satisfactory solutions to the guests.

The guests are also encouraged for repeat visits by doing small yet memorable things for the guests. Remembering the guest names is a very effective way of making the guest feel special. The front desk may also give them reminders of any special events or activities in the hotel so that they do not miss out on them. The front office tracks the charges and requests payments from the guests if the balance is higher than the credit limit.

Guest feedback must be taken from the guests to show them that the hotel and its employees are concerned. If the guest is dissatisfied about any aspect, solution should be given promptly and efficiently.

If there are any visitors for the in-house guests, the guests are informed and the visitors are requested to wait in the lobby. Visitors are not allowed in most hotels for security reasons. Also if there are any messages, mails or parcels for the in-house guests, they should be delivered promptly to the guestrooms. All requests during the stay must be fulfilled efficiently so as to give a wonderful experience to the guests.

DEPARTURE

The front office employees have to complete the check out procedure for the guests. This includes updating and settlement of bills, checking and handing over all mails, messages and parcels to the guests, taking guest feedback and creating guest history record for future reference.

The front desk has daily arrival and departure lists so they are aware of the guests who would be checking in or checking out for the day. The front desk agents must confirm check out with the guests and keeps the bills ready before they arrive at the front desk. All the charges must be checked and updated for the same. The front desk agents who are handling the check-out process should be confident about the payment methods acceptable at the hotel. The guests should be given a copy of the bill and money receipt after the payments.

If there are any mails, messages or parcels received at the hotel for the guest, they must be handed over to him/her before they leave. The guest is asked if he requires any car drop till the airport, if so, the transportation personnel must be given instructions for the same.

The front desk agent must update the room status once the check-out process is complete. The guest history record is created and recorded for future use. The guest's family members' names, the special dates, likes, dislikes, allergies etc. are listed in the guest history record. The rooms and other outlets revenue earned by the hotel through the guest is also recorded. This information is used by the sales and marketing team and the reservation team for building a relationship with the guests and sending them offers and packages according to their choice on their special days.

Guest feedback is also taken and analysis is done if there were any complaints as to how they could have been avoided. A report is made for management review. The guests are encouraged to visit the hotel again.



III. CONCLUSION

It is thereby understood from the explanation in the chapters that the front office personnel play a very integral role in guest satisfaction. They help to make the guest stay better from the moment a guest enters the hotel and until he/she leaves after completing the stay. The guest feel comfortable to ask the front desk about anything since they are the first people to welcome the guests in the hotel. The front office employees specially the front desk, concierge and uniformed services are also always available at the lobby and can be approached by the guests easily. Front desk personnel are always ready to resolve all guest issues efficiently with a smile on their faces. Hence the guest satisfaction is mostly ensured by the front office team and supported by the other departments.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

I have taught several years and have written the article on the basis of my learning and classes taken over the years mostly. I have however referred the book listed below for the completion of the article.
Managing Front Office Operations by Michael L.Kasavana

