

# Reinventing Housekeeping

BY TARUN KAPOOR

Housekeeping is usually the largest department in a hotel with the largest payroll, physically demanding jobs, and menial tasks. Most jobs are lonely, largely female- and minority-dominated; and perceived as a job of servitude versus one of service. All this results in low job satisfaction and high turnover.

Not surprisingly, most room attendants do not recommend hotel management as a career of choice to their college-bound kids.

Sustained growth and prosperity demands that the industry make some concerted changes in this department.

Ironically, most innovation that has taken place in the hospitality industry has been initiated by suppliers. As a result, research tends to be tangential and self-serving for the supplier, lacking a "what is best for the industry" approach.

The lodging industry needs to change

this and conduct fundamental research analyzing not only what guests need, but the fundamental ways in which hotels process and deliver products. Housekeeping is one of the areas that would benefit from this.

## Challenges facing housekeeping

There are three different, yet related challenges facing housekeeping today.

- *Housekeeping's fundamental processes have not changed in the past 100 years.* With the exception of using vacuum cleaners to clean and telephones to communicate between the room attendant, front desk, and management, hotels continue to clean rooms the same way.

- *Housekeeping involves a lot of menial tasks.* Room attendants have to do many tasks that are perceived to be menial, including cleaning bathrooms and making

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beds. These tasks continue to be performed the same way they have always been—one room attendant, one room at a time.

- *Housekeeping does not promote accountability.* Performance management principles (expectations, accountability, and feedback) are as foreign a concept to room attendants as they are to dishwashers in restaurants and janitors in airports. After all, they are hired not to innovate, but merely to complete tasks.

#### **Performance management**

Every housekeeping employee must clearly understand their hotel's business objectives, the department's goals, and what they need to do to reach these objectives. "Key performance indicators" that clearly relate to each individual's role must be developed. Likewise, a system and process must be developed so that each employee can monitor and self-assess KPIs in a timely manner, be held accountable for their outcomes, improve performance as needed, and be rewarded appropriately for their efforts.

In reinventing housekeeping, the secret is in identifying the key functions—not positions—that need to be performed. Typically, these include: daily cleaning of guest rooms and public spaces; periodic deep cleaning of guestrooms and public spaces; laundering linens; procuring linens, amenities, cleaning supplies, and guest loan items; and managing inventory, FF&CE, labor, and scheduling. KPIs need to be developed for each of these functions and employees must be given goals for each KPI they are accountable for.

Redesigning housekeeping using performance management principles will eliminate the need for inspection—a customary and costly practice. Housekeepers will be free and available to coach room attendants and others in achieving KPIs and develop those who would like to advance. ■

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