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Check–in Check–out: Improving the Management of Hotel Front Office Operations

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Abstract. This article deals with the specific character of the reception service organization, depending on the type of hotel and its classification. Reception service can be called the heart of the hotel, the center of the emerging issues and the center of guests' problems solutions. Hotel organizational structure includes administrative, service, operational and support departments. The article investigates the improvement of hotel reception service.

Keywords: Hotel; Check-in; Check-out; Hospitality and Hotelier.

Every day, managers solve difficult problems turn organizations around, and thereby achieve astonishing performances. In order to be successful, every organization needs professional managers. Management is the attainment of organizational goals in an effective and efficient manner through planning (i.e. setting goals & deciding activities), organizing (i.e. organizing activities & people), leading (i.e. motivating, communicating with & developing people) and controlling (i.e. establishing targets & measuring performance) organizational resources [Management by Richard L. Daft, 2012. P. 6].

Hotels are commercial buildings that offer lodging to travelers. Hotel services consist of providing temporary lodging facilities and additional services to guest. A service consists of the interactions and transactions that result in relationships among customers and staff members, which are called customer relationships. Therefore, customer relationship may be measured by two factors, intimacy of the interactions and the duration of time spent with the customer. According to the "Rules for the provision of Hotel services in the Russian Federation (RF)" (approved by the RF Government Decree of April 25, 1997 № 490 with most recent amendment on March 13, 2013 № 206), the basic hotel services consist of lodging and feeding. In addition to this, a new classification system was earlier issued in Russia for the tourism industrial facilities, hotels and other accommodations, ski trails and beaches on 25 January, 2011 ("Order № 35"). As a result, numerous hotels and resorts are now highly motivated to invest their resources in Russia either directly or through franchising structures, for instance Azimut, VOYAGE Hotels & Resorts, Accor, Kempinski, Shangri La, Hilton, Hyatt, Inter Continental Hotel Group, Marriott, Carlson Rezidor, Ritz-Carlton, Tulip Hotels, etc. This new classification system is unquestionably connected to the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics Games, but is also part of a broader trend of introducing international standards in connection with Russia's ambitions on joining the World Trade Organization in 2012.

Notwithstanding, the guests of today expect to be treated with respect and concern; thus hoteliers must be creative and continually invest new ways in order to attract new guests and to retain their regular customers. Many top executives in the hotel industry believe that mediocrity should not be tolerated as a result each employee should be selected very meticulously (HBR: www.hotelexecutive.com). As a front office manager, you look for applicants who are outgoing, comfortable with working in public, well groomed, and who have a good understanding of service and a positive attitude. Moreover, Hotel businesses very much depend on personality, because success depends here on the quality of services, and good services – should always be characterized by acts of personification. Regardless of class or type of the hotel, the front office (FO) has been described as the nerve center of the hotel [Hotel Front Office Management by James A. Bardi, 2011.

P. 1.]. Guest hereby interacts with hotels for the first time by communicating with the staff of the FO, who usually creates the first impression about the hotel based on the efficiency, competency and behavior of the FO staff. Positive first impressions are critical to the successful guest experience; setting the tone for hospitality and establishing a continuing business relationship. When guests arrive at the hotel after long, tiring trips, they expect to be welcomed by someone with a warm smile and with genuine greetings. What constitutes a warm welcome? This varies; it begins with the front desk employee's sympathizing with the feelings of the traveler, someone who has been away from familiar surrounding for many hours or many days. He or she may be stressed by the frustrations of commercial traveling, delayed schedules, lost luggage, unfamiliar surroundings and public transportation etc. The hotel employee who is considerate of the traveler under the above mentioned circumstances is more likely to recognize anxiety, restlessness, and hostility and respond to them in a positive, understanding manner.

As Heldenbrand H. V. stated in his classic 1944 book *Front office Psychology*, "To the guest, the Front office Manager (FOM) who heads this department is largely represented by the FO, and the unseen head will be judged favorably or otherwise by the guest treatment there". Thus, the FOM must embrace the charge of becoming a proactive communicator and facilitator. This hotel executive must analyze and seek the pieces of information guests will probably need and figure out which department must interact to fulfill these needs. The FOM must stay in control of all activities that affect the delivery of hospitality to the guest – a major function of a hotel's financial success. With the help of a property management system (PMS) e.g. OPERA Enterprise Solution (PMS), Epitome (PMS) etc., the FOM works with an assistant FOM, a night auditor, a reservation manager, front desk employee's and a bell captain to tend to the details of running an efficient department.

The FO staff interacts with all departments of the hotel, including marketing and sales, food and beverage, housekeeping, security, controller, human resources and maintenance. The FO serves as a clearinghouse for communication activities in the hotel, for instance the marketing and sales department relies on the FO to provide current and accurate details concerning each guest's visit, which is a valuable resource for the marketing and sales department to target marketing campaigns, develop promotions, prepare mailing labels, and select appropriate advertising media. The housekeeping department and FO is responsible for housekeeping room status, details of potential house count, security concerns, and requests for amenities. The housekeeper relies on the room sales projections – a weekly report prepared and distributed by the FOM that indicates the expected number of arrivals, walk-ins, stayovers, and no-shows to schedule employees etc. Effective interdepartmental communications must be maintained as it focuses on how the FO relates to employees of all departments in a hotel. Guest needs are met when employees cooperate and communicate to provide hotel services. However, when these lines of communication breakdown, so does quality of services.

Guest check-in or registration process at hotels is one of the first opportunities for a face-to-face contact in a hotel with the guest. At this point, all the marketing efforts and computerized reservation systems should come together. Will the guest receive what has been advertised and promised? The front desk clerk who is well trained in the registration process is therefore able to portray the hotel in a positive manner. The good first impression helps ensure an enjoyable visit. The steps of the guest stay are: pre-arrival, arrival, occupancy, and departure. The guest check-in procedure involves several steps that, if followed accurately, allow management to ensure a pleasant, efficient, and safe visit. The check-in process follows a concise procedure of offering the guest hospitality, retrieving a reservation, reviewing the registration card for completeness, extending credit, selecting a room to meet the needs of the guest, checking room status, confirming room rates, promoting additional room sales, assigning room keys, and processing the guest folio. All these steps occur within the space of few minutes, but the organization behind the scenes is essential, irrespective of the fact whether the check-in process is manual or computerized. The check-in procedure is more efficient and effective with the use of computerized property management system (PMS), a generic term for applications of computer hardware and software used to manage a hotel. The PMS promotes interfacing – the electronic sharing of data, between hotel departments such as food and beverage and the gift shop through point-of-sale (POS), an outlet in the hotel that generates income (restaurant, gift shop, spa, garage) etc. All the

technological gadgetry in the world will not impress a guest if the equipment fails to deliver service, that is the system must work for the staff as well as the guest.

The check-out point is the last contact a guest will have with the property and experience at this point will determine what kind of impression will a guest carry with him/her. If front office personnel collect and promptly post late charges, the guest check out can proceed without constrain. However, when the cashier or front desk clerk must call the restaurant, gift shop, and switchboard to verify charges, delays and disptes can occur. The guest checkout involves the following steps: Guest requests checkout, desk clerk inquires about quality of products and services, Guest returns key to desk clerk, desk clerk retrieves and reviews folio for completeness, Guest reviews charges, payments and determines method of payment, Guest makes payment, desk clerk inquires about additional reservations, desk clerk files folio and related documents for the night audit and finally Desk clerk communicates guest departure to housekeeping and other departments in the hotel if necessary.

Hotels are changing and will continue to change. As a result, the techniques of management of modern hotels must adapt to changing circumstances. With the introduction of new concepts like Tele-check-in, Property Management System, Yield Management etc. the front office staff should be constantly trained to handle these latest technologies and management practices.

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Check–in Check–out: Совершенствование управления оперативной работы службы регистрации отеля

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Аннотация. В данной статье рассмотрена специфика организации работы службы приёма и размещения, в зависимости от типа гостиниц и их классификации. Службу по приёму и размещению можно назвать сердцем гостиницы, центром возникающих вопросов и центром решения проблем гостей. Организационная структура гостиницы состоит из административной, сервисных, функциональных и вспомогательных служб. В статье исследуется совершенствование деятельности службы приема и размещения в гостинице.

Ключевые слова: гостиница; заезд; выезд; гостеприимство и отельер.