

# Training for Hospitality

## OPENING DILEMMA

**Enrique Garcia, a hotel general manager, has heard the last complaint about his staff! He is tired of writing letters of apology and comping guest stays because of poor delivery of service. Recently, a guest complained that after he left the front desk area in his wheelchair, a desk clerk was overheard making an unkind remark. Two days before that, another hotel employee took 45 minutes to respond to a guest's request for assistance in moving a heavy box from his room to the lobby area, and that same person said it took 10 minutes to go through the check-in process. Mr. Garcia wants to contact an advertising agency that will assist him in cleaning up the hotel's image.**

## CHAPTER FOCUS POINTS

- Determining employee hospitality qualities
- Screening for hospitality qualities
- Developing an orientation program
- Developing a training program
- Cross-training employees
- Developing a trainer
- Practicing empowerment
- Applying the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

## Determining Employee Hospitality Qualities

Assessing personnel needs requires identifying the skills and character traits required to do a particular job. Frequently, the front office manager can recite a list of problems with front desk personnel but cannot identify their strengths. The ability to recognize positive traits—skills of present employees as well as skills a potential employee should have—helps not only in choosing the right candidate for a particular position but also in assigning tasks to employees that match their abilities. If you do not know the skills of your current staff and the skills future staff will need, you cannot assemble a staff that will meet your needs or make effective use of their skills.

### Job Analysis and Job Descriptions

A front office manager should begin by preparing job analysis and descriptions of each position in a department. Identify the responsibilities and objectives of each and then consider the personal qualities, skills, and experience needed to perform those duties. For example, a front office manager may want front desk clerks to sell the more expensive suites or rooms and other services of the hotel. To accomplish this objective, an individual must have an outgoing personality or be willing to accept new responsibilities as a challenge or an opportunity to grow. The front office manager may wish the front desk clerks to be more efficient in handling clerical duties neatly and accurately. These qualities may be found in a person with prior experience in other clerical or sales positions. Previous experience outside the labor force—for example, as an officer in a service club or a community group—may indicate the person's leadership skills and ability to organize projects. These and other traits should be viewed as a whole. The motivational concepts discussed later in the chapter will help a front office manager identify and develop an employee's positive attributes.

### Positive Hospitality Character Traits

A front office manager must think about the character traits necessary to deliver hospitality on a daily basis. These traits include maturity, an outgoing personality, and patience as well as a willingness to accept constructive criticism. The employee should also feel comfortable selling, as he or she must promote the hotel's services.

Outgoing employees are able to seek out other individuals and make the initial effort to set a relationship in motion. Employees who are extroverts enjoy meeting guests and making them feel welcome. This is the type of employee who, in many cases, can turn a difficult situation into a challenge. For example, if a guest says there is no way he or she will be walked to another hotel—"After all, a reservation is a commitment"—an outgoing person may be better at persuading the guest that the alternative hotel will surely "meet your highest standards" than saying nothing at all.

Mature employees are able to assess the big picture and quickly analyze a situation before acting. Instead of reacting to a situation, this type of employee allows a guest to vent his or her concerns before offering a response. Mature employees also possess and exhibit patience in situations that require guests be allowed time to think or carry out a request. Guests may be confused about geographic directions in an unfamiliar surrounding; a mature employee gladly repeats and offers written directions or sketches to allow the guest time to absorb the information.

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## **Practicing Promotional Skills**

Employees who possess a positive attitude toward constructive criticism prosper and progress in a hotel career. All employees occasionally make errors in judgment and fail to meet standards. Employees who want to continue to learn seek a supervisor's insights into why a particular situation resulted from their actions.

Front desk clerks who are comfortable with practicing promotional skills are a great asset to a front office manager. This type of person accepts the challenge to sell products and services throughout the hotel and seek ways to meet or exceed sales quotas. This quality allows a front desk clerk to understand the total effort necessary to produce a profit for a hotel.

## **Screening for Hospitality Qualities**

Composing questions prior to interviewing to determine if an applicant has the personal qualities needed to fulfill a job's requirements is usually effective. The interview should have some structure but be flexible enough for both the interviewer and the applicant to freely express their concerns.

The front office manager begins to develop a list of questions based on the job description to guide the interview. He or she wants to determine if the candidate has an outgoing personality, patience, the ability to accept constructive criticism, and the ability to sell. These are only a few of the qualities for which a front office manager wants to screen in an interview.

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## **An Outgoing Personality**

The first question attempts to determine if the applicant is outgoing. Although observing the person during the interview gives some indication of how he or she deals with others, you could get more insight with this question: "Tell me about the last time you went out to dinner. What did you like about the host or hostess?" A response that indicates appreciation for a friendly welcome shows the candidate is aware of the concept of hospitality.

## FRONTLINE REALITIES



**Y**ou have scheduled three job interviews for tomorrow. In the past six months, you have lost six front desk clerks. As a front office manager, how will you prepare for the interviews to ensure that you choose the best employee?

### Patience

To learn about the level of patience a job candidate possesses, ask a question such as “Tell me about your recent participation in an event (sporting, social, work) at which you received less than what you had expected.” A response that indicates that small details were overlooked but overall the experience was rewarding may indicate the person is willing to be a team player.

### Ability to Accept Constructive Criticism

To assess a candidate’s ability to accept constructive criticism, a question such as “At your previous job, how did your manager handle a situation in which you did not meet stated goals?” may be used. A candidate’s response to this reflects the degree of understanding the interviewee had about why he or she was reprimanded, and how the situation was corrected may indicate how the person accepts constructive criticism.

### Interest in Selling

A question that allows a candidate to express his or her openness to soliciting donations for a charity assists an interviewer in understanding the applicant’s desire to sell products and services for the hotel.

These questions do not guarantee that the front office manager will choose wisely, but the effort will produce a more effective track record of screening for hospitality.

## Developing an Orientation Program

The person who is hired to work in the front office is in a unique position. In no other department of the hotel is each employee expected to know the operations, personnel, and layout of the facilities of every other department. The front office employee is constantly bombarded with questions from guests and other employees concerning when a certain banquet or reception is being held, where key supervisors are, or how to find the lounge or pool area. The **orientation process** introduces new hires to the organization and work environment and is vital in providing employees with background information

about the property. This program helps new hires become aware of the activities, procedures, people, and layout of the hotel. It is a critical first step in training new employees.

Of the utmost importance is ensuring that orientation is thorough and well designed. An employee who is given a brief introduction to the people who work the same shift, a quick tour of the location of the guest rooms, and information concerning the time clock can hardly be expected to be competent. By the time orientation is complete, new employees should be able to answer guests' questions easily. If they don't have answers at their fingertips, they should know how to find them quickly. For example, if someone asks for the general manager by name and the new front desk clerk responds, "Who is that?" an inefficient and unprofessional image of the organization is conveyed. The new employee should know who that person is and how to reach him or her. Moreover, orientation should prepare all new hires to provide correct and complete information to guests, the general public, or other employees.

Orientation programs for front office employees differ from one establishment to another. However, the following outline can be used to develop a program for any establishment. This outline incorporates factors common to all properties, such as economic position of the establishment in the community, overview of the hotel, the employee handbook, the policy and procedure manual, and an introduction to the front office environment.

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## **Economic Position of the Property in the Community**

A new employee benefits from knowing how a hotel fits into the economic scheme of the community and the region. He or she may be impressed to learn, for example, that a particular hotel is responsible for 10 percent of the employment in the area. Information concerning the value of the tax dollars generated by employees, significance of the tourism market, number of conventions and subsequent guests who rely on the services of the operation, significant growth accomplishments, and other economic contributions not only reassure new employees that they have chosen the right employer but also instill a sense of pride in the organization. These and other economic indicators help the new hire think of the employer as a well-respected member of the business community. Larger organizations can prepare a slide or multimedia presentation to demonstrate their commitment to the business area.

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## **Overview of the Lodging Establishment**

An overview of the lodging establishment includes the number of rooms (accompanied by a detailed printed handout concerning layout), a list of services offered in the establishment, an organization chart of the staff in the various departments, and, of course, a tour of the property.

### **Guest Rooms**

The guest rooms are an important part of the day-to-day activity of the front office staff. The sooner the employee is aware of the location and contents of the rooms, the quicker he or she feels comfortable with the job. Floor plans for each floor and a printed sum-

mary of the typical contents of the rooms are handy references that the new person can review at a later time. For instance, if the odd-numbered floors have three suites and the even-numbered floors have study areas for businesspersons, including this information in the printed material assists in the training process.

### ***Service Areas***

The services offered by the hotel (restaurants, banquet facilities, room services, lounges, pool, athletics room, and gift shops) should be identified during the orientation program so the new employee can assist and direct guests. Listing the hours of operation for each department helps the new employee learn about the systematic operation of the hotel.

The people listed on the organization chart should be pointed out to the new hires. These people and their responsibilities should be explained. This background information assists in decision making and communication of information to department heads. It also gives the new hire a sense of belonging to the group.

### ***Tour of the Property***

The overview of the lodging establishment is not complete without a tour of the property. This tour should include the guest rooms and guest room areas, major departments, and service areas such as restaurants, banquet rooms, gift shops, and recreational facilities. The tour can be informal yet specific in content. It allows the new employee to see the establishment as a place of work and a place of recreation for the guest. These tours also help the employee understand the front office's relationship to the entire establishment.

## **Employee Handbook**

The **employee handbook** provides general guidelines concerning employee conduct and is a valuable resource for new hires. In this publication, hotel managers describe many topics related to personnel issues, including:

- Pay categories
- Evaluation procedures
- Vacation time
- Sick leave
- Holidays
- Paydays
- Use of controlled substances
- Social interaction with guests
- Resolving disputes with guests and other employees
- Insurance benefits
- Uniform requirements

Sometimes people being interviewed for positions at an establishment or new hires do not ask questions about these policies because they feel the employer may think them greedy, lazy, or overconcerned with a certain issue. On the contrary, these questions form the basis for a good employment contract. Employers should make the effort to discuss and explain their personnel policies.

## Policy and Procedure Manual

The **policy and procedure manual** outlines how the specific duties of each job are to be performed (this is also known as *standard operating procedures* [SOPs]). This is another specific set of guidelines that is valuable for employee training. The policy and procedure manual addresses such concepts as the following:

- Operation of the PMS and other equipment in the front office
- Reservations
- Registrations
- Posting
- Written and oral communications with guests and other employees of the hotel
- Checkouts
- Preparation of the night audit
- Safety and security measures

The front office manager who takes the time to develop these guidelines will have prepared a useful supervisory tool. Providing materials in writing to supplement the spoken training session allows new employees to review the skills they must master and to retain more of what they are taught.

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### Introduction to the Front Office Staff

The final segment of the orientation process is an introduction to the front office itself. This introduction prepares new hires for the training program that will follow. It familiarizes them with coworkers, equipment they will be using, personnel procedures, and interdepartmental relations.

New employees should be introduced to the current staff of front desk clerks, bellhops, telephone operators, reservation clerks, night auditors, supervisors, and others. A little planning on the front office manager's part is required to ensure that the new employee meets the entire staff in the first few days. Saying a few words about the role of each employee during the introductions not only makes new hires feel more comfortable with their coworkers but also makes each current staff member feel like a special part of the team. Current staff members also appreciate meeting the new addition. This procedure is often overlooked, and new employees feel awkward for days or weeks.

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### Equipment Overview

The equipment in the front office should be described and shown to the new employee. Brief remarks about each piece serve as a reference point when needed skills are explained in detail during the training program. This part of the orientation program can be slowed somewhat to allow the new hire to become familiar with the equipment. The operator of the call-accounting system may have the new person pull up a chair to watch how calls are handled. The new employee may be encouraged to observe how a fellow desk clerk

processes registrations and checkouts. The front office manager should assure the new employee that specific training will follow. This is a time for familiarization only.

The new employee should be shown how to check in for a shift on the PMS or the time clock. The location and timing of the posted schedule of shift coverage should also be indicated. The importance of reporting for duty on time and its effect on fellow employees should be explained at this time.

## **Interdepartmental Cooperation**

Interdepartmental cooperation must be stressed during the introduction to the front office. This is an ideal time to establish the importance of harmony among the housekeeping, maintenance, marketing and sales, food and beverage, and front office departments. The front office must take the lead in establishing good communications among departments. Because the front office is the initial contact for the guest, obtaining status reports, maintaining communications, and knowing the functions being hosted each day are the responsibilities of the front office staff. Overlooking trivial misunderstandings with other departments sometimes takes colossal effort, but the front office must keep the communication lines open. Guests benefit from and appreciate the work of a well-informed front office.

## **Administering the Orientation Program**

Administering the orientation program requires planning by the front office manager. The front office is a hectic place, and there is much for the new employee to learn. Concern for the guests and the services and information they require must be a priority. A standard **orientation checklist** should be prepared that summarizes all items that must be covered during orientation; Figure 12-1 shows an example. The checklist ensures that the new employee is properly introduced to the front office. It should be initialed by both the new employee and the orientation supervisor after the program is complete to verify that all policies were covered. Thus, no one can claim to be ignorant because there is written evidence that the material was covered in the orientation program.

## **Selection of Orientation Leader**

The orientation program should be delivered by a member of the supervisory staff or a trained senior staff member in the front office. This person must have the ability to convey the attitude of the organization as well as the tasks of the employees. Whoever handles the orientation should not be on duty at the same time; it is impossible to explain so much about the property to a new employee while performing other tasks as well.

The orientation program helps the employer-employee relationship begin on the right foot. It introduces the workplace, guidelines and procedures, coworkers, and management staff to the new hire. The orientation program also introduces new employees to their work environment and encourages them to be a part of it.

**FIGURE 12-1** An orientation checklist is a useful tool that assists in providing a comprehensive orientation.

- \_\_\_ Economic position in community
- \_\_\_ Community geography
- \_\_\_ Printed floor plan of hotel
- \_\_\_ Visits to guest rooms
- \_\_\_ Hours for guest services
- \_\_\_ Organization chart
- \_\_\_ Explanation of key management personnel
- \_\_\_ Interdepartmental relations
- \_\_\_ Visits to:
  - Food and beverage areas
  - Housekeeping
  - Maintenance
  - Marketing and sales
  - Controller
  - Human resources department
  - Gift shop
  - Pool and athletics area
- \_\_\_ Sample restaurant menus
- \_\_\_ Employee handbook:
  - Dress code
  - Hygiene
  - Benefits
  - Pay rate
  - Paydays
  - Evaluation procedures
  - Vacation policy
  - Sick leave
  - Holiday policy
  - Drug and alcohol policy
  - Social interaction with guests
  - Schedules
  - Grievances
- \_\_\_ Policy and procedure manual
- \_\_\_ Coworkers in front office
- \_\_\_ Equipment in front office
- \_\_\_ Time clock
- \_\_\_ Fire and safety procedures
- \_\_\_ Training program

\_\_\_\_\_  
*(Orientation Supervisor/Date)*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*(Employee/Date)*

### FRONTLINE REALITIES



In your new role as front office manager, you remember reading about the importance of an orientation program to new hires with disabilities, and you also remember the lack of an orientation experienced by a friend of yours with a disability. You want to organize a thorough orientation program and present it to the general manager. How would you proceed?

## Developing a Training Program

Training is an important management function and is required to develop and ensure high-quality performance.<sup>1</sup> In the hospitality industry, some hotel organizations take training seriously; others talk about it extensively but have no real program in place. Those that have developed, instituted, and continued to update their training programs consider them great assets in human resources management. They allow the management team to develop qualified employees who can perform jobs according to predetermined standards. A good training program ensures that errors are reduced because all procedures are explained and demonstrated.

Planning and developing a training program for front office employees includes identifying the tasks performed by the front office staff, preparing step-by-step procedures for each task, determining who will train employees, administering the training program, and reviewing the steps in the training process.

### Identification of Tasks and Job Management Skills

The tasks performed by each employee are usually identified through the job description. The job description is based on the job analysis (discussed in chapter 2), which lists, in chronological order, the daily tasks performed by the employee. For example, the front desk clerk performs the following tasks on the day shift:

- 6:00 A.M. Enters start time with PMS.
- 6:05 Talks with night auditor about activities on the 11:00 P.M. to 7:00 A.M. shift; checks the front desk message book for current operational notes.
- 6:10 Obtains **cash bank**, a specific amount of paper money and coins issued to a cashier to be used for making change, from controller; counts and verifies contents.
- 6:30 Reviews daily report concerning occupancy rate and daily room rate.
- 6:35 Obtains function sheet (list of activities and special events, receptions, and the like) for the day.
- 6:37 Obtains housekeeper's report for the previous day.
- 6:40 Calls housekeeping and maintenance departments to determine the communications list (a log of unusual occurrences or special messages that the front office personnel should know about) from the previous shift(s).
- 6:45 Calls restaurant to learn specials for lunch and dinner.
- 6:50 Reviews expected checkouts and reservations for the day.
- 6:55 Checks out guests until 9:30 A.M.

All of the tasks identified in the job analysis must then be broken down further into specific skills to build a sound training program. This may seem like a laborious procedure. It is! But the first step is always the most cumbersome. Using the job analysis for each of the jobs in the front office ensures that all tasks required to deliver hospitality to the guest are included in the training program.

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## Preparing Step-by-Step Procedures

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Step-by-step procedures for each task help the trainee understand how to perform tasks correctly. This approach also helps the trainer prepare and deliver training sessions more efficiently.

If a hotel front office has a PMS, the operator of the computer terminal must learn to enter data or commands sequentially. **Documentation**, written instructions on how to operate computer software, accompanies all property management systems. Documentation can be used as a basis for developing the step-by-step training procedure for using the PMS, and it can serve as a model for preparing step-by-step procedures for other tasks.

A step-by-step procedure to complete a guest checkout on the PMS might include the following:

1. Inquire about the guest's accommodations.
2. Enter the guest's room number.
3. Inquire about late charges.
4. Confirm method of payment.
5. Print a hard copy of the folio.
6. Allow the guest to review the folio.
7. Accept cash or credit card or bill-to-account.
8. Enter amount of payment.
9. Enter method of payment.
10. Enter department code.
11. Check for zero balance.
12. Give the guest a copy of the folio.
13. Inquire if additional reservations are needed.
14. Make farewell comments.

Each of these procedures can be subdivided as necessary. For example, as part of step 6, the new desk clerk could be trained to point out major sections of the folio and charges incurred by the guest so the guest is aware of all the charges that make up the total. The

guest can then ask questions about any of the charges at this time, rather than after the bill is produced, thus eliminating extra work for the controller's department.

## Management Concepts

In addition to task performance, other, less tangible skills must be addressed in a training program for front office employees. Stress management, time management, and organizational skills are some of the areas that should be discussed. Although these skills are often covered in seminar formats, they cannot be considered in isolation. These skills are better understood when integrated into the training program as a whole, so they can be applied to task performance. For example, the employee being trained to check out a guest should be made aware that this process may occur under stressful conditions; he or she could face long lines, many guests questioning charges, and pressure from other guests to keep the line moving. Learning to remaining calm under these circumstances does come with experience, but the tenets of stress management will help even the new employee handle difficult situations. Self-control and concern for the guest's welfare are paramount.

Mastering time management is another important skill that enables employees to perform particular tasks at required times. For example, various departments depend on front office employees on a regular basis to relay messages to guests and other departments; if the front office does not come through, a great deal of confusion results for all concerned. Organizational skills help employees deal with their workload systematically rather than jumping from one task to another without completing any of them. Completing paperwork on a regular basis, rather than allowing it to mount into an intimidating pile, is one example of an organizational skill that can improve performance.

## Steps in the Training Process

The recommended steps in the training process include preparation, delivery, trial and error, and follow-up.

### Preparation: Get Ready

***Behavioral Objectives: What do you want them to do?***

The trainer must plan the details of the training session. The first step is to prepare behavioral objectives for trainees. These objectives identify what trainees should know when the session is over and allow the trainees to achieve expected changes in behavior. They assist trainees in building their knowledge base as they develop skills. Behavioral objectives define what the trainee should be able to do, how effectively he or she should do it, and when the task should be complete. For example, a behavioral objective for a training session on guest check-in might be: "The trainee will be able to perform the guest check-in procedure for a guest with a prior reservation on the PMS with 100 percent accuracy in five minutes." This focuses the trainer on the task of training a desk clerk in

completing a check-in for a guest with a reservation, not a check-in for a guest without a reservation. The trainee must also have already mastered the step-by-step procedure for operating the registration module on the PMS. The goal of 100 percent accuracy in five minutes may be unrealistic to achieve during the actual training session because practice is required. The desk clerk must practice to achieve the speed.

***Train the Trainer: The trainer must be ready.***

In addition to preparing behavioral objectives for each training session, the trainer must know how to present the new skill to the trainee, relate the skill to other parts of the employee's job, review the presentation area and scheduling for the session, and supply ancillary materials, such as audiovisual presentation equipment and printed matter.

Presenting a skill requires the trainer to demonstrate the step-by-step procedure with the needs of the trainee in mind. This is not the time to show off how quickly the trainer can check in a guest. The trainer must be patient and consider the task from a beginner's point of view. First, the trainer must explain what the trainee is expected to learn. Next, he or she must repeat key instructions, particularly when demonstrating complicated equipment. The trainee must also be informed about where he or she can find assistance if help is needed (in printed instructions, with the user-friendly Help program on the terminal, or from another employee). Trainers should always explain slowly and check that the trainee understands all explanations as he or she goes along.

The trainer should also keep in mind what is best presented to trainees in various areas of the front office or hotel and at specific times of the day. Will the area be free of distractions and available for training? Is the time to present this skill better scheduled for the midmorning, early afternoon, or late evening? Training a new employee to use the PMS at the height of the morning rush almost guarantees failure. Of course, new employees must work under distracting and disorderly conditions, but during training they require a distraction-free, orderly area so they can concentrate on mastering skills.

The trainer should also be sure the materials needed to deliver the session are in order. Have DVDs, CDs, and videotapes been ordered and received? Have they been previewed? Does the VCR work? Has the room been scheduled for the satellite or **PictureTel** reception, the use of telephone lines to send and receive video and audio impressions? Have **telephone initiation and reception agreements**, contracts between senders and receivers of PictureTel concerning specifications of the telephone call and who pays for the call, been set? Have the coordinates been set for the satellite dish reception? Has the printed material required for training and follow-up been duplicated? Are enough copies available? These preparations are essential to a professional presentation. They allow in-depth training to take place without interruption and provide the trainee with a means for review after the session is over.

***Training Is a Communication Process: You have to help them think through it.***

Explaining how the skill being presented relates to other parts of the employee's job improves learning, enabling the trainee to understand how a particular task fits into the job as a whole. Trainees remember more when they understand why a task is important. Such explanations also teach new employees the importance of performing individual tasks correctly; this, in turn, forms the basis for a series of jobs.

## **Delivery: Show Me**

**Adopt the Point of View of the Trainee: He or she will learn better.** When demonstrating skills, the trainer must consider the presentation from the trainee's point of view. For example, present the skill with the trainee to your right or left so the trainee can observe as it is presented. The trainee who cannot see the skill being presented has a much harder time understanding and retaining the skill. If the trainee is left-handed, special presentation planning is required. Perhaps standing in front of the left-handed person for the presentation will allow him or her to reverse some of the items mentally. If the trainer is aware that the trainee is left-handed (in a right-handed operation), training time and employee errors decrease.

**Trainers Communication Techniques: Master a clear speaking presentation style, explain jargon, and present in logical steps.** The trainer must speak clearly and distinctly. Mumbling or talking too quickly only confuses the trainee. The trainer must consider not only what he or she says but also how it is stated. If the trainer's tone of voice implies that the trainee is incompetent, he or she alienates the trainee. Instead, the trainer should encourage the trainee's efforts, offer praise when a skill is mastered, and always be patient.

Every industry has its own jargon. Trainees should learn hotel jargon during training. For example, *house count*, *no-show*, *sleeper*, *full house*, and *late arrival* are all terms used in the industry. Even if the trainee has previous experience at another lodging property, it is still necessary to review these terms to be sure he or she understands each term as it is used at the current establishment. For example, at a former job, the term *late arrivals* may have referred to guests who arrive after 9:00 P.M.; at the current establishment, however, *late arrival* may refer to anyone arriving after 4:00 P.M.

The presentation should be broken into logical, sequential steps. The step-by-step procedure that was previously prepared allows the front office manager to present the material in an orderly fashion. Trainees understand such straightforward instructions as "Press this key on the keyboard to activate the registration menu" more easily than they understand "Here is the registration menu. . . . Oh, wait a minute. Let's go back to the reservation menu for a minute . . ." Printed material that outlines the procedure helps the trainee learn the skill with practice.

**Relax as a Presenter: It's OK to make mistakes.** The trainer is encouraged to think out loud, explaining every step and its importance as the associated skill is demonstrated. The trainer might want to tell a story or two about how he or she performed at a first training session. The trainee can then logically follow the demonstration and feel more comfortable asking questions. This communication process also encourages the trainer, who can observe whether or not the trainee is picking up on the skill. The more the trainee is involved in the process, the more likely learning will occur.

After training is complete, the front office manager should watch how the employee performs on the job. Skills performed correctly are a good indication that the training was successful. Conversely, if the employee is confused or makes mistakes, it is possible that a trainer wasn't stopping to make sure the trainee was following along. As is true of all skills, being a good trainer comes with experience.

**Methods of  
Presentation**

The methods a trainer selects to train an employee depend on the particular topic being presented. Clerical and computer skills are usually taught by demonstration and on-the-job training. Maintaining customer relations is usually handled with role-playing, videotaping and subsequent analysis of role-playing, or viewing and analysis of commercially prepared videos or cable network programs.

**Skill  
Demonstration**

In **skill demonstration**, the trainer demonstrates specific tasks required to complete a job. The trainer performs a task in a sequential manner and provides the trainee with an opportunity to practice, with the benefit of the trainer's being there to offer constructive feedback.

**On-the-Job  
Training**

**On-the-job training** is a process in which the employee observes and practices a task while performing his or her job. This method is a mainstay of training in the hospitality industry. Planned training sessions must be incorporated into on-the-job training if this approach is to be successful. This method trains the new employee to perform tasks on an as-needed basis; the employee learns a skill only when he or she has to use it on the job. With this method, however, the demands of the business come first, and training takes a back seat. A consequence of failing to follow through is that the employee is never taught the correct procedures for performing a task. When this occurs, it means that the ground on which a good training program is founded—planning, development, organization, delivery, and follow-up procedures—is undermined. The consequence is an employee who does not have all the skills necessary to do the most efficient job.

**Role-Playing**

**Role-playing** gives the trainee an opportunity to practice a customer service situation by acting out the role before actually being required to do the job. The front office staff must often act as a sounding board for complaints and as a problem solver, even when the problem has nothing to do with the front office. Experience teaches that, sooner or later, every front desk clerk will have a customer with a guaranteed reservation when there are no vacancies, a customer who was given a key to a room that was not cleaned, or a customer who must wait a long time to gain admittance to a guest room. The options available for handling such situations are often not communicated to new employees. Only by trial and error do they learn to find accommodations at another hotel when the hotel is overbooked, to offer a sincere apology and provide another room to the guest who was sent to a dirty room, or to suggest a snack in the dining room or provide directions to the patio lounge to the guest who must wait an hour to get into a room. Role-playing allows the new employee to confront these situations before they actually occur. The goal is that when such situations really do crop up, the employee is able to act professionally and offer service with a smile.

If the hotel has the equipment to videotape employees, trainees can be taped during role-playing sessions. The tape can then be reviewed with the employee to provide feedback on his or her performance. The trainer can analyze the employee's eye contact, clarity of diction, talking speed, poise, manner of dress, and posture. This method is valuable in preparing new employees to handle the stress of a busy front desk or an irate telephone caller.

**Commercial Videos**

Several commercially prepared videotapes are offered by the Educational Institute of the American Hotel & Lodging Association to front office managers to use in training front office employees. These tapes show customer service situations, enabling the new employee to see how other front office employees handle customer relations. The trainer should preview the tapes and prepare a list of discussion questions to be sure the employee understands the purpose of the tape and can apply on the job what he or she observes.

**Distance Learning**

New inroads have been made in **distance learning**, providing educational and training opportunities anywhere, anytime, and at any place, through **HSA International**, a commercial hospitality educational organization based in Pembroke Pines, Florida. HSA International offers 24/7 distance learning salesperson skill training in reservations via the Internet for front office and marketing and sales office personnel. "A major capability of the new online learning system is that a hotel's team members can select the language in which they feel most comfortable reviewing and experiencing the material. English, German, and Spanish were available in 2003. Mandarin (Chinese), French, and Italian were introduced in 2004."<sup>2</sup>

**Trial and Error: Let Me Do It**

At this stage of the training process, the new employee demonstrates the skill to the trainer, who observes the attempt and offers constructive criticism. Here, the behavioral objective is useful, as the trainer can use it to determine whether or not the employee is performing the skill according to desired standards.

The trainee should be encouraged to perform the procedure as often as necessary to master it and meet the objective. The trainer may note how much practice other employees needed to learn this particular skill; for example, saying "Many employees must practice this five or six times before they catch on and come up to speed" lets the trainee know that instant mastery of the skill is not expected. The trainer should specify how long the trial-and-error period will last. Additional training may be required.

The step-by-step training procedure is helpful to the trainee in learning to perform the skill. The parts of the skill demonstration that were confusing or fuzzy are clarified through individual effort.

**Follow-up: Check My Progress**

The trainer must follow up with trainees after the program is completed. This is a necessary final element in a sound training program. The trainer may develop a **training tickler file**, a database that keeps track of training sessions and alerts trainers to important upcoming dates for each new employee, listing the name of the training session, date of the session, comments, and date for follow-up. Figure 12-2 demonstrates how this management tool can be used. This type of information can be processed in a separate database program on the PMS or maintained in an index card file.

The follow-up completes the training session because it provides the feedback the trainee needs to meet the behavioral objective. It also assures management that the skills necessary to deliver hospitality have been planned, demonstrated, practiced, and mastered.

**FIGURE 12-2** The tickler files help the front office manager check up on employee training.

Training File	Employee Name: _____
Session	Orientation Program
Date:	12/1
Comments:	Employee very enthusiastic; possible interest in reservationist position
Follow-up:	12/5 Show rooms again. 12/6 Meet night auditor.
Trainer:	JB
Session:	Guest Check-in
Date:	12/6
Comments:	Rated 80%, 1st attempt on 12/6 Rated 85%, 4th attempt on 12/9
Follow-up:	12/15 Check to see if flow has picked up.
Trainer:	JB

## Administering a Training Program

Planning the training program includes making provisions for administering it. Many details must be coordinated. Accurate but flexible schedules for training sessions must be set and maintained. Progress charts on employee training should be produced and displayed. Content preparation and duplication of training materials must be completed in a timely fashion.

The responsibility for administering the training program rests with the front office manager. If this responsibility is delegated to an assistant in the front office or human resources department, details of administration must be discussed with that person.

Effective training for front office positions is not easy to apply in the hospitality industry. The constant flow of people at the front desk, registrations and special events, telephone calls, emergencies, vendor calls, and other demands require the front office

### FRONTLINE REALITIES



**Y**ou have been asked by the front office manager of a local hotel to offer tips on training new employees at the front desk. What guidelines would you offer?

manager to balance the needs of the moment with those of the future. However, if high-quality hospitality services and products are to be available, training procedures for new employees must be well planned and developed.

## Cross-training

Even the most basic training programs must make provisions for developing employee skills that are useful to the organization. The unpredictable nature of business volume and employee availability in the hotel industry calls for a versatile staff. **Cross-training**, which means training employees for performing multiple tasks and jobs, is key. A front office staff member who is able to perform multiple jobs has rescued many a front office manager during a crisis. The front office manager who discovers that one front desk clerk and one telephone operator are unexpectedly absent on the same day can attest to the value of cross-training. If a bellhop knows how to operate the PMS and the reservationist is trained to use the switchboard, the day can be saved. However, cross-training will get a front office manager out of a tight situation only if he or she has planned for it. If cross-training is to be provided, it should be built into a job description and pay rate. Note, however, before planning for cross-training, that some labor unions prohibit the practice of assigning noncontractual duties; in this case, cross-training is not viable.

## Developing a Trainer

Careful consideration should be given to selecting the individual who trains new employees. This person should have a professional attitude and provide trainees with a positive attitude and enthusiasm for their positions. The selected person should be in management or be a senior staff employee. The trainer must also be well versed in all procedures pertaining to the employee's job and familiar with training methods.

### Job Knowledge

Knowledge of performing tasks comes with practice after formal training. There is no substitute for experience. The trainee inevitably has specific questions about particular tasks, and the trainer must be able to answer them accurately and completely. Such answers are not always found in policy manuals and training handbooks; they are often learned only through hands-on experience.

### **Ability to Teach**

The ability to teach is important. The trainer must be able to plan the session in a logical, incremental fashion. It is also critical that the trainer possess good communication skills. The training session may include demonstrations, discussions, and workshops.

The trainer should be familiar with all front office equipment and know how to prepare printed instructions and how to operate audiovisual equipment. He or she should be familiar with the basic steps of the training process (discussed earlier in this chapter). Finally, trainers should try to empathize with the new employee, perhaps by recalling how inadequate they felt when they were new on the job. Patience is important, as is careful explanation. Trainers who give hurried explanations discourage questions and, as a result, end up with trainees who feel unprepared to do their jobs.

### **Professional Attitude**

The trainer must have a professional and positive personal view that supports the organization's goals of providing high-quality services and products, maximizing profits, and controlling costs. A professional attitude is evident in the way an employee handles his or her job responsibilities: explaining a foul-up in a room reservation, helping a guest locate another department in the hotel, participating in programs to increase room rates, and controlling operating expenses. The desk clerk whose responses to these duties are "This company always overbooks at this time of the year," "Follow the signs on the wall to find the restaurant," "I wouldn't help this place get higher room rates," and "Take an extra 15 minutes on your break—this place can afford it" does not exhibit a professional attitude.

Experienced managers are well aware of the skilled senior employee who has mastered the skills involved in a job but holds a negative attitude toward the company or the management that represents the company. It is best not to enlist the assistance of such employees in training new hires. Managers are responsible for molding attitudes, teaching skills, and passing knowledge on to their employees. Exposing new employees to an unprofessional, negative attitude during training undermines the purpose of the training sessions. The trainer should represent the company and demonstrate good employer-employee relations.

## Training for Empowerment

Empowerment, which was discussed in chapter 11, must be applied to training employees. The act of delegating authority and responsibility concerning specific tasks to frontline employees, empowerment is an essential element in operating an efficient front office. As part of the training program, a front office manager must specify the dollar amount within which an employee can credit a guest's folio without the intervention of the front office manager. The trainer must discuss this empowerment concept so the employee knows when the dollar amount and the guest's satisfaction are in harmony. Yes, there are times when the front desk clerk may have to stretch the dollar amount because of extenuating circumstances. However, a daily review of credits that allows an opportunity for employee explanation makes empowerment work for the guest, the employee, and the front office.

According to Lawrence E. Sternberg, "Contemporary management thinking is that the greatest gains in efficiency, productivity, and guest satisfaction are generated by making improvements in the system. Those improvements are most likely to occur when employees are empowered to recommend and implement changes on their own."<sup>3</sup>

## INTERNATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS



Front office employees must become aware of the importance of greeting international visitors who have needs such as information on currency, local geography, or local time. They may be unfamiliar with smoking regulations, operation of dining facilities, or observance of local customs. A training program for greeting international visitors includes trainee role-playing and employee sharing of relevant prior experiences. Sensitization of employees to the needs of international guests goes a long way in ensuring hospitality.

## Americans with Disabilities Act

The **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)** is a U.S. law enacted in 1990 that protects people with disabilities from being discriminated against when seeking accommodations and employment. There are two parts to this act: accommodations for people who are physically challenged and employment practices concerning hiring of them. Because the rhetoric of the law is still being reviewed in the courts, it is important to review employment practices and implications. Not only is it important to adhere to the principles of the law but also the opportunity to employ an individual based solely on his or her talents is rewarding.

The ADA states that employers must make “reasonable accommodations” to the known disabilities of the person unless the employer demonstrates that this would constitute an “undue hardship.” Section 1211 states that making “reasonable accommodations” includes making existing facilities used by employees readily accessible to people with disabilities and considering accommodations such as job restructuring, part-time or modified work schedules, reassignment, and provision of readers or interpreters.<sup>4</sup>

Current information on this important law can be obtained from state and U.S. legislative agencies as well as the Internet.

Front office managers must focus on the abilities of every job applicant regardless of physical challenge. Well-written job descriptions should outline the specific tasks required to perform a job. These tasks provide the background for evaluating all job candidates. If a certain required task is physically impossible for an applicant to perform, then the front office manager should consult with the general manager on rearranging the work environment so the applicant can succeed. For example, if an applicant in a wheelchair applies for a job as a front desk clerk, initial reactions may be “It just won’t work,” “There’s no room for the wheelchair,” or “Too much movement is required between pieces of equipment.” The front office manager should analyze how the physical work environment could be adjusted to meet the needs of this employee. Could pieces of equipment be clustered to provide easy access for an employee in a wheelchair? Could counter height be adjusted via a front desk that allows for vertical raising and lowering? All of

this must be evaluated in terms of associated financial costs. But these financial costs also must be evaluated against the costs of recruiting employees and paying for incentive programs, the expense of new trainee mistakes, and the like.

Training an employee with physical disabilities is no different than training any other new employee, in most cases. All the same methods are required. While the trainer may have to rethink the four steps involved in training, the opportunity to look at a familiar situation from another perspective may lead to improved routines for all.

The Marriott Foundation for People with Disabilities has made an exemplary effort in providing guidelines for working with people with handicaps and has developed a list entitled “Fears vs. Realities About Employing People with Disabilities.”

The Marriott Foundation developed the list after interviewing employers and coworkers of young people with disabilities who participate in the Foundation’s “Bridges . . . from school to work” program. “Bridges . . . from school to work” fosters the employment of young people with disabilities by facilitating paid internships for students with disabilities who are in their final year of high school. [Between 1989 and 2001,] Bridges has placed more than 5,000 students in paid internships with over 1,300 employers. Eighty-seven percent of the students completing the program have received offers of continued employment. “Finding meaningful employment can be hard enough for young people, not to mention young people with disabilities,” said Richard E. Marriott, chairman of the Marriott Foundation. “By working with school districts and employers, the Foundation’s Bridges program is helping these young people and their employers break through the ‘fear’ barrier and think in terms of ‘ability’ versus ‘disability.’”<sup>5</sup> [Author’s note: The Bridges program has placed over 6,000 youth with over 1,500 employers as of early 2005.]

The seven “Fears vs. Realities About Employing People with Disabilities” are as follows:

1. Fear—People with disabilities need expensive accommodations.  
Reality—Often, no accommodation is needed. When necessary, most accommodations cost very little or nothing at all.
2. Fear—I’ll have to do more work.  
Reality—Not true, especially when the abilities and skills of the individual are matched with the needs of the job. More effective matching up front will make disabilities largely irrelevant.
3. Fear—I’ll have to supervise more.  
Reality—Most employees with disabilities do their jobs as well as, or better than, other employees in similar jobs, and often seem more motivated and dependable.
4. Fear—Turnover and absenteeism will be high.  
Reality—Studies show that employees with disabilities rate average to above average on attendance.
5. Fear—People with disabilities may not be able to do the job.  
Reality—Because people with disabilities often have to work harder to get the job they want and, therefore, appreciate what having a job means, they typically per-

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The front office manager has a difficult time deciding which employee to hire. Mark and Tse have similar qualifications. Mark has two years' experience as a front desk clerk, but he was recently in an auto accident, which left him with a paralyzed right leg and dependent on a wheelchair for mobility. Tse has two years' experience as a salesperson with an electronics firm and expressed interest in learning all he can in the hotel business. How would you proceed?

form up to and beyond expectations. The key is effectively matching skills to job needs, focusing on ability.

6. Fear—People with disabilities need preferential treatment.  
Reality—People with disabilities neither require [n]or want to be treated any differently than employees without disabilities. What people with disabilities do need is an equal opportunity.
7. Fear—Will people with disabilities fit in?  
Reality—As part of a diverse workforce, employees with disabilities often bring unique life experiences which can be a shot in the arm for the entire workplace. Their perspectives on and approach to their jobs can be contagious, creating a positive ripple effect.<sup>6</sup>

## Solution to Opening Dilemma

Although an advertising agency may be part of the answer to this hotel's image problem, the real problem lies with the people who are delivering hospitality. Determining the qualities required to provide hospitality in a hotel and screening job candidates for those qualities are essential in order to present an image that reflects the enthusiasm and professionalism of individuals who truly want to deliver hospitality.

## Chapter Recap

If front office managers want to ensure that their employees deliver hospitality, they must begin by hiring people with character traits they feel are necessary to handle front office responsibilities. This chapter began with a review of those character traits—extroversion, maturity, patience, positive attitude toward constructive criticism, and an ability to sell. Finding these qualities in job candidates can be accomplished by developing interview questions based on these traits. An orientation program is necessary to begin the process of training hospitality employees. An orientation checklist that tracks completion of the explanation of such matters as the economic position of the property in the community, an overview of the hotel's physical layout, services, and coworkers, and a tour of the property can be helpful. The orientation should also include a review of the

employee handbook and policy and procedure manual. The new employee's introduction to the front office staff and general management staff completes the orientation. Administering an orientation program provides a check on the continual planning and delivery of this personnel function.

Training practices were also discussed. The front office manager would start by identifying tasks and job management skills required to perform an entry-level front office job. Preparing step-by-step procedures is necessary to assist the trainer in developing a training session. The four-step training process—get ready, show me, let me do it, and check my progress—assists the trainer in working through the details of the training session. A discussion of methods of presentation included skill demonstrations, on-the-job training, role-playing, videotaping of role-playing, commercially prepared video training films, and distance learning via the Internet. Administration of the training program is an essential element that allows the continual delivery of quality hospitality.

Cross-training of employees assists the front office manager in handling the daily formation of a front office team. Employees who are cross-trained in various tasks and jobs allow the front office manager to deliver service as required.

Developing a trainer is an important part of training for hospitality. The selection of a trainer should be based on this person's knowledge of the tasks and jobs, ability to teach, and possession of a professional attitude that represents the hotel.

Empowerment was discussed as an essential element in the training process that lets hospitality flourish.

A discussion of the Americans with Disabilities Act provided the background, concepts, and applications of this important U.S. legislation. It stressed the value of providing the opportunity for physically challenged candidates to be offered employment and the benefits of hiring these candidates.

## End-of-Chapter Questions

1. How does assessing personnel needs lead to a more efficiently managed front office?
2. How would you prepare to interview a front office job candidate? Develop a list of questions to use in interviewing an applicant for the position of front desk clerk.
3. If you are currently employed in the hospitality industry, describe the orientation you received. What would you have added to the program if you were the manager?
4. If you are currently employed in the hospitality industry, describe the training you received. How does it compare with what was recommended in this chapter?
5. Prepare a mock training session on how to check a guest out of a hotel room. Where would you begin? Incorporate the four-step training method into your training session. Have a group evaluate your success in delivering the training session.

6. How do you feel about the concept of using the Internet as a 24/7 resource for training?
7. How important is cross-training to operating a front desk?
8. If you were asked to choose a trainer, what qualities would you specify? Why are these qualities vital to the success of a training session?
9. What does *empowerment* mean to you? Have you ever experienced empowerment on the job? How did you feel? How did the customer feel?
10. If you had the opportunity to hire a physically challenged job applicant as a cashier, what would you consider as a realistic assessment of the situation?

### CASE STUDY 1201

Ana Chavarria, front office manager of The Times Hotel, is in the process of organizing an orientation program for the new front office staff. As part of the orientation program, she will introduce the front office equipment and the associated paperwork. Further training on each piece of equipment will be scheduled at a later time.

She begins by listing and describing the functions of all the equipment. She also spells out how each piece of equipment relates to the overall function of the front office. Because most of her front office staff are relatively new (turnover is high), she decides she must deliver the orientation program herself.

Paolo and Brian have been hired at The Times Hotel as desk clerks. Paolo will start training on Monday at 7:00 A.M., and Brian will start on Monday at 3:00 P.M.

On Monday, a full house is going to check out by 11:15 A.M., and another full house will check in at 2:00 P.M. Ana greets Paolo at 6:45 A.M., only to find that the PMS is malfunctioning and a switchboard operator has called in sick. After attending to these crises, she receives a request for 20 additional rooms for today. By 1:30 P.M., Paolo, who has helped out where he could, still has received no orientation. Ana feels that all is not lost—yet. Brian will be in at 2:45 P.M. She will keep Paolo on for another hour

and deliver the orientation program to both new hires at once.

Brian shows up at 2:45 P.M. ready to go to work. Ana takes both Paolo and Brian to the coffee shop and begins a brief orientation to The Times Hotel. Returning to the front office half an hour later, she finds a long line of people waiting to check in. She tells Paolo, “Check out on the time clock; I will catch up with you tomorrow,” and asks Brian to work with the switchboard operator “until we get this mess straightened out.”

At 5:00 P.M., things have calmed down, and Brian is eager to learn his way around the front desk. In desperation, Ana writes up a quick checklist and tells Brian to go to Kris, the switchboard operator, and Hoang, the front desk clerk, and have them explain how to operate the switchboard and the PMS registration module.

How does Ms. Chavarria’s view of the orientation program compare to that presented in this chapter? What has she omitted from the program? How realistic is her scheduling of this orientation program? Is it possible to have a senior employee conduct the orientation program? Under what circumstances? Do you think Ms. Chavarria’s turnover rate has anything to do with her approach to orientation?

## CASE STUDY 1202

Ana Chavarria, front office manager of The Times Hotel, is participating on a team in her professional organization—Regional Hotel Administrators (RHA)—to develop a procedure to screen candidates for front office employment that other front office managers will be able to use. A few of the team members feel this procedure will probably end up being tossed out by the general membership because interviewing has so many variables.

Ana disagrees and says that if team members look at common characteristics of their successes and failures in hiring, they may be on the road to producing something really useful. Teresa Valquez, the representative from the RHA Southern Chapter, feels this

might work, but she still thinks it is an overwhelming task. Steve Harp, the representative from the RHA Western Chapter, says, “We have to do something. Our regional unemployment rate is so low that we have a hard time finding employees, so our decisions have to be good ones.” It seems there is sufficient energy in the team to begin planning to produce such a document. The group has elected Ana as team leader, and she begins with a brainstorming session.

Play the roles of five team members (all front office managers) who have the goal of identifying desirable qualities in employees that reflect the ability to deliver hospitality and determining how to use that information in a screening interview.

## Notes

1. The content of this section relies on ideas found in *Supervision in the Hospitality Industry*, 4th ed., Chapter 6, “Developing Job Expectations” (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2002), by Jack E. Miller, John R. Walker, and Karen Eich Drummond.
2. Brad Smith, “New Reservations Training Program Designed to Improve Agent Performance Any Time . . . All the Time,” [http://www.hotel-online.com/News/PR2003\\_2nd/Jun03\\_RezTraining/html](http://www.hotel-online.com/News/PR2003_2nd/Jun03_RezTraining/html)
3. Lawrence E. Sternberg, “Empowerment: Trust vs. Control,” *Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (February 1992): 72.
4. J. Deutsch, “Welcoming Those with Disabilities,” *New York Times*, February 3, 1991, quoted in John M. Ivancevich, *Human Resource Management*, 6th ed. (Chicago: Richard D. Irwin, Inc., 1995), 75.
5. Marriott Foundation, “‘Fear of the Unknown’ Invisible Barrier to Employment, says Marriott Foundation for People with Disabilities,” Washington, D.C., September 30, 1997; edited July 23, 2001. Copyright Marriott Foundation for People with Disabilities.
6. Ibid.

## Key Words

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)  
cash bank  
cross-training  
distance learning  
documentation  
employee handbook  
HSA International  
on-the-job training  
orientation checklist  
orientation process  
PictureTel  
policy and procedure manual  
role-playing  
skill demonstration  
telephone initiation and reception  
agreements  
training tickler file