

Effective Interdepartmental Communications

OPENING DILEMMA

The leader of a workshop in one of the conference rooms is uneasy about his program today. After noticing the connection for the teleconference is not working, he stops by the front desk and asks if the convention representative could come to the conference room. The desk clerk on duty offers to locate the convention representative and send her to the room. After the workshop leader leaves the front desk area, the desk clerk remarks, “You would think we have to be all things to all people all the time!”

CHAPTER FOCUS POINTS

- Role of the front office in establishing and maintaining effective communications with other departments
- Discussion and application of total quality management techniques used in improving interdepartmental communication

Role of the Front Office in Interdepartmental Communications

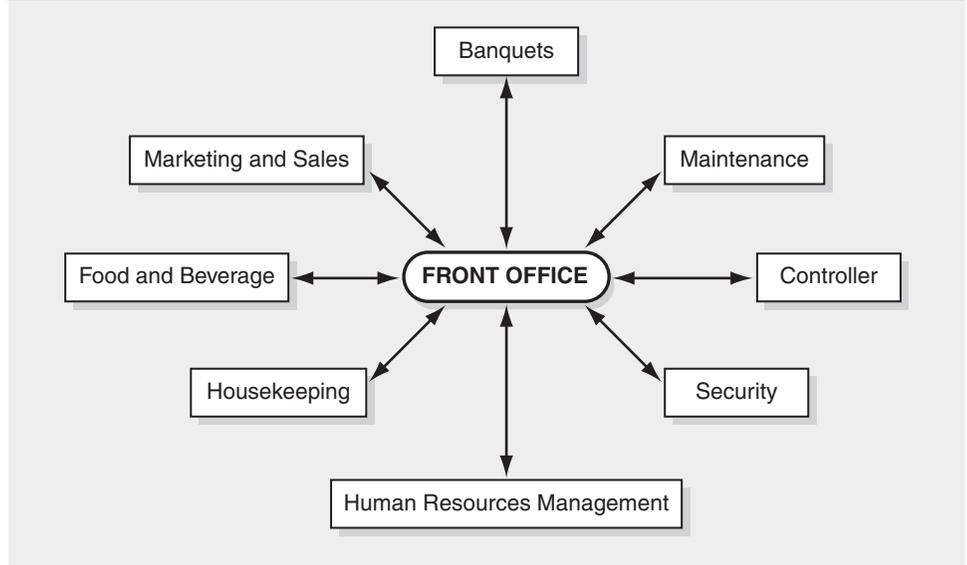
The front office plays a pivotal role in delivering hospitality to guests. It sets the stage for a pleasant or an unpleasant visit. Guests, often in an unfamiliar setting and wanting to proceed with their business or vacation plans, are eager to learn the who, what, when, where, and how of their new environment. Requests for information often begin with the porter, bellhop, switchboard operator, front desk clerk, cashier, or concierge, because these employees are the most visible to the guest and are perceived to be the most knowledgeable. These employees are believed to have their finger on the pulse of the organization and the community. Their responses to guests' requests for information on public transportation, location of hotel facilities, special events in the community, and the like indicate how well the hotel has prepared them for this important role. Front office managers must take an active part in gathering information that will be of interest to guests. They must also be active in developing procedures for the front office to disburse this information.

The relationships the front office manager develops with the other department directors and their employees are vital to gathering information for guests. Developing positive personal relationships is part of the communication process, but it cannot be relied on to ensure that accurate and current information is relayed. How does the front office manager encourage effective **interdepartmental communication** (communication between departments)? This chapter provides relevant background for you as you begin your professional career. It is important to note that this discussion is applicable to **intradepartmental communication** (communication inside a department) as well.

Figure 3-1 shows the departments in a hotel that interact with the front office. The front office is at the center of the diagram to illustrate the many interdepartmental lines of communication that exist. These lines are based on the direction each department is given to provide hospitality in the form of clean rooms, properly operating equipment, safe environment, well-prepared food and beverages, efficient table service, and professional organization and delivery of service for a scheduled function as well as accurate accounting of guest charges and the like. These general objectives help department directors organize their operations and meet the overall goal of delivering professional hospitality. However, in reality, constant effort is required to manage the details of employees, materials, procedures, and communication skills to produce acceptable products and services.

Front Office Interaction with Other Departments in the Hotel

The front office staff interacts with all departments of the hotel, including marketing and sales, housekeeping, food and beverage, banquet, controller, maintenance, security, and human resources. These departments view the front office as a communication liaison in providing guest services. Each of the departments has a unique communication link with the front office staff. The front office in any type of lodging property provides the face

FIGURE 3-1 The front office serves as a clearinghouse for communication activities.

and voice of hospitality for the organization around the clock. Guests are most likely to approach the front office staff for connections to staff in other departments. As you review the following lodging facility departments, try to grasp the role of the front office in communication with each. As shown in Figure 3-1, the front office is a clearinghouse for communication activities. The members of the front office team must know to whom they can direct guest inquiries for assistance. They learn this by means of a thorough training program in in-house policy and procedures and a constant concern for providing hospitality to the guest.

Marketing and Sales Department

The marketing and sales department relies on the front office to provide data on **guest histories**, or details concerning each guest's visit. Some of the information gathered is based on ZIP code, frequency of visits, corporate affiliation, special needs, and reservations for sleeping rooms. It is also the front office's job to make a good first impression on the public, to relay messages, and to meet the requests of guests who are using the hotel for meetings, seminars, and banquets.

The guest history is a valuable resource for marketing and sales, which uses the guest registration information to target marketing campaigns, develop promotions, prepare mailing labels, and select appropriate advertising media. The front office staff must make every effort to keep this database current and accurate.

The process of completing the booking of a special function (such as a wedding reception, convention, or seminar) depends on the availability of sleeping rooms for guests. The marketing and sales executives may have to check the lists of available rooms three or six months, or even a year in the future to be sure the hotel can accommodate the expected number of guests. A database of available rooms is maintained in the property management system by the front office.

The first guest contact with the marketing and sales department is usually through the hotel's switchboard. A competent switchboard operator who is friendly and knowledgeable about hotel operations and personnel makes a good first impression, conveying to the prospective client that the hotel is competent. When the guest finally arrives for the function, the first actual contact with the hotel is usually through the front office staff. The front office manager who makes the effort to determine which banquet supervisor is in charge and communicates that information to the desk clerk on duty demonstrates to the public that this hotel is dedicated to providing hospitality.

Messages for the marketing and sales department must be relayed completely, accurately, and quickly. The switchboard operator is a vital link in the communication between the prospective client and a salesperson in the marketing and sales department. The front office manager should instruct all new front office personnel about the staff in the marketing and sales department and what each person's job entails. (This applies to all departments in the hotel, not just marketing and sales, as explained in chapter 12.) Front office employees should know how to pronounce the names of all marketing and sales employees. To help front office staff become familiar with all these people, managers should show new employees pictures of the department directors and supervisors.

Requests for service at meetings, seminars, banquets, and the like are often made at the front office. The **banquet manager**, the person responsible for fulfilling the details of service for a banquet or special event, or **sales associate**, who books the guest's requirements for banquets and other special events, might be busy with another function. If a guest needs an extension cord or if an electrical outlet malfunctions, the front desk staff must be ready to meet the guest's needs. The front office manager should establish standard operating procedures for the front office employees to contact maintenance, housekeeping, marketing and sales, or the food and beverage department to meet other common requests. Knowing how to find a small tool kit, adapters, adhesive materials, extra table covers, or window cleaner will help the guest and save the time involved in tracking down the salesperson in charge.

Housekeeping Department

Housekeeping and the front office communicate about **housekeeping room status**, the report on the availability of the rooms for immediate guest occupancy. Housekeeping room status can be described in the following communication terms:

- Available Clean, or Ready—room is ready to be occupied
- Occupied—guest or guests are already occupying a room

- Stayover—guest will not be checking out of a room on the current day
- Dirty or On-Change—guest has checked out of the room, but the housekeeping staff has not released the room for occupancy
- Out-of-Order—room is not available for occupancy because of a mechanical malfunction

Housekeeping and the front office also communicate on the details of potential **house count** (a report of the number of guests registered in the hotel), security concerns, and requests for **amenities** (personal toiletry items such as shampoo, toothpaste, and mouth-wash; electrical equipment). These issues are of immediate concern to the guest as well as to supervisors in the hotel.

Reporting of room status is handled on a face-to-face basis in a hotel that does not use a property management system (PMS). The bihourly or hourly visits of the housekeeper to the front desk clerk are a familiar scene in such a hotel. The official reporting of room status at the end of the day is accomplished with a **housekeeper's room report**—a report prepared by the housekeeper that lists the guest room occupancy status as vacant, occupied, or out of order. Sometimes even regular reporting of room status is not adequate, as guests may be anxiously awaiting the opportunity to occupy a room. On these occasions, the front desk clerk must telephone the floor supervisor to determine when the servicing of a room will be completed.

The housekeeper relies on the **room sales projections**—a weekly report prepared and distributed by the front office manager that indicates the number of departures, arrivals, walk-ins, stayovers, and no-shows—to schedule employees. Timely distribution of the room sales projections assists the executive housekeeper in planning employee personal leaves and vacation days.

The front desk also relies on housekeeping personnel to report unusual circumstances that may indicate a violation of security for the guests. For example, if a maid or houseman notices obviously nonregistered guests on a floor, a fire exit that has been propped open, or sounds of a domestic disturbance in a guest room, he or she must report these potential security violations to the front office. The front office staff, in turn, relays the information to the proper in-house or civil authority. The front office manager may want to direct the front desk clerks and switchboard operators to call floor supervisors periodically to check activity on the guest floors.

Guest requests for additional or special amenities and guest room supplies may be initiated at the front desk. The prompt relay of requests for extra blankets, towels, soap, and shampoo to housekeeping is essential. This is hospitality at its best. More examples of communication between the housekeeping and front office departments are presented in chapter 15.

Food and Beverage Department

Communication between the food and beverage department and the front office is essential. **Transfers**, which are forms used to communicate a charge to a guest's account, are used to

relay messages and provide accurate information. Communication activities also include reporting **predicted house counts**, an estimate of the number of guests expected to register based on previous occupancy activities, and processing requests for **paid-outs**, forms used to indicate the amounts of monies paid out of the cashier's drawer on behalf of a guest or an employee of the hotel. These vital services help an overworked food and beverage manager, restaurant manager, or banquet captain meet the demands of the public.

Incoming messages for the food and beverage manager and executive chef from vendors and other industry representatives are important to the business operation of the food and beverage department. If the switchboard operator is given instructions on screening callers (such as times when the executive chef cannot be disturbed because of a busy workload or staff meetings, or vendors in whom the chef is not interested), the important messages can receive top priority.

In a hotel that has **point-of-sale terminals**, computerized cash registers that interface with a property management system, information on guest charges is automatically posted to a guest's **folio**—his or her record of charges and payments. When a hotel does not have such terminals, the desk clerk is responsible for posting accurate charges on the guest folio and relies on transfer slips. The night auditor's job is made easier if the transfer slip is accurately prepared and posted. The front office manager should work with the

HOSPITALITY PROFILE



Michael DeCaire is the food and beverage manager at the Houston Hilton, Houston, Texas. His previous experience includes positions as executive chef at the Park Hotel in Charlotte, North Carolina; executive and executive sous chef at the Pacific Star Hotel on the Island of Guam; and executive sous chef at the Greenleaf Resort in Haines City, Florida.

Mr. DeCaire relies on the front desk for accurate forecasting of arrivals, notification of VIPs and Hilton Honors Club members, communication of complaints and positive comments concerning food and service, and processing of guest bills. He also works with the front desk to obtain a thorough knowledge of the needs and location of banquet and meeting guests through a ten-day forecast of banquet and meeting events.

The communication emphasis at the Houston Hilton is extended into a nine-week cross-training program, in which all departments (food and beverage, front desk, housekeeping, sales, etc.) participate in learning the basics of each department. This training effort allows the salesperson to appreciate the duties of a cook, the waiter or waitress to understand the duties of a front desk clerk, and the front desk clerk to value the duties of a housekeeper. Another area of cooperative training efforts is fire command post training.

Mr. DeCaire offers the following advice for students wanting to make a career in the hotel industry: Take an entry-level job in the hospitality industry so you can understand the work requirements of weekends, holidays, and nights prior to investing in a college education. This effort will pay big dividends for your career growth.

food and beverage director in developing standard operating procedures and methods to complete the transfer of charges.

The supervisors in the food and beverage department rely on the predicted house count prepared by the front office manager to schedule employees and predict sales. For example, the restaurant supervisor working the breakfast shift needs to know how many guests will be in the hotel so he or she can determine how many servers to schedule for breakfast service. Timely and accurate preparation of this communication tool assists in staffing control and sales predictions.

Authorized members of the food and beverage department occasionally ask the front office for cash, in the form of a paid-out, to purchase last-minute items for a banquet, the lounge, or the restaurant or to take advantage of unplanned opportunities to promote hospitality. Specific guidelines concerning cash limits, turnaround time, prior approval, authorized signatures, and purchase receipts are developed by the general manager and front office manager. These guidelines help maintain control of paid-outs.

Banquet Department

The banquet department, which often combines the functions of a marketing and sales department and a food and beverage department, requires the front office to relay information to guests about scheduled events and bill payment.

The front desk staff may also provide labor to prepare the **daily announcement board**, an inside listing of the daily activities of the hotel (time, group, and room assignment), and **marquee**, the curbside message board, which includes the logo of the hotel and space for a message. Because the majority of banquet guests may not be registered guests in the hotel, the front office is a logical communications center.

A daily posting on a felt board or an electronic bulletin board provides all guests and employees with information on scheduled group events. The preparation of the marquee may include congratulatory, welcome, sales promotion, or other important messages. In some hotels, an employee in the front office contacts the marketing and sales department for the message.

The banquet guest who is unfamiliar with the hotel property will ask at the front office for directions. This service might seem minor in the overall delivery of service, but it is essential to the lost or confused guest. The front office staff must know both how to direct guests to particular meeting rooms or reception areas and which functions are being held in which rooms. Front desk clerks, as shown in Figure 3-2, must be ready to provide information for all departmental activities in the hotel.

The person responsible for paying the bills for a special event will also find his or her way to the front office to settle the city ledger accounts. If the banquet captain is not available to personally present the bill for the function, the front desk clerk should be informed about the specifics of food and beverage charges, gratuities, rental charges, method of payment, and the like.

FIGURE 3-2

Front desk clerks must be able to provide immediate responses to guests' requests for information. Photo courtesy of Radisson Hospitality Worldwide.



Controller

The controller relies on the front office staff to provide a daily summary of financial transactions through a well-prepared night audit. This information is also used to measure management ability to meet budget targets. Because the front office provides the controller with financial data for billing and maintenance of credit card ledgers, these two departments must relay payments and charges through the posting machine or property management system.

The information produced by the front office is a necessary first step in the process of the factual guest accounting process and the financial assembly of data for the controller. Without accurate daily entry by desk clerks and production of a night audit, the controller does not have the figures to produce reports for the owners, general manager, and supervisors. One might expect this communication to be in the form of reports. However, the front office and controller departments often communicate orally. They share a common concern for guest hospitality, and when finances are concerned, oral discussion is inevitable.

HOSPITALITY PROFILE



James Heale is the controller at the Sheraton Reading Hotel, located in Wyomissing, Pennsylvania. He processes money that comes in and expenses and taxes that are paid out. He prepares daily audits, is responsible for payroll preparation, and produces quarterly and annual financial statements. He also prepares financial forecasts and subsequent budgets.

Mr. Heale says his relationships with desk clerks, cashiers, and night auditors are important; however, his relationship with their respective managers is more important. He audits the work of the desk clerks, cashiers, and night auditors but does not directly supervise them. If they make mistakes, Mr. Heale tries to show them why. He makes sure they receive proper training, which includes letting them know the results of audits

when they occur and making them aware of their individual performance.

Mr. Heale has a good relationship with the front office manager. They work together to forecast room sales and to audit daily cash banks. The front office manager monitors the payroll and may ask for Mr. Heale's assistance. The front office manager is also involved in cash management problems; he and Mr. Heale alert each other to problems and work together to solve them. The front office manager monitors accounts receivable and is required to let Mr. Heale know when a guest has exceeded his or her credit limit.

He adds that everyone in a hotel is a salesperson. Selling is a big part of his job through fostering a good relationship with local vendors. His efforts may encourage vendors to become customers of the hotel.

Maintenance or Engineering Department

The maintenance or engineering department and front office communicate on room status and requests for maintenance service. Maintenance employees must know the occupancy status of a room before attending to plumbing, heating, or air-conditioning problems. If the room is reserved, the two departments work out a time frame so the guest can enter the room on arrival or be assigned to another room. Cooperative efforts produce the best solutions to difficult situations. Figure 3-3 depicts the essential communication and planning by departmental managers to provide guest services at a time that does not interfere with delivering hospitality.

Likewise, the requests from guests for the repair of heating, ventilating, and air-conditioning units, plumbing, televisions, and other room furnishings are directed to the front desk, which relays them to the maintenance department. The front desk clerk must keep track of the repair schedule, as guests want to know when the repair will be made.

FIGURE 3-3

Coordination of maintenance service requires cooperation between the maintenance and front office departments. Photo courtesy of Host/Racine Industries, Inc.



Security Department

Communications between the security department and the front office are important in providing hospitality to the guest. These departments work together closely in maintaining guest security. Fire safety measures and emergency communication systems as well as procedures for routine investigation of guest security concerns require the cooperation of these departments. Because of the events of September 11, 2001, the nature of the security hotels offer their guests has changed. All members of the front office team must be on alert for people who don't belong in the lobby and report inconsistencies with the security department. This professional view of security allows the front office to support the security department.

Human Resources Management Department

The human resources management department may rely on the front office staff to act as an initial point of contact for potential employees in all departments. It may even ask the front office to screen job candidates. If so, guidelines for and training in screening methods must be provided.

Some directors of human resources management depend on the front office to distribute application forms and other personnel-related information to job applicants. The potential employee may ask for directions to the personnel office at the front desk. The human resources management department may also develop guidelines for the front desk clerk to use in initially screening candidates. These guidelines may include concerns about personal hygiene, completion of an application, education requirements, experience, and citizenship status. This information helps the executives in the human resources management department interview potential job candidates.

Analyzing the Lines of Communication

This section describes situations in which communications between the front office and other departments play a role. Each situation involves communication problems between departments, traces the source of miscommunication, analyzes the communication system, and presents methods that will help improve communications. The purpose of this method of presentation is to help future professionals develop a systematic way of continually improving communications.

Situation 1: Marketing and Sales Knows It All—But Didn't Tell Us

Mr. and Mrs. Oil Magnate are hosting a private party for 200 people in the Chandelier Room of City Hotel. On arriving at the hotel, they approach the front desk and ask if Mr. Benton, the director of marketing and sales, is available. The desk clerk checks the duty board and sees that Mr. Benton has left for the day. He responds, "Sorry, he's left for the day. What are you here for anyway?" The Magnates immediately feel neglected and ask to see the manager on duty.

Mr. Gerard, the assistant general manager, arrives on the scene and asks what he can do for the Magnates. Mr. Magnate has a number of concerns: Who will be in charge of their party? Will their two favorite servers be serving the cocktails, appetizers, and dinner? Have the flowers that were flown in from Holland arrived? Mr. Gerard says, "Gee, you'll have to speak with André, our banquet captain. He knows everything."

When André arrives, he tells the Magnates that Mr. Benton left no instructions about who will be serving the party, and he has not seen any tulips in the walk-in. Mrs. Magnate declares her party will be a disaster. Mr. Magnate decides to proceed with the party and take up the lack of professional service later.

Later has arrived: Mr. Magnate has complained to the general manager and I. M. Owner—the owner of City Hotel—and both are upset about the situation. Mr. Magnate and I. M. Owner are co-investors in a construction project. Even if the two men were not business associates, the treatment of any guest in such a shabby way spells disaster for future convention and banquet sales.

Analysis

The communications breakdown in this case was the fault of all the employees involved. Communication is a two-way process, and both senders and receivers must take active roles. As the sender, Mr. Benton, the director of marketing and sales, did not do his homework. Assuming he was aware of I. M. Owner's relationship with Mr. and Mrs. Magnate, he should have adjusted his work schedule so he could be there for the party. He also should have informed the front office manager of the Magnates' scheduled event, explained who they were, and asked that he be summoned immediately on their arrival. Mr. Benton should also have worked more closely with André, the banquet manager, in scheduling employees and receiving and storing the flowers. Although Mr. Gerard, the assistant general manager, would not normally be involved in the details of a party, in this case, the VIP status of the guests would be a reason for him to be aware of the presence of the Magnates in the hotel.

The receivers in the communication process are also at fault. These include the front office staff, the banquet manager, and the assistant general manager. At times, a member of the management team fails to communicate the particulars of an upcoming event. However, the front office staff, the banquet manager, and the assistant general manager are responsible for reviewing the daily function board as well as the weekly function sheet. They are also responsible for learning about the backgrounds of the people, associations, and corporations that stay at and conduct business with the hotel.

Several things can be done to avoid this type of situation. First, the front office manager can ensure that the initial guest contact will be professional by reviewing the function board with each front desk employee on each shift. The manager can then help the front office staff focus on the day's upcoming events. Weekly staff meetings may also provide an opportunity for the director of marketing and sales to give brief synopses of who will be in the hotel in the coming week. At that point, special requests for VIP treatment can be noted.

Situation 2: Peace and Harmony in 507

Veronica is busy at the front desk checking in a busload of guests. Several of the guests ask her for directions to the nearest dining facility because they are hungry. Two of the guests seem restless and want to get into their room right away. One of them is an elderly traveler who needs assistance with his luggage and the other one, his young grandson, had experienced motion sickness on the bus. Although it seemed normal that a couple of guests would be restless and require special attention, something about these two disturbs Veronica. The elderly man's blank look on his face and his uneasy restlessness made her wonder what was on his mind. She checks them into room 507, calls the

bell staff and asks for assistance with the elderly guest's luggage, suggests that the elderly guest take a nap so he could rest from the bus trip, and directs the younger guest to do likewise.

The day continues, and several more routine check-ins and check outs occur. Veronica takes a midafternoon break and happens to notice the elderly traveler crossing the lobby of the hotel on her way to the hotel's restaurant. She remarks to herself, "He seems to be walking much straighter and taller than he did when he checked in. It's only been two hours since he got off the bus; that nap must have done him some good!" Likewise, on her return from her break, she sees the younger guest laughing and talking with friends while they listened to their boom box in the lobby. That nap must have helped cure his motion sickness.

Veronica greets her replacement afternoon coworkers, John and Delaney, and checks out. She has to hurry because she had an appointment in the city. Two hours into their shift, John receives a phone call from room 505 complaining of strange, loud noises in the hallway. John alerts Ishmael, the security guard on duty, and Ishmael investigated the situation. When Ishmael approaches room 507, he couldn't believe what he saw. The two guests are hosting a nondenominational religious party complete with live animals, musical instruments, and oh, yes—a bright 1,000-watt lamp. "The people in the room," Ishmael said later. "There must have been at least 45 of them, and they invited me in to share peace and harmony." They are quite taken aback when Ishmael tells them the party will have to break up because state law prohibits more than two people in that particular room. However, they cooperate and abide by the law.

Analysis

In this situation, we can see three communication opportunities were overlooked. First, when Veronica had misgivings about the elderly traveler and his grandson who had experienced motion sickness, she should have discussed them with a coworker or supervisor. It may have been nothing, but then again, it may have been a situation that would warrant further investigation. Then, when these misgivings were supported by the quick cures two hours later, this should have alerted her to something questionable—and precipitated a discussion with her supervisor or a call to the director of security. Again, it could have led to nothing, but a polite courtesy call to room 507 could have saved time later on. The third missed opportunity was Veronica's failure to relate her concerns about these two guests to John and Delaney. This shift-change communication is vital for keeping guests safe. All the communication training employees receive does not override the human instinct that should underlie the communication process.

Situation 3: I Know What You Said, and I Think I Know What You Mean

The director of maintenance, Sam Jones, has assigned his crew to start painting the Tower rooms at the hotel. Prior to making this assignment, he checked with the reservations manager, Keith Thomas, for approval to place the Tower rooms out of order for four days. Keith consented because a prior reservation for 150 rooms for Photo Bugs International had been confirmed for 100.

At 1:00 P.M., Sam receives a call from Keith asking if it is possible to reassign the painting crew to some other duty. The Photo Bugs have arrived—all 150 rooms' worth! The lobby is filled with guests for whom there are no available rooms. Sam tells Keith to give them one hour to clean up the mess and air out the south wing. He says the north wing has not been prepared for painting, so those guest rooms are ready for occupancy.

Analysis

What went right? What went wrong? This case demonstrates that cooperation between two staff members can resolve even the most unfortunate of situations. Sam was aware of the need for prior approval to take guest rooms out of service. Keith's decision to grant the request had a legitimate basis. Sam was also able to head off a nasty situation for the guests by being flexible. Then what went wrong?

The words that people use in communicating with hotel staff members must be clarified. In this case, the person who booked the convention said there were confirmations for 100. Was this 100 guests for 50 rooms or 100 guests for 100 rooms? This lack of clarity was at the root of the problem. In some hotels, the reservations manager may require a change in reservations to be written (in the form of a letter); these written instructions are then attached to the convention contract.

These examples of day-to-day problems in a hotel underscore the importance of good communication between the front office and other departments. Similar problems will occur again and again as you begin your career in the hospitality industry. You will grow as a professional if you adopt an analytical view of the communication system. Front office managers who actively participate in systematic communications are more effective managers. Training employees in proper procedures for dealing with other employees as well as their own departments helps improve the delivery of professional hospitality.

INTERNATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS



Justin, the front desk clerk on duty, cannot speak Spanish fluently but knows how to communicate phonetically with the Spanish-speaking housekeeping staff. When Victorio, the houseman, approaches the front desk to inform Justin which rooms are clean, they use the phonetic pronunciation of numerals and housekeeping status. For example:

English

Room 2180
is
clean

Phonetic Spanish

(dough s, ooe no, oh cho, sarh o)
(es tah)
(limp e oh)

The Role of Total Quality Management in Effective Communication

Total quality management (TQM) is a management technique that encourages managers to look with a critical eye at processes used to deliver products and services. Managers must ask front-line employees and supervisors to question each step in the methods they use to provide hospitality for guests. Examples: “Why do guests complain about waiting in line to check out?” “Why do guests say our table service is rushed?” “Why do guests get upset when their rooms aren’t ready on check-in?” Managers and their employees must then look for answers to these questions.

Total quality management was developed by W. Edwards Deming, a management theorist, in the early 1950s. His intent was to offer a new way for American manufacturers to improve the quality of their products by reducing defects through worker participation in the planning process. American manufacturers were reluctant at first to embrace total quality management, but Japanese manufacturers were quick to adopt Deming’s principles of streamlining methods to manufacture products such as automobiles. He gave managers tools such as flowcharts to analyze production by dividing the manufacturing process into components and then focusing on the segments of processes that produce the end product.

The most important aspect of total quality management in the context of the hotel industry is the interaction between frontline employees and their supervisors. The interaction of employees in a group setting or on a one-on-one basis to determine the root of the problem and how the desired end result can be achieved thrusts them into an atmosphere of cooperation that may not have previously existed. First-shift and second-shift employees, who usually do not understand each other’s activities, find they do have common concerns about serving the guest. Housekeeping and front desk employees come to realize that a guest’s request for a late checkout plays havoc with the delivery of hospitality. Total quality management practices ensure that the front office checks with housekeeping to determine room availability in such a situation. The bottom line is that interdepartmental communication is enhanced each time a team of members of various departments meets to analyze a challenge to the delivery of hospitality. Figure 3-4 provides a view of the interaction necessary to make total quality management a success.

FRONTLINE REALITIES



While a guest in room 421 is checking out, she indicates a dripping faucet in that room. After the guest departs, the desk clerk brushes off her remark, saying to a fellow desk clerk, “There are so many dripping faucets in this hotel that one more won’t mean anything.”

If you were the front office manager and you heard this exchange, what would you do? How would you encourage better communication between the front office and maintenance?

FIGURE 3-4

Group analysis of jobs is an essential element in total quality management. Photo courtesy of Radisson Hotels.



An Example of Total Quality Management in a Hotel

Total quality management in a hotel may be applied as follows: The general manager has received numerous complaints about the messy appearance of the lobby—furniture and pillows are out of place, ashtrays are overflowing, flowers are wilted, and trash receptacles are overflowing. The front office manager recruits a total quality management team, consisting of a front desk clerk, a maid, a waiter, a cashier, and the director of marketing and sales. The team discusses how the lobby area could be better maintained. The maid says her colleagues are overworked and are allotted only 15 minutes to clean up the public areas on the day shift. The front desk clerk says he would often like to take a few minutes to go out to the lobby to straighten the furniture and pillows, but he is not allowed to leave the front desk unattended. The director of marketing and sales says she is embarrassed when a prospective client comes into the hotel and is greeted with such a mess. She has called housekeeping several times to have the lobby cleaned but is told, “It’s not in the budget to have the lobby cleaned six times a day.” All of the team members realize the untidy lobby does create a poor impression of the hotel and the situation does have to be remedied.

The team decides to look at the elements in the situation. The furniture is on wheels for ease of moving when the housekeeping staff cleans. The pillows add a decorative touch to the environment, but they are usually scattered about. The waiter jokingly says,

“Let’s sew them to the back and arms of the sofa!” Might the ashtrays be removed and receptacles added for guests to use in extinguishing a cigarette? Could a larger waste receptacle with a swinging lid be used to avoid misplaced litter? “The fresh flowers are nice,” adds one of the team members, “but many hotels use silk flowers and plants. This must save money over the long run.”

The team discussion encourages each person to understand why the maid can’t straighten the lobby every two or three hours and why the desk clerk can’t leave his post to take care of the problem. The employees’ comments concerning furniture and appointments foster an atmosphere of understanding. Team members start looking at one another with more empathy and are slower to criticize on other matters. Was the issue of the messy lobby resolved? Yes, but more important, the team members developed a way to look at a challenge in a more constructive manner.

Solution to Opening Dilemma

Upon initial review, the problem seems to be that all employees should be encouraged to assist guests in an emergency. However, in this case, the desk clerk has a perception problem about his job. This shortsightedness probably results from poor training, a lack of opportunities for employees from various departments to exchange ideas and socialize, and an atmosphere for employee motivation. The front office manager should discuss the situation with the convention representative and emphasize the benefits of total quality management. Supervisors must concentrate on the guests’ needs and foster employee growth and development so their employees will likewise concentrate on guests’ needs. These concepts are at the heart of effective interdepartmental communications.

Chapter Recap

This chapter analyzed the interdepartmental communications that must be maintained in a hotel. In particular, it focused on how the front office relates to employees in all departments—marketing and sales, housekeeping, food and beverage, banquets, controller, maintenance, security, and human resources. Guest needs are met when employees cooperate and communicate to provide hotel services. However, when these lines of communication break down, so, too, does quality of service. The front office manager must take an objective view of these communications, considering the needs of the guest, the actions of the employees, and the policies and procedures in effect. There are times when segments of the communication system will seem overwhelming, but the professional hotelier improves with each new challenge.

Situations illustrating communication lapses and their subsequent analysis provided insights into the complex process of communicating. Each employee must develop an appreciation for the work of other departments and an understanding of how each employee's activities affect the delivery of hospitality. Well-developed operational policies and training programs assist employees in communicating within a department and between departments.

Total quality management was introduced as a management tool that encourages interdepartmental cooperation and communication. This management technique focuses on ways everyone can work together to discuss issues and problems and resolve them as a team. This method produces the best products and services for the guest.

End-of-Chapter Questions

1. How do the communication efforts of front office employees help set the tone for a guest's visit? Give examples.
2. Give examples of how the marketing and sales department and the front office communicate.
3. Communications between the front office and the housekeeping department revolve around room status. How can each department director ensure that these communications are effective?
4. How does the banquet department interact with the front office? Do you think any of these duties should be shifted to the banquet captain's staff? Why or why not?
5. What does the controller expect of the front office on a daily basis? Why is this communication tool so important?
6. What role does the front office play in communications between the guest and the maintenance department?
7. How can the human resources department include the front office in the operations and communications process?
8. What does "tracing and analyzing the lines of communication" mean to you? Do you think this concept will assist you in your career in the hospitality industry?
9. What is your reaction to the use of total quality management as a means of developing better communications between departments?
10. Identify a problem area in your place of employment and develop a plan to use total quality management to resolve the issue. Whom would you place on the total quality management team? What results would you expect?

CASE STUDY 301

It is Thursday morning at The Times Hotel. The reservations manager has printed the list of reservations for the day. The front office staff has prepared 252 packets for guests who have preregistered for the Pet Owners of the Americas Conference. The Times Hotel has been designated the headquarters for the cat owners, while The Sebastian Hotel, located two blocks away, has been designated the headquarters for the dog owners. The participants in the Pet Owners of the Americas Conference are supposed to start arriving at noon.

The Times Hotel had a full house on Wednesday night. A planning group (179 rooms) for the Biology Researchers Conference was in the hotel. They held a meeting that ran into the early hours of Thursday morning. Several of the guests posted DO NOT DISTURB signs on their doors.

Yoon-Whan Li, the executive engineer, has noticed the air conditioning going on and off on the fifth and sixth floors. Yoon-Whan investigates the problem and estimates it will require about 12 hours of repair time. Yoon-Whan gets on the phone to the front office to report the problem, but the desk clerks are busy and fail to answer the phone. Meanwhile, another repair call comes in, and Yoon-Whan is off again. The air-conditioning situation is never reported to the front office.

The chef is busy preparing vendor orders for the day. He is also planning the food production worksheets for the Pet Owners of the Americas. The chef has left word with one of the suppliers to return his call early in the afternoon to clarify an order for the banquet tonight. The organizer for the Pet Owners of the Americas wants a special Swiss chocolate ice cream cake roll. The sales office has also included an order for two ice sculptures—one cat and one dog.

The banquet manager and several of his crew are scheduled to arrive about three hours prior to the banquet to begin setting up furniture and tabletops.

The servers will arrive about one hour before the banquet begins.

It is now 11:00 A.M., and a group of the conferees has arrived to register. They have brought along their cats and want to know where they can house them. The front desk clerk does not know where the cats are to be housed. He calls the sales department and asks for directions. The sales department says the person who organized this conference specifically told the participants they were to leave their pets at home. This was not to be a pet show, only a business/seminar conference.

The housekeeping staff is unable to get into the rooms (checkout time is noon). The Biology Researchers Conference attendees have not risen because of the late planning meeting. Also, two of the room attendants did not report to work this morning.

It is now 1:30 P.M., and the majority of the Pet Owners are in the lobby, with their pets, waiting to get into the rooms. With the air conditioning out of order, the lobby is bedlam. The odor and noise are beyond description. Housekeeping calls down and says it will need about two more hours before the first 75 rooms can be released.

The switchboard has been bombarded with telephone calls for the Pet Owners. The chef is anticipating his call from the vendor for the Swiss chocolate ice cream cake roll. He finally calls the supplier and finds out she has been trying to call him to let him know that the supplier is out of this product, but no one answered the phone at the front desk. The chef is beside himself and runs out of the kitchen into the lobby area. He finds the switchboard operator and verbally rips him apart. The front office manager is up to her ears in kitty litter and responds likewise to the chef. It is not the best of situations.

Just when it seems that nothing else can go wrong, a group of ten Pet Owners of the Americas arrives in the lobby with guaranteed reservations.

(continues)

CASE STUDY 301 (continued)

The hotel is completely booked, and these additional reservations represent an overbooked situation. The reservationist forgot to ask if these guests were cat or dog owners. You guessed it—they all brought along Fido. The clamor in the lobby is now unbearable—dogs are barking at cats, cats are hissing at dogs, and guests are complaining loudly.

The banquet manager and his crew have finished setting up the room for the banquet. One of the crew turns on the air conditioning; there is a dull roar, and blue smoke pours from the vents. Thinking this is only a temporary condition, he does not report it

to the banquet manager. Later on, the banquet manager instructs the setup crew to take the ice sculptures from the freezer and set them in front of the podium and head table. The banquet servers will be arriving within an hour to start the preparations for the banquet.

If you were the front office manager, what would you do to solve the immediate problems at hand? After the commotion had settled down, how would you analyze the situation? List the opportunities for improving communications between the front office and other departments.

CASE STUDY 302

The following script fictionalizes a hotel general manager's weekly staff meeting. Several students should act the roles of staff members, while other students observe and analyze the communications.

Margaret Chu (*general manager*): Good morning, everyone! It's great to gather once again to discuss our challenges and plan for the future. Let's see, Ana, you asked to have time today to discuss the issue of too few parking spaces in the hotel garage.

Ana Chavarria (*front office manager*): Yes, and this problem is causing all kinds of difficulties for my staff. At least ten guests a day threaten to cancel their next reservation if I don't find them a parking space. How am I supposed to achieve 100 percent occupancy with such a little thing as parking causing such a big problem?

Andy Roth (*parking garage manager*): Hold on there, Ana. Running a parking garage isn't an

easy job. We have a lot of new monthly business customers who are helping us make plenty of money. Did you forget that those new monthly business customers paid for the property management system you just bought? You were pretty happy about that new business six months ago.

Margaret Chu: Look, folks, we have to focus on the customer right now; I think both of you have lost sight of who the customer is.

Eric Jones (*food and beverage manager*): It seems to me we have too few customers. I would like to see some of those new parking customers stop in to one of my restaurants to have lunch. We have been tracking our lunch guests with business card drawings, and so far we have only had three of them in for lunch. Let's get rid of those new parking customers and stick to the regular hotel guests.

CASE STUDY 302 (continued)

Frank Goss (*director of maintenance*): I agree. Those new parking customers are littering all over the garage. They dump their cigarette butts and fast-food trash all over the place.

Andy Roth: I'll tell you just like I told Ana, those new parking customers bought you that fancy machine to change light bulbs in your department. Where were all of you people when I asked Margaret Chu if we could start to market the sales of new parking garage permits? This hotel should be called Hotel Second Guess!

Eric Jones: I think we are getting carried away with this concern; the real problem we have here is the lack of cooperation with security. Ana, didn't you have two guest rooms broken into this month? It's too bad the director of security isn't here to tell us more about it. We never seem to get any follow-up reports on what's going on or what we can do to prevent it from happening again.

Margaret Chu: Mike, that is a good point you bring up, but we have to resolve Ana's problem first. What do all of you suggest we do about the parking problem? Should we abandon a profitable profit center or keep the hotel guests happy?

Andy Roth: Ms. Chu, if I may be so bold as to say so, the solution we need is neither of those two options but a third one. Let's lease some off-premises parking from the Reston Hotel across the street for our hotel guests during the business week. My friend Margo runs that garage, and she says it is only about 75 percent full most weekdays.

Margaret Chu: Well, Andy, I will have to check this out with the general manager of the

Reston. He and I have a meeting with the City Visitors Association tomorrow.

Frank Goss: Ms. Chu, before we get to that security problem, let's discuss my need to cover the second shift over the weekend. That is an impossible request, because I am so understaffed. Do any of you have any extra employees who are handy in fixing things and would like to earn a few extra bucks?

Margaret Chu: Frank, it's not that easy. We are on a tight budget, and there are no extra dollars to pay overtime. Let's think about it and put a hold on scheduling a person for the second shift until we can resolve the issue.

Frank Goss: Sounds good to me.

Margaret Chu: OK, Frank, we can meet right after this meeting and talk about it.

Many of you do have challenges running your departments, and most of the time you do a great job. However, from what I am hearing today, we need to start anticipating problems before they happen. Recently I ran across a management technique called *total quality management*. It will help us understand one another's challenges and make us a little more patient. I will schedule a few workshops for you and your employees in the next few weeks.

As observers of this staff meeting, how do you feel the staff members interact with one another? What role is Margaret Chu playing? If you were the general manager, what role would you play? What effect do you feel the total quality management workshops will have on this group?

Key Words

amenities
banquet manager
daily announcement board
folio
guest histories
house count
housekeeper's room report
housekeeping room status
interdepartmental communication
intradepartmental communication
marquee
paid-outs
point-of-sale terminals
predicted house count
room sales projections
sales associate
total quality management (TQM)
transfers