



UNIT-2

The Role of a Hotel Receptionist

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Discuss the main duties of the hotel receptionist
- ✓ Understand the functions and importance of a reception shift checklist
- ✓ Handle difficult customer requests and communications with discretion

Unit 2

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Introduction

Receptionists typically operate the front desk of a business. They are often referred to as a front desk agent. They answer phones, greet clients, provide directions or information and organize files.

Hotel receptionists welcome guests as they arrive at the hotel. Their duties include checking guests in and out, issuing keys, and taking reservations by telephone or email, preparing bills and dealing with payments. They provide guests with information answer their queries and deal with complaints.

Work Activities

Hotel Receptionist, deals with enquiries and room reservations made on the telephone, online or by email. Receptionists greet guests on arrival at the hotel; it is important that they make a good first impression - a warm welcome and pleasant atmosphere in the reception area can help to get guests' stay off to the best start. Receptionists check guests in and out, often using a computerised system. They issue keys to guests and keep accurate records of which guests have arrived at, or left, the hotel. They make sure that any necessary information goes to the housekeeping, restaurant, maintenance, and management departments.

They provide guests with information about local attractions and places of interest. They might provide additional services for the convenience of guests, such as ordering newspapers or taxis, storing valuables and taking messages. They make sure that guests receive their messages without delay, along with any mail that might arrive for them. Some Hotel Receptionists operate the hotel switchboard, directing incoming calls and helping guests to make external calls.

Hotel Receptionists prepare a customer's account when they leave the hotel. They put together the cost of additional items such as drinks, telephone calls and newspapers, and include them in the final bill. They take payment from the customer in cash, or by credit/debit card. Some Hotel Receptionists might also exchange foreign currency. Guests might come to the Hotel Receptionist with any queries or complaints - not all of which will be easy to deal with. Receptionists often need to use their sales skills to persuade guests to take a better and more expensive room, to stay longer, use hotel services such as the restaurant, spa, and leisure facilities, or take advantage of a special promotion to help to increase revenue for the hotel.

They might also make reservations and appointments for these facilities. In the event of an emergency, Hotel Receptionists might have responsibilities such as helping people as they evacuate the building, calling the emergency services, and checking that all guests have reached safety. Sometimes, Hotel Receptionists might also live in the hotel where they work. In small hotels, they might have other duties such as serving in the bar or restaurant or helping with housekeeping. Some Hotel Receptionists wear a uniform.

Multitasking

As a receptionist you need to act like a juggler, always keeping multiple things moving at once, such as entering a reservation whilst dealing with telephone enquiries and giving keys to staff, getting people to sign in and out. Sound stressful? The easiest way to deal with these is to not overburden yourself; if you have a queue of guests, ring someone to come and help (guests rarely mind this); if you have people at the desk and are in the middle of a conversation on the phone, simply acknowledging the guest will work wonders and they will happily (usually) wait for you to finish.

Key Note:
Regardless of what you are doing, guests take priority! If the phone rings whilst you have a guest at the desk, before answering the phone, ask the guest if it is okay for you to answer the call; if you are doing something else and a guest comes to the desk, acknowledge the waiting guest and deal with them as a priority, over what you are doing – if you are on the phone, ask the caller if they are okay to be placed on hold for a short time and you will come back to them

Cash handling

Most hotels operate a standard cash handling policy that should be adhered to at all times. This policy usually covers actions to be taken in the instance of monetary discrepancies in floats or shift cash drops as well as control of access to money within the safe and tills at the front desk.

As a bare minimum you should always adhere to the following:

You are responsible for all the money that is within your immediate control. This includes ensuring the credit card machine balances with your shift takings, that all floats balance at the beginning and end of your shift and that any monetary withdrawals from the safe and deposits to the safe (i.e. petty cash, receipt of change orders etc.) are balanced and correct.

You should always ensure that you do not relinquish control to someone else for money that you are responsible for. It may feel uncomfortable, but even if your manager requests money from the safe the amount should be counted, verified and countersigned by you as correct.

Ensure any cash is kept locked in a secure place away from guest view. Most hotels have a drawer, till or cash tin that is locked when not in use. Do not allow anyone else access to your cash floats without being present yourself to verify their actions.

Never exchange cash for a cheque or credit card transaction (unless permitted by your hotel). These can hold serious financial implications as cheques may bounce and the credit card may have a transaction fee that means you may have given out more in cash than the hotel actually received from the card payment.

Count every penny in and out of your floats and safes. This includes any deliveries of change – count it all to make sure it is correct before signing to accept delivery.

Anyone who takes money out (e.g. for petty cash purchases) should be made to sign a receipt for the amount (usually known as a petty cash voucher); this should then be included in your float checks as partial balance towards your float.

Never let anyone else process payments or transactions using your ID or login for any systems. If they wish to process a payment they should do so on their own ID or they should ask you to complete the transaction for them.

It is recommended to review your own cash handling policy from time to time, even if only as a refresher.

Shift Checklists

Most hotels operate with a three-shift reception system consisting of a night shift, morning or early shift and afternoon or late shift. Usually these operate at times of around 7am to 3pm for early shifts, 3pm to 11pm for late shifts and 11pm to 7am for night shifts; each hotel varies however the hours are usually similar to these across the industry. Sometimes there will be a mid-shift of around 10am to 6pm or similar, in order to assist with a busy departure or arrival schedule. Regardless of the shift you are on, the hotel will commonly operate a shift checklist to ensure that a number of common tasks are completed on a daily basis. Sometimes these will be arranged so that certain tasks fall on certain days (such as checking an order for more change for the restaurant or bar has been placed on a specific day).

It is important to know that shift checklists are not just there to ensure things get done as they are also there to help your fellow team members. Imagine if you forgot to check everyone out of the system and the late shift had to spend time checking people out just so they could get on with their roles. It would get very frustrating if this was continuously happening.

Shift checklists should be there as a guide to let you know the most important things to be completed on a day to day basis and are also an effective management tool. I have spent many months perfecting shift checklists in the past, amending and altering them upon reviewing the tasks that people undertake. If you think something is not on your shift checklist but should be, then let your manager know. If you do not run shift checklists, speak to a manager about getting them instigated.

It is important to note that not everywhere is suitable for shift checklists. Some larger hotels operate reception desks where checklists are not feasible or where the main duties of reception are to meet and greet and get people checked in. For smaller hotels this may not be feasible, so a shift checklist becomes extremely useful as it ensures that the administration work is completed for the following shifts and that everything is correct prior to the receptionist leaving for the day.

Each checklist varies according to each hotel and all the tasks that are required for each shift within that hotel. Some example tasks include:

- Log in using your ID (surprisingly a lot of people forget to do this!)
- Count and reconcile all floats/safes
- Check all guests in/out
- Bank out and balance all financial reports

Keys

One of the core responsibilities of any reception is to control access to areas of the hotel. This usually means that you will have full responsibility for managing who has what keys and when.

Most hotels have a key log, where people sign keys in and out when they are taking or returning them and this should be enforced by reception at all times. This is so you can easily track down where keys have gone if they go missing and so that everyone knows exactly who has the keys at any given time.

If you use an electronic key system you should always ensure the following:

- Keys are programmed for the appropriate number of days for the guests stay; nothing is worse than having to go to reception to get the key reprogrammed every day
- Only de-program a key if you are permitted to do so (see 'lock-outs')
- Do not leave master keys or lock programming passwords within guest view or reach.

Lock-outs

This is where you de-program a key to prevent access to a specific area for a guest or group. This can occur for many reasons;

Accidental lock-out. This happens when a guest has left a room and the key is still within the room. In this instance the duty manager or maintenance will usually be able to allow access back in to the room for the guest.

Time-sensitive lock-out. This happens with electronic locking systems from time to time. Usually most rooms will have a standard cut-off time (for example a key programmed for a bedroom tonight will expire at midday tomorrow). If the guest has a late departure of say 2pm, their key will not operate beyond midday and will need reprogramming.

Purposeful lock-out. This happens usually when it is required for a guest to attend the desk for one reason or another. Commonly this is used by hotels for guests that have an outstanding or high balance that needs to be cleared prior to any further stay being allowed. It may also be used to arrange for guests to move rooms or provide witness statements for incidents etc. Never use this just to deliver a message to the guest or just 'for a chat'!

Messages

Guest messages are important. You should always try to ask the person leaving the message how urgent the message is. You do not want to interrupt a very important meeting for a phone call from a partner asking them to pick up some milk on the way home; but you also do not want to delay the news that a relative has been taken seriously ill.

You will have to use your discretion as a receptionist to determine whether or not you should get the guest now, or whether it can wait; usually the caller or person leaving the message can let you know this. For guests who are in their bedrooms, you can usually transfer the call directly. For guests at conferences or in-house events you may need assistance from other staff to get the message delivered to the guest.

Urgent or distressing messages

If the caller states the call is urgent immediately contact a manager, porter or other staff member to attend the guest's room or conference and personally retrieve the guest so they can take the call. Offer a private space to take the call (even if this is in the back office or in an empty bedroom) and leave them alone to take the call; do not hover over the guest whilst they are on the phone. If the guest is distressed or upset, immediately offer a private area for them to stay in whilst they gather themselves, along with complimentary use of a telephone or internet facility.

If the news is particularly distressing, offer a refreshment and use of the facilities; offer to contact any family members and arrange any transportation or taxis that may be required. Act with the guest in the same as you would a friend. Do not offer cuddles and hugs, but allow the guest to have privacy and relieve some strain by making any necessary travel arrangements for them (such as ringing the airport to rearrange a flight, or booking a taxi).

Non urgent messages

Other messages that are non-urgent can be placed into the guests pigeon hole, slipped under their door, placed in their room or added to their in-room television system (if the guest has a bedroom), or they can be delivered to the guest during a break from the event. Never leave them on the side and forget about them.

Delivering messages

When delivering a message it should be written verbatim (word for word as spoken to you) onto a piece of headed paper (or preferably typed up and printed) and placed in a sealed envelope with the guest's name on the front. Never disclose the contents of a message for a guest to anyone except the guest themselves.

Events

Most hotels hold some form of event from time to time, be it a private dining event, wedding, conference or office party. How each is handled is crucial to the success of the event. Here are some guidelines for dealing with some common scenarios:

Any event:

- Know where it is taking place and how to get there, this is so you can direct guests appropriately.
- Know the time everything begins and what guests are to do prior to the event starting – do not allow guests to accumulate in public areas unless already agreed with the event organisers. Similarly, do not send them to the event area until you have been advised it is acceptable to do so.
- Know who the main organisers are and when they will be arriving. Nothing is worse than attending an event that you are organising and for no-one to be ready for you.

Conferences and Seminars:

Usually these are charged per delegate, so ensure you have enough registration forms printed for guests to sign in to the event. Ensure you know the variations of each conference event's name. There may be many different people from many different companies arriving and all may know different variations of the conference name. Knowing as many of the possible variations as you can speed up the registration process.

Weddings and Parties

Know who is in which room in the hotel. Ensure that the party guests are allocated into the bedrooms above where the party is taking place as they will be less likely to be disturbed by, or complain about, the noise from the celebrations. Also know where the organisers or bride/groom are staying.

Guest Confidentiality

This is very unusual to be included in a training manual about reception, but it is one of the informal rules of reception.

No-one exists.

Sound strange? It really is fairly simple; if someone asks for details of where a guest is staying, you should refuse to provide the room number unless they have a legitimate reason for knowing, and even then you should be cautious.

The best policy is to politely refuse to provide room numbers to anyone who asks (unless of course they have lost their key and cannot remember their room number in which case you should verify the name, address and any other information you feel necessary to feel confident they are the person staying in that room). Advise the person requesting the information that for the security of all guests you are unable to release room numbers to guest. The person at the desk may however be allowed to use the reception phone to call the guest and find out which room they are in (obviously with you dialling the room number so they cannot see it).

If you are suspicious about the caller or person wanting a guest's room number, ask them to take a seat whilst you have a look at the records for them (usually the ploy of the system having problems and going to check the manual records will work well). Go to the rear office of reception (ensuring you have locked access to your terminal at the front desk) and discretely call the guest in the room and enquire if they wish their details to be released and then act upon their instructions. If they do not want details released, advise the enquiring person that there are no records of any guest under that name within the hotel.

Many hotels will operate an incognito service, whereby the guest's name on the system is altered to that of an alias or pseudonym so the guest may not be located easily. This is commonly employed by celebrities and high-level public figures. This should always be adhered to and many systems have a facility in place to allow a guest to be incognito.

Marketing Materials

Although you have little control over marketing from within reception, you still have a responsibility to ensure everything is up to date. Under no circumstances should you allow out of date materials to remain on display. It is extremely poor service having to explain to a guest that the brilliant offer they just saw on a poster in reception actually ran out a week ago!

Utilise the materials you have available. If you have feedback cards, prompt guests to complete them. If you have business cards, give them to guests who are enquiring about staying in the future.

Departures

Okay, so the guest has stayed and had a wonderful time with you and now comes the time to depart the hotel. It is important to be alert for guests approaching the desk to depart the hotel – usually you will hear them approaching as they come down the corridor or through the lobby. Immediately you should stand to greet them before they reach the desk and should also ensure you have your departures screen loaded ready to check them out.

When the guest reaches the desk, greet them with a friendly ‘Good Morning’ and ask them for their room number (although the best receptionists will know this already as they will recognise the guest!).

If the guest has a balance to pay you should print a copy of their invoice and ask them to check through the invoice before requesting payment. If the guest is satisfied with the bill, process their payment. Any invoice queries should be resolved quickly and any necessary corrections made (such as a guest being charged for 2 breakfasts when they only had 1) – serious discrepancies should be investigated with the assistance of a manager.

At the point of departure you should always enquire whether the guest has enjoyed their stay. This is also a perfect opportunity to have any comment cards completed by the guest. If the guest has had any issues, make a note of them and pass these to a manager, advising the guest that you will get them looked in to and thanking them for letting you know.

If the guest had issues and complained during their stay, instead of asking if they enjoyed their stay, ask if everything was resolved to their satisfaction and offer your apologies again for the issues they experienced.

Once the guest has settled their account and checked out, offer assistance with on-going travel arrangements such as taxi’s, train times or directions. Offer assistance with luggage or the use of an umbrella if it’s raining – do not let the service slip just because the guest is leaving – the service should never stop – after all the guest may ring up later that day to book a room for a few months’ time.

Personal Qualities and Skills

The key skills needed to be a hotel receptionist have been discussed below:

Great Listener

While receptionists often play the role of message sender, awesome receptionists are usually great listeners first. A great receptionist must quickly determine the needs of individual prospects or guests and then ensure those needs are met as efficiently as possible.

Organized

A key feature of working on Front of House is the ability to be well organized at all times. Good receptionists balance their strong interpersonal qualities with their effective organizational skills.

Helpful Attitude

A receptionist should have a helpful attitude. A skilled receptionist at a visitor's information center, for example, will answer calls enthusiastically and provide all of the necessary information to help people plan trips or find their way around.

Patient

Not all patrons or clients are a joy to deal with. An awesome receptionist is patient, flexible and accommodating in dealing with different personality types and communication styles. A hotel receptionist might have to deal with some guests who are especially demanding, surly or unpleasant after a long, tiring trip. Showing patience, listening to concerns with compassion and taking the time to resolve issues are all hallmarks of a high-quality receptionist.

Communication

Communication is critical for hotel front desk and guest service employees. They speak with guests in person and over the phone all day, so it is important that they speak clearly and maintain a positive tone.

Neat and Professional Appearance

The lobby may be the first thing a hotel guest sees when checking in, but the front desk agent is the first person he or she meets. These professionals are basically the face of the establishment, and employers are looking for individuals who will take pride in this roll and the representation of their brand.

Speak Multiple Languages

A hotel receptionist is likely to encounter visitors from all over the world. Being multilingual is a skill many employers value.

Problem Solving Skills

Even the best hotel has disappointed guests from time to time. For this reason, employers want to hire front desk professionals who can solve problems as they arise. Oftentimes, a prompt and courteous response to a complaint can turn a potential bad review into a good one—preserving a hotel's valuable reputation.

Ability to Stay Calm under Pressure

Most jobs for front desk professionals require multitasking in a fast-paced environment. At any given moment, a hotel receptionist may need to answer the phone, greet a guest, sign

for a package and process a credit card transaction simultaneously. Employers look for candidates who can do so without losing their cool.

Strong Interpersonal Skills

Liaising with guests, colleagues and management to ensure smooth running of the entire hotel requires good interpersonal skills.

Computer Literacy

Working at the front desk requires using computers to keep records, process payments, and complete other tasks. While you don't need to be an expert in the world of tech, you do need to be computer literate. You must either be already comfortable with the software the hotel uses and be able to learn new software quickly.

Friendliness

A front desk employee is typically the first person a guest sees upon entering a hotel. Therefore, front desk workers have to be extremely welcoming. A good guest services employee greets every guest with a smile and kind word.

Teamwork

Front desk employees often have to work with others. Sometimes they have to work with other employees at the front desk to handle a difficult problem. Other times, they have to communicate with people in different departments within the hotel—including parking, housekeeping, and management—to ensure that guests are satisfied with their stay. Front desk employees should, therefore, be able to get along and work with a variety of people.

Able To Work Flexible Schedule

Hotels and resorts are 24/7 businesses. Guests come and go at all hours, and someone needs to be at the front desk to help them. For the best chance at a front desk job, offer to work whatever schedule is needed—be that early mornings, late nights, weekends and/or holidays.

Guest Service

Without guests a hotel cannot stay in business. For this reason, guest service is the third most in-demand skill mentioned in front desk job postings on Hcareers. It includes being pleasant and friendly, working efficiently and accurately, solving problems and anything else necessary to ensure a pleasant experience for hotel customers.

Effective Written Communication

From responding to guest emails to writing down directions to local attractions, there are many front desk duties that require the ability to effectively communicate in written or verbal form.

Sales Skills

While front desk employees are not salespeople, they should be able to promote specific hotel services and offer suggestions. They might also encourage guests to purchase more luxurious and expensive rooms, if their goals and budget would be better served. People in guest services, therefore, need to be comfortable promoting products and services.

Further Reading:

- ✓ *Varinder Singh Rana, (2017), Hotel Receptionist.*