



Paradigm shift in the role of Housekeeping in Hotels in the post Covid-19 World

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Abstract: The Housekeeping department of a Hotel is said to be one of the most elaborate and labor intensive one, not only does the manpower need to be planned properly but also adequate training and development is required from time to time to reduce accidents and hazards. With the emergence of new trends and innovations at the various five star hotels post Covid 19, it is easier to keep a check on the quality standards set by the hotel and at the same time ensuring that no harm is being caused to the environment. There are several changes in hotel operations as of today, it is firmly believed that this is a dynamic situation that will continue to evolve over time. However, some of the enhanced precautionary measures that are here in present five star hotels will stay and which includes non-invasive thermal screening of everyone who enters the hotel premises, filling up of health declaration forms, frequent deep sanitization of areas as well as new contactless processes and physical distancing measures across the hotel and restaurants. In the current scenario the areas within the hotel are demarcated in all public areas which includes the lobby, reception area, banquets, elevators and classified based on risk due to the frequency of traffic and human interactions. Cleaning protocols within guest rooms have as many as seventy plus touchpoints that are sanitized daily. Housekeeping associates use prescribed personal protective equipment or PPE on daily basis, they work wearing masks and gloves and that is mandatory for all. The Arogya Setu mobile application is also running on all handheld devices as per Government directives in India.

Keywords: Hotels, Housekeeping, Cleaning, sanitization, touchpoints, precautions.

INTRODUCTION

A hotel is an establishment which is controlled by many responsible people who are designated with certain positions and responsibilities that come with those positions. These people are what make up a hotel, in broader words a hotel is an establishment made to provide guests with a place to stay overnight, in terms short-time basis, this is done with the exchange of money. Different hotels boast different features and services they provide to each guest. The products and services that are provided to each guest can vary majorly from hotel to hotel. Each hotel has a pricing strategy that is targeted towards a particular market or target customer. Hotel is a very broad term used to describe the different types of lodging services that are available for the guests to choose from. The different hotels include hostels, motels, Inns, resorts, service apartments, boutique hotels, apartment hotels and many others. Hotels invite many different types of guests and it is imperative that each of these guests are treated in a way which is suitable to them. For Hotels to get guests they offer or publish the offers to different platforms through which people book their rooms. We've entered a world of change and the hospitality industry has been deeply impacted. Now, with regions across the globe reopening, the consideration of what it means to live and travel in this strange new world has begun to kick in. This includes changes throughout all hotel departments, from contactless check-in at the Front Desk to new procedures for valets and bellmen. Housekeeping will be the bedrock of security, as cleanliness is critical to safety. Cleaning hotel rooms is a core part of the hospitality business. With heightened awareness as a result of the pandemic, hotel teams will face additional scrutiny on what makes a room clean and safe. Hotel safety for guests and employees, as well as national economic and health safety, relies on the ability to control and eliminate COVID-19 in shared environments.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Housekeeping department is said to be the frontline defense in the fight against COVID-19. In the difficult times of the pandemic situation, the hotel industry lost a lot of its revenues and suffered major losses due to it. In the post COVID-19 World the hotels are making a comeback with much stronger values and much better safety plans which ensures and gives a guest a peaceful and good stay. Hotels are ensuring that every corner of its premises is clean and sanitized before a guest is allowed to enter and use the services provided there.

The hotel industry is a customer driven industry. The hotels are looking for new ways to improve their services towards their customers and in turn increase their revenues. The effect of the Covid 19 pandemic has been severe on the hotel and tourism industry. Recovering from the losses incurred during this pandemic is of utmost importance. The hotel housekeeping department is working with atomized sanitation and cleaning procedures; a modified service blueprint. This research paper focusses on the new ways, techniques and technology that has been adopted by the Hotel Housekeeping department in present times to attract more clients by offering them a pleasant, safe, virus free environment for their hygienic stay.

Paradigm shift in the Role of Housekeeping Department in Hospitality Industry

In the housekeeping world, there are different things where Hotels are focusing now a day-

Ensuring Safety for Staff and Guests

The first and most important thing will be to ensure the safety of everyone on property -- both staff and guests. To do this, prevention will be essential. For prevention, incorporating and maintaining guidelines and recommendations for safe operations will be critical ensuring hotel meets new cleanliness standards. Recommendations for the Housekeeping Department include Frequent antiviral cleaning of public high touch areas, in accordance with Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and American Hotel and Lodging Association Safe Stay recommendations, offering masks to guests upon arrival and enforcing usage (in a gentle and hospitable manner), Clear and consistent policies around sick leave for employees, put tape/stickers down in places where people congregate to mark 6 feet of distance (in both guest and staff areas) for social distancing protocols.

Robust Cleaning SOPs

Before COVID-19, there were minimums for water temperature for linen cleaning, approved cleaning solutions, and preventative measures for sanitation, but those may not be sufficient against this particular virus. There must be a strong link with a quick turnaround between the science of COVID-19 and how hotels incorporate new cleaning products. To help with this, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is keeping a published list of the new "best cleaners" to incorporate, since the old procedure just won't cut it any longer.

External Communication of Cleanliness

As a hotelier, we may know how clean our hotel is, but that doesn't mean that hotel guests do. Guests look for visual indicators, but COVID requires sanitization, which is invisible to the naked eye. To keep guests calm and coming back, it's important to proactively communicate with them, letting them know exactly what the property is doing to ensure a safe guest experience, especially as not all hotels in the region may be holding themselves to the same level of stringency. Whether or not hotel standards are measured at a property, corporate, or third-party level, hotels must make sure that they let guests know what is happening. And that is what exactly many 5 star properties are doing to increase repeat clientele.

Communicating cleanliness

Automated emails to planned guests informing them of the new standards and how they are being kept safe, Visual indicators of sanitization, Physical printouts in-room detailing the measures that were taken to ensure cleanliness, easily accessible summary on hotel's website and/or booking platform are given so that the guest is updated about the sanitization process.

Lean Teams Doesn't Necessarily Mean Less Efficient Teams

The hotel industry has undergone an incredibly rough since the year 2020 and the path ahead isn't totally straightforward. Though occupancy rates are increasing, they don't yet always merit the staff levels that were seen in 2019. This will probably mean the staff hotels do have will need to wear multiple hats, either within each department, or even across departments. All of these changes can get lost in the shuffle, so hotels are making sure that their team is aligned on what is most important to get done on a daily, weekly and monthly basis.

Process adopted by Hotels for managing lean teams

Identifying the “most critical” parts of hotel’s standard operating procedures and making sure that these are happening, bringing in more technology for multitasking, streamlined communication, and cross-team collaboration. New expenses and managing Housekeeping Budget is a point of concern as there are a lot of new expenses coming down the pipeline. Protective personal equipment, new cleaning supplies, and physical changes to communal space puts a strain on pre-COVID budgets. Even items like linens need to be replaced more often with the more caustic cleaning. Determining what specific changes need to be made to the hotel’s housekeeping protocols for COVID-19 will help estimate the new costs. Another consideration for these new expenses would be a case where lower occupancy means less frequent restocking, as the wear and tear on inventory decreases.

Process adopted by Hotels for managing the housekeeping budget

Hotels are estimating the new budget and communicating the changes throughout management, they are trying to find places where to temporarily reduce costs, Outfitting Housekeeping Departments with PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) to protect the housekeeping team members and guests, housekeepers are preparing to enter a guest room to clean it. They are confirming that they have all of the items needed (both PPE and items to restock the room) to complete the service before entering.

Items the Housekeepers are carrying prior to entering a guest room for cleaning:

Stock of gloves, clean masks, cleaning supplies, disinfectant supplies, linens based on calculated needs, amenities (shampoo, conditioner, soap, water, etc.), hand sanitizer put on clean gloves, properly fitting clean mask to face, Verifying the guest is not in the room, not entering a room with a guest present, putting an alert on the door to notify guests that a housekeeper is in the room and guests are not allowed to enter. Also using the housekeeping cart or ‘boat’ to blockade the room, Disinfecting Phone or Tablet device, even personal devices, Disinfecting personal protective equipment.

Guests are watching hotels and precautionary actions make them feel safer while traveling and staying in hotels. Seeing employees wearing protective gear like masks and gloves reassures guests that hotels take safety seriously.

Opt-In Housekeeping & Safety Consultations

Many hotels have gone to opt-in versus opt-out for housekeeping. In this program, it is assumed that guests will not receive housekeeping services during their stay. Instead, towels and toiletries are provided in the room based on the number of nights and number of guests in a room. This way no one enters the room other than the guests during their stay. In the event that more items are needed, hotel staff will leave them outside the door.

Procedure adopted by Hotels to successfully obtain plan for opt-out service

Hotels are calculating the number of nights and the number of guests to determine the amount of towels, sheets and other amenities (bottled water, coffee, tea) that are likely to be needed. Then they are Updating the housekeeping system to include these items in the room cleaning. If the room has already been cleaned, setting up a service issue for the update as the floor is attended to. Housekeeping Supervisors and Managers are conducting checks, if something is amiss, appropriate action are being taken immediately.

Some hotels still performing traditional housekeeping on a regular basis, but instead of clearing and cleaning rooms, as a housekeeper goes through their ‘board,’ guests are scheduled a window of time to have their room serviced.

Hotels are also using a tool to schedule housekeeping service and guest Messaging to communicate with the guest. It is critical that guests know that rooms will not be serviced if any guests are present in the room. Missing the scheduled cleaning window might result in a guest’s room not being cleaned. Other strategies involve a Safety Consultation with the guest prior to arrival. A few of the full service and luxury brands are adopting this model. They plan to reach out to guests a few days prior to arrival to completely tailor their stay according to their preferences, including if they want staff to enter the room and how they want that handled. This could also be accomplished with a SMS or email to the guest to start this dialog. Once the guest is consulted, hotels are preparing the room as per their request.

Consultative questions that are asked are How many people will be staying in the room with the guest, Is the guest comfortable with hotel staff entering the room to clean, Has the guest reviewed the hotel’s cleaning and safety policies, Do the guest need help with luggage or if the guest is having any further questions. A preemptive conversation with the guest can reassure them that the hotel is safe and that they have some voice in how their stay is managed. Though the process of reopening has begun, the era of COVID-19 will last much longer. Even after the new case rates are reduced, travelers and guests will still be more aware and cautious for

months, if not years. For this reason, these changes will not be the brief intermediate solution. This will ensure the travel industry, and thus hotels, can stay afloat and even return to previous profit margins.

New Products that are currently introduced by Hotel Housekeeping

Liquid sanitization additive by Napisan, Hygiene Spray, Aerosol Spray, Disinfection cleaner, general purpose cleaner, all purpose cleaner, mold free cleaner by sagrotan, variety of surface cleaner and multi-purpose cleaner by Dettol, disinfectant spray to go, disinfectant spray crisp Linen, all purpose cleaner – lemon breeze, cherry blossom and pomegranate, mango and hibiscus by Lysol.

Apart from using the above mentioned cleaning chemicals, constant video surveillance, UV (Ultra Violet) lighting coir sanitizers, touchless solutions, cleaning of surfaces and washing of hands are done every time.

CONCLUSION

The hotel industry is a customer driven industry. The hotels are looking for new ways to improve their services towards their customers and in turn increase their revenues. The basic rules and regulations of the Hotel Industry has not changed. Details like attention to detail, personalization, providing the best experience to the guests is there and continue to be the qualities emphasized in the industry. Since the Covid 19 has subsided in most of the part of the world, the recovery pattern is clearly visible. Both the domestic and luxury travel started operating. The effect of the covid-19 pandemic has been severe on the hotel and tourism industry. Recovering from the losses incurred during this pandemic is of utmost importance to the hotels. Understanding how particular hotel brands and chains fight with the situation and their ideas for recovery is important as well. There are several new methods of cleaning as well as new products and procedures of cleaning. Innovations in products and operations showcase the minds of hospitality brands working on the recovery process. With all the challenges and hardships faced during the pandemic guests also have newer expectations on how things should be done. Keeping up with these expectations is of high value to hotels as this would potentially increase revenue post Covid-19. So for the safety of the hotels, they are following more contactless check-ins, voice encrypted kiosks and chat bots installed at all possible places. Robot butlers are also introduced along with voice recognition technology in lifts, advanced cloud computing usages also started taking place in hotels. Therefore, it is important to keep up to date with the industrial trends, for the traveler who wants to spend his accumulated income on experiences or a business owner who tries to stay on the top of the competition. The Pandemic has had atrocious effects on the industry but the road to the full recovery is near, the virus has been like a dark, never ending tunnel but the light at the end is visible and the industry has started reaching that light.

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