

The Laurel Experience

There are a number of elements that make a hotel experience great. Business travelers are interested in different things than a family on vacation, or budget-minded travelers versus those seeking a luxury experience. Regardless of the clientele the hotel seeks to attract, their best effort in elements such as hotel amenities, room layout, restroom facilities, bedding quality, or food and beverage services, will be undermined by a poor housekeeping department. While it might not be the first thing you think of, my experience working in the housekeeping department at The Laurel Hotel and Spa demonstrated that this department is much more complex than the pushcart we squeeze by in hotel hallways.

The experience in the housekeeping department is much different than expected. Having your room cleaned, bed-made and fresh towels is what most think about housekeeping. This is obviously an important aspect of housekeeping, but experiencing it first-hand gave me a new respect for the work that is required. The day begins with a review of the housekeeping computer system to determine which rooms are occupied, which rooms are checking out, and which rooms have guests arriving. The room occupancy is constantly changing and needs an organized system and management process for housekeepers before their work even begins.

After the room assignments are made, the service carts are loaded for the day. The carts are loaded with all items needed for the assignments, including cleaning supplies, trash bags, towels, sheets, toiletries, replacement cups, and replacement items for in-room food and beverage areas. Forgetting any of these items results in returning for appropriate supplies and interrupting workflow. This oversight may delay guests getting access to their room.

Occupied rooms require a special approach when entering a guest's space. The Laurel Hotel and Spa is equipped with lights located under the room number to indicate if the room is occupied. We were instructed to knock twice and call out "housekeeping" to ensure the room

was vacant. Once inside the guest's room, even the smallest details are important. Guests often notice even the tiniest imperfections, particularly as it regards their personal items. The housekeepers must work around the guest's belongings and may have to move items to complete the room service. Care is required with the guest's personal items.

The cleaning process is an organized process involving numerous steps. Housekeepers must inspect the room for any issues, missing supplies, and areas that need special attention. This includes removing trash, replacing toiletries, and even wiping fingerprints off the television. Of course, cleaning the bathroom is of utmost importance. Everything must be returned to a specific standard. Lighting, curtains, and air temperature are reset to standards. Movable items such as chairs, lamps, irons, ironing boards, or other items are returned to their appropriate location. The room should feel welcoming, fresh, and clean when guests enter. Details such as lighting and temperature impact the first impression of a guest.

The laundry procedures are a physically demanding element of housekeeping. Dirty towels go into one designated bag. Once the bed is stripped, sheets and pillowcases go into another. The laundry is then loaded onto the cart and transported to the basement to be washed, dried, and folded. This requires some physical strength and stamina.

The housekeeping experience provides a new level of respect for the professionalism required to run this department and the impact it has on the guest experience. Housekeeping is more than cleaning rooms. This department should be coordinated with the desired ambience the hotel wants to project. Strong organization and management skills in planning, training, attention to detail, and consistent effort are necessary to run a successful housekeeping department. Housekeeping often receives little recognition, but without a well-run department it can undermine the entire guest experience. The housekeeping rotation provides an

understanding of the essential role of housekeeping that is performed primarily behind the scenes but is essential to the overall guest experience.