

## **4.3 A DAY IN THE LIFE OF THE FRONT OFFICE MANAGER**

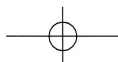
**Garry Dickover**

It's 6:00 on a Saturday morning. The alarm clock is blaring its normal "beep, beep, beep." The sun is peering through the window. Time to start another day as front office manager. It is going to be a busy day featuring 800 arrivals and 750 departures. Plus, the hotel is 50 rooms oversold. It is going to be a fun one.

It's 7:00 A.M. The drive to work is an easy one this Saturday morning. It gives me a chance to think about one thing in particular that is on tap for today. There is a 9:00 A.M. pre-convention meeting for the group that is arriving today. There is the regular morning pre-shift meeting. Today I also have to review hospitality standards with the front desk staff. You would think that it would be easy to have

people smile and greet the guest, use a guest's name, add a value statement about the hotel or city, and thank the guest for his or her business. I don't ask for much, but to train people to do those four things can be a challenge.

Pre-shift meetings are an important start to the day, but it can be a hassle getting everyone together. There are a lot of reasons why an associate can't make a pre-shift meeting, but attendance is important to the success of my department. It is the time I have everyone together, let them know what is going on for the day, and get a chance to share with them the standards we have set and how they can apply them to the customer. At 1:00 P.M. today I have a Safety Committee meeting, and at



4:00 I have my weekly rap session with the telephone department. Yeah, I think to myself, it is going to be a full day.

As I arrive to work, I can see that the check-outs have already started. It is nice to see the bellmen taking care of our guests. As I scan the grounds, I make sure there is no trash on the ground, the bell carts are clean, and the valet parking staff is hustling to retrieve guest cars. I look at the windows of the entryway to the hotel to check for cleanliness. The front drive is the first and last thing a guest sees, so it has to be looking good. Today, all looks good.

It is better for me to spot-check the area before the general manager comes by and sees any problems. As the FOM, I learned the GM's route when he arrives at work, so I make sure the area is clean. (This is something they did not teach me in college, along with how to repair printers and copy machines—some things you gotta learn by doing.) This morning, things look good.

It's 7:50 A.M. I make my way to the back of the front office. My desk managers are busy getting information ready for the pre-shift meeting. As I walk through the area, I always make it a point to greet people as I pass and wish them a good morning. I know how important it is to give each and every associate a cheerful good morning. It sets the stage for the day. And you know, it really does make people feel good. A good department head recognizes his or her associates. The first words that come out of your mouth should be pleasant. The front office team takes the brunt of all the complaints. They don't need me to harp on them.

The pre-shift meeting goes smoothly. The desk managers prep the team for the day, I review the hospitality standards, and we are set. As we are about to finish, I notice some ten-

sion on the staff's faces. They know they are in for a tough day—remember, 50 rooms oversold. It is important that I don't let the team see any stress I may feel on my face. The team knows how important it is to sell out the hotel. They know that once a room is empty overnight, you never get a chance to sell that room again. They also know you have to oversell the hotel. This is the time I can reassure them that the revenue department has calculated all of the slip percentages for the big group checking in. A slip percentage is the expected variation from stated arrival and rooms pick-up percentages the group's meeting planner promised. It is important for me to develop a good relationship with the revenue department. The FOM must be active in the forecast meetings to ensure the hotel is not "sold up the river," meaning overcommitted by the sales staff.

Relationship building is an important job for the FOM. It is where trust is established—trust between you and the other departments. It is not me versus them; it's *us* trying to maximize revenue and occupancy and to continue to build loyalty. This is the time to reassure the team that if we do our jobs as we have been trained, all will be fine. We do a little cheer, and out to the desk they go! Now for a cup of coffee.

I review the plans with the desk managers for the sold-out night. This is also the time I check availability at other hotels, check the stayover requests and no-show percentages, and check for duplicated reservations. It looks like they have it under control. I double-check the staffing during the peak periods and remind the managers to get everyone to lunch. (As simple as this sounds, sometimes we forget.) I check my watch; 30 minutes to the pre-con. Better pull out the group resume, which is our profile of the group that includes,



among many other things, a historical profile of the group's room pick-ups, occupancies, and food and beverage revenues.

At 8:45 A.M., I'm off to the pre-con. I head by the desk to wave to the staff, and I stop by the telephone system, bellstand, and the concierge desk. All seems to be going smoothly. At the pre-con, we all do our formal introductions and meet the group's representatives, usually the meeting planner and members of the group's leadership. We each discuss our individual departments and the relationship we will have with the group. This is our time to sell them on how well we will do for their group. It is a successful pre-con; all the parties seem happy. I spend just a couple of minutes with the group convention manager, giving an update on the oversold situation. If we have to walk guests, it is important to let the group convention manager know about the situation. Today I said we might, but we should be in good shape. She thanks me for the update.

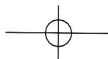
As I make my way back to the front office, I end up walking with the resident manager (RM). He asks me how things went last night and how our hotel is for tonight. As an FOM, it is important to know what your boss is going to ask you. Bosses are all different, but they always seem to ask the same questions. It is important to review the daily sales and occupancy report from the previous day so you know what is going on and can share this information with the RM. I gave the RM the information he wants, always emphasizing the positives.

When I get back to my office, I have a couple of associates wanting to talk to me. They are bothered by the new schedule. They wanted some specific days off and, because of the business, they did not get them. This is a delicate situation. You want to be fair to the

team, but you also have to respect why your managers did what they did. The best thing to do is to listen to what your associates say and then review the situation. I have found that 80 percent of the time there is an alternative. You want to create win-win solutions. By spending time with your associates, you demonstrate to them you care about their situation; this helps build loyalty. *Remember that they don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.* Another situation solved.

The next couple of hours I spend reviewing the previous day's information and getting caught up on email, memos, and other communications. Generally, this is the time I get a couple of phone calls from upset guests. This could be for a variety of reasons. Before check-out, some people always want to let the manager know how things went. It is important to listen to customers when they complain. It is a great way to find out what deficiencies you may have in the hotel's service processes. Most complaints are caused by a breakdown in the process. Sometimes people get upset over the smallest things. Sometimes they have a right to be upset. One example from past experience was the room being so cold that when the guest lifted the toilet seat, the water had a small sheet of ice on it. Ensuring customer satisfaction is a large part of the FOM's job. You have to own hospitality. Your team sets the stage for a guest's entire stay. It better be good!

By now it is 12:15 P.M. and time for lunch. I grab the information I need for the 1:00 P.M. safety meeting. I will go directly to that meeting after lunch. As I make my way, I check on the desk and the house count. We are now only 29 oversold. We have had some canceled reservations, and we also had 18 early departures. Things are looking good.



At 1:00 P.M. I walk into the safety meeting. This is never an exciting meeting, but it is always important. Accidents are costly to the hotel. It is important to keep accident prevention a priority for all associates. Today we talk about the most current accidents, how they could have been prevented, and the next steps. We also discuss the implications of safety and security interests for our guests. This is important to avoid lawsuits and provide guests with a safe and secure environment. The meeting wraps up at 2:30 P.M.

As I come down the escalator, I see the check-ins are starting to arrive. I head to the bellstand to see if the bell captain is caught up. All is well. Because lines are forming, I go behind the front desk to handle a few check-ins. I always like this part of the job. It also gets a smile from the desk clerks. Before you know it, you have helped move the line. Because the desk is staying busy, it is time for me to move out and manage from the lobby. This is a great way to watch what is happening. You can view your whole front office team by being in the lobby. (You can also ensure the cleanliness of the area. This helps our friends in housekeeping.) A big part of the job in the lobby is just answering questions and giving directions. Every guest I help means one guest who did not have to go to the front desk and one more guest who did not have to stand in line. This is the fun part of the job!

At 3:50 P.M., my pager goes off. It is a reminder about my 4:00 P.M. rap sessions. I can't believe 90 minutes passed while I was in the lobby. It is a good day.

Meeting with associates allows me to take the pulse of their work situation. I do it in small groups or as a one-on-one rap. It helps build a relationship within the team and also helps identify challenges I was unaware of. I ask leading questions so the session does not

become a bitch session; this helps me control the meeting. During this meeting, I discover some equipment that is needed and that we need more uniforms for the team. It would be great to buy them all new uniforms, but I have to stay within my budget. Sometimes that is hard to do. I take notes on their comments and will pass them on to the other managers. It is important for all of the managers to be in the loop. I always keep the raps to about an hour.

By now it is 5:00 P.M., our peak check-in time. I go back out to the lobby to see how things are going. On a busy day like today, I typically spend the next couple of hours helping out in the lobby. At 5:30 P.M., the night manager on duty (MOD) comes out to meet with me. We usually work the lobby together while I tell him about the day. He tells me about the previous night. Of course, the first thing he shows me is the house count: 24 rooms oversold and 352 arrivals expected. We are in good shape. It is important to track the number of no-shows. This helps you make better decisions to maximize your revenue. The MOD is a little nervous. I tell him not to worry, we will be fine. We review the sold-out night so we don't miss anything. He tells me he already has the walk letters (expressing our regret and outlining our promises to a guest who is walked to another hotel) out on the desk. This brings a good laugh. We have done this plenty of times, so I trust that the hotel is in good hands.

It's 7:00 P.M., and things seem to be in good shape. Time to go home. I make one more trip around to the departments in the front office to see how they are doing and wish them a good evening. Another good day!

The day described above is a typical day as a front office manager. Some days have different meetings, some days have more upset



guests, some days have more upset associates, and some days are just better than others are. The thing I have learned over the years is that the job of the FOM is the same. Take care of

the associates, who take care of the customers, who take care of the business. It's the same job, just different players, and I love it.