

### **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:

<i>English</i>	<i>Phonetic Spanish</i>
Room 2180	(dough s, ooe no, oh cho, sarh o)
is	(es tah)
clean	(limp e oh)