

Hotel Common Sense

By [“A Bakers Dozen” of Strategies for Hotel Directors of Housekeeping |Dr. John Hogan, CHA MHS CHE](#)

Top ten lists are often quoted or used to catch people’s attention, but this series has been expanded to be certain that no one is “short-changed.” The number thirteen has evolved into what is called “baker’s dozen”.

Following is A Bakers Dozen” of Strategies for Hotel Directors of Housekeeping

1. **Learn to look at your hotel from an operational perspective as if you owned it.** The most successful housekeepers are those who take ownership of their property. Directors of Housekeeping are critical to making the first impressions positive, whether it is in public space, the guest room or bathroom. Housekeeping has responsibility for corridors, pool and patio areas, management offices, storage and linen areas, the laundry and many related areas. Strong and successful housekeepers plan the work of the department effectively, using inventory control, setting standards and maintaining schedules.
2. **Honor the idea that the hotel guest is your guest, as if in your own home.** While this has some parallels to the number 1 above, Aleta’s experience demonstrated to her that it was the sense of pride and hosting that makes a huge difference in whether someone has a job or a career. Particulars include:
 - o Maintain your awareness of the property of the whole, even if it outside of your particular direct area of responsibility. This includes parking areas, public areas, access points to the hotel and the all important curb appeal.
 - o Work with the other property managers (as opposed to “hiding” in the office) because it takes the whole team to create a great experience for guests.
 - o Effective directors of housekeeping show their pride by offering to assist senior management in other areas of discussion, even in some cases in the sales effort as appropriate. Remember, EVERYONE SELLS should be a mantra for success and housekeepers regularly come in contact with vendors and others who need hotel services.
3. **Know about the condition of the property from first-hand experience.** Personally and regularly inspect every type of accommodation in your hotel. This does NOT mean personally inspecting EVERY ROOM DAILY, but with some kind of rotation and scheduling. Being aware of changes in the hotel can also help management to be better aware of potential problems. Aleta said she “always imagined that somewhere in the hotel there was a dirty washcloth hanging on the back of a bathroom door hook or over a shower curtain rod. . . and she didn't want someone else to find it first.”
4. **When recruiting people, pay attention to the “human” resource role: balance “high touch” and “high tech”.** Recruit and select people wisely. Encourage your General Manager to pay competitively or better and lead in incentives. As Director of Housekeeping , recognize your team regularly with “thank you’s “and expressions of appreciation. Retain the champions by whatever it takes to keep them. Give them the

training to succeed and then share in their successes with incentives and the chance to be part of a very cohesive and proud team..

5. **Maintain and increase training.** This is crucial in housekeeping. The development of the staff to the point where room keepers can be completely trusted to finish their jobs with “pizzazz” because they take pride/ownership in their rooms should be a goal for everyone. There is no excuse today for inadequately prepared or untrained housekeeping and laundry staff.
 - There is enormous training support available at very low cost online from the major brands and a wealth of support from CDs, books, newsletters and the internet. When running high occupancy, many managers claim to be “too busy” to train. When occupancy is flat or declining, cutting ongoing training to “save money” will really cost more as it will drive the good staff to consider leaving and the loyal customers to the competition because it appears you don’t care. Remember “the only thing worse than an untrained staff that leaves, is an untrained staff that stays to service your customers.”
 - Today’s successful and confident director of housekeeping will also embrace technology in training. Use of computers and training DVDs should be the norm.
 - Recognize and address the language challenge if appropriate to your market, even to the point of getting your hotel to pay for your learning of a new language to improve your effectiveness.
6. **Share the professional expectations provided to you from ownership and or management clearly with all members of the staff.** Newcomers to the industry sometimes imagine huge profits when they compare their hourly wage with the rooms’ rates paid by guests. Those of us who have been in the industry for more than just a few years realize that profits and losses go in cycles, and that it is important to share the realities of the cost of doing business at all levels. All staff should understand the total costs of ownership, including support staff such as engineering and sales, franchise or royalty fees, management company fees, the concepts of debt service and more. Make those expectations understood, explain the value and rationale to all staff and be certain these expectations can be measured fairly.
7. **Hold regular one-on-one sessions with all direct reports in this department, including the laundry.** These sessions should not be formal “reviews” but guide posts to reinforce positive actions or to correct a potentially dangerous course of action. When I first started doing these more than 20 years ago, the 1st time was awkward because people were “gun-shy” or afraid of hidden agendas. When it becomes apparent that these are honest dialogues, they sessions evolved into the opportunities to clear the air on potential problems.
8. **Constantly assess time management.** The 80-20 rule of priorities and value remains true much of the time. 80% of our problems often come from 20% of the rooms or staff. Research why things go smoothly and replicate that success. The question needs to be not are we doing things “right”, but are we doing the “right” things correctly?
9. **Work with the front office management to capitalize on forecasts for long term efficiencies.** Operating budgets are usually approved by the ownership or Management

Company in a remote location and the housekeeping budget is tied to occupancy. Working with the front office however, allows effective directors of housekeeping to plan for deep cleaning in slower periods or to replace capital items on a schedule that does not interfere with periods of high activity.

10. **Master the art of inventory controls.** There are many inventories to attend to, including:

- Linens and appropriate par levels
- F&B materials
- Pillows and furniture Uniforms
- Cleaning equipment
- Cleaning Supplies
- Guest Supplies
- Guest Loan items

Properly addressing the ordering, receipt, use, storage and security of these (and other) items is a financial necessity.

11. **Study, embrace and insist on proper safety and security.** Room and laundry attendants regularly deal with an array of chemicals. While most may be initially in the proper containers and concentrations, care must be maintained to continue to use them accurately and safely.

There should be training given and follow up checklists provided for linen rooms, housekeeping carts, using equipment and the laundry.

Government regulations, such as OSHA or state/provincial guidelines, must be posited and followed. Specific security practices should be considered, reviewed, discussed and constantly monitored. Housekeeping staff may be working in isolated areas and should be trained in the best ways to provide cleaning services safely. Reasonable Care should be identified and practiced.

12. **Embrace the Brand Standards and Suppliers.** A majority of hotels in the US today are part of a brand, and the trend is growing globally. The Director of Housekeeping should learn what the brand's requirements and expectations on housekeeping services and programs.

- Have you, as the Director of Housekeeping, explained to your staff your brand's expectations and standards on housekeeping services ?
- Do you take the time to work with your GM to understand the brand's supply programs and preferred suppliers that likely have great pricing and delivery options? If there is a better local price or distribution, have you made certain those products effectively do the job?

A WORD TO INDEPENDENTS - if your hotel is not part of a brand, your local hotel association will likely know of qualified programs or products

13. **Know your budgets, costs and results.** Housekeeping usually employs the largest number of people in a hotel. The outstanding housekeeping managers are those who are able to often obtain higher compensation for their staff by effectively reducing turnover and managing their total budgets while exceeding guest expectations.

Budgets need not be a mystery and most caring general managers should be pleased to share that portion of their operating budgets because it helps everyone.