

# Why housekeepers are critical for hotel brands, guest satisfaction and safety

Housekeeping is the single most important factor behind guest experience and safety, brand image and even the operational costs of any hotel. This is according to Diversey, global sanitation and Hygiene Experts, and sponsors behind the upcoming Africa Housekeeper League of Champions challenge to be staged at The Hotel Show in Johannesburg in June.



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The Africa Housekeeper League of Champions challenge pits top teams of hotel housekeepers against each-other in a race to deliver the cleanest, most comfortable hotel rooms in the shortest time.

While this may sound like a fun event, Alp Aksoy, Director, Hospitality, Africa, ME, and Turkey at Diversey, says it underscores the importance of housekeeping in a hotel's ability to attract guests and keep the hotel sustainable.

## Housekeeping underpins guest safety and satisfaction

"Hygiene is crucial for guest satisfaction – one spot on the sheets or someone else's hair in the drain can ruin the entire stay, erode trust in the hotel's hygiene across all areas, and mar the entire hotel brand in the mind of the guest," says Aksoy.

In addition to clouding the guest's perception of the hotel, inadequate cleaning can actually put guests at risk, he notes.

"An improperly cleaned critical point of contact puts guests at risk of picking up the viruses, bacteria and fungi left on surfaces by previous guests only hours before. Above anything else, the guarantee that a room is clean and safe is the most important promise a hotel makes to its guest – it is the very basis of the definition of a 'comfortable room'," he says.

Well trained and efficient housekeepers deliver on these promises of comfort and safety. "As much as we may see them as 'just cleaners', they are actually the custodians of the brand. Should they fail in their task, no amount of smiling service and good food elsewhere in the establishment can fully rebuild the guest's trust."

Aksoy believes that the housekeeping staff, as crucial interfaces between hotel and guests, should be in-house staff who care about the hotel's brand and the guests' experience.

## **Slashing costs**

Housekeeping can also make a significant contribution to the operational costs – or profits – of a hotel, Aksoy notes. "Well trained housekeeping staff who have been taught to clean efficiently and without wastage can make a huge difference to the sustainability of a hotel.

"Consider cleaning agents sprayed onto surfaces, for example – where one to three squirts should be sufficient, we have seen cleaning staff squirting up to 90 times to clean a single bathroom. Multiply that by 350 bathrooms every day for a year, and you'll find significant wastage, as well as unnecessary exposure to chemicals for staff and guests."

But cleaning chemicals make up only around 5% of the total housekeeping costs in a hotel, he says. The major costs incurred are electricity, water and labour. "Efficient processes, the use of the right equipment, and effective cleaning agents can slash the costs of power and water and reduce the number of staff needed," he adds.

## **The marks of efficient housekeepers**

Efficient housekeeping teams can have a room comfortable and spotless in as little as 30 minutes, says Aksoy. "There is no standard time of cleaning, due to variations in the size of the room, fabrics in the room, or even the different cultures of the previous visiting guest. But we would expect a 5-star room with a standard set up to be prepared in 33-35 minutes for a new guest, and depending on the process of the hotel, a possible 15-20 minutes for a stay over guest."

In this time, the team will have applied their own – often secret – techniques for a perfectly made bed, cleared the room and ensured that every critical control point has been thoroughly cleaned. These surfaces, which all guests touch, include light switches, doorknobs and the TV remote. The executive housekeeper should also inspect that the cleaning goes beyond just visual cleanliness, by using a marker and UV black light or an adenosine tri-phosphate (ATP) surface hygiene test.

"At the end of the day, today most cleaning is evaluated visually, which might still be inadequate for the safety of the guest. Today we live in a world of pandemics, and superbugs and sickness in Shanghai may travel to Cape Town within a time of 24 hours, so hotels need to protect guests against this potential danger" says Aksoy.

In addition to leaving a room safe and comfortable, housekeepers can add to the guest's experience by adding a personal touch such as a note, flowers or chocolate, and should always be seen to be tidy, friendly and welcoming.

"My experience is that the guest wants to feel special. Extra effort creates a true intimacy between the hotel and the guest,

if it can be followed up with smiles in the corridors, or heartfelt greetings from the staff," he says.

"Displeasing the guest, however, is far easier than to please them. Any spot on a wall or furniture, or hair in the shower from the previous guest may ruin the guest's trust in his or her host."

## **Africa's best in action**

Having seen housekeeper challenges becoming increasingly prestigious elsewhere in the world, Diversey will sponsor the Africa Housekeeper League of Champions to help recognise the unsung heroes of hotels' value proposition.

"Diversey globally stands for the best in hygiene and cleaning. Since we work so closely with so many housekeeping teams, this is a great opportunity for us to see their energy, enthusiasm and work ethics being recognised in a regional event, with a positive and fun setting," says Aksoy.

Now in its third year, The Hotel Show attracts nearly 3,400 GMs, owners, operators, procurement managers, designers, developers and the all-important frontline hospitality personnel.

Running alongside The Hotel Show, the Hospitality Leadership Forum will see over 90 expert speakers will take to the stage to address burning issues, trends and opportunities in the sector. The Hotel Show is now co-located with Africa's Big 7 and SAITEX, bringing together over 10,000 international industry professionals from 53 countries and over 500 exhibitors from more than 40 countries for three days of business negotiations, networking and knowledge-sharing.

The Hotel Show will be staged as part of Africa Trade Week from 23- 25 June 2019, at the Gallagher Convention Centre, Johannesburg.

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