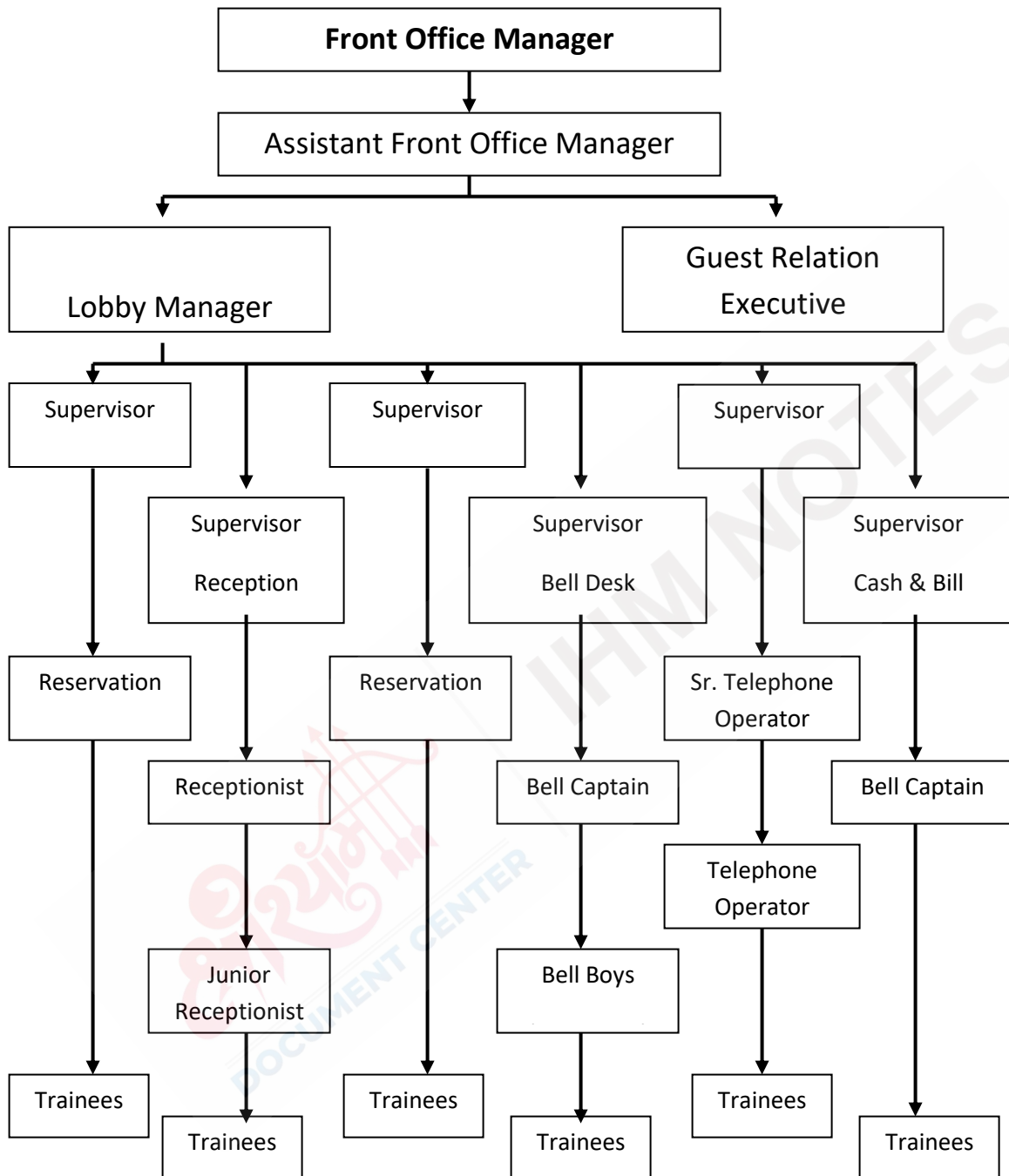


## FRONT OFFICE ORGANIZATION



- Explain how an organization chart depicts the lines of responsibility among positions, departments and divisions.
- Classify the functional areas of a hotel.
- Draw the organization chart of a small, medium and large size hotel.
- Describe the primary functions of the front office.
- Describe the positions and functions of the uniformed service
- Understand the relationship between the front office and housekeeping departments
- Outline the functions of other departments typically found in a full-service hotel.
- Discuss the use of job descriptions and job specifications
- List and describe the typical front office positions and their duties.

### **Organization Charts**

An organization chart is a schematic representation of the relationships between positions within an organization. It shows where each position fits in the overall organization, as well as where divisions of responsibility and lines of authority lie. Solid lines on the chart indicate direct-line accountability.

Dotted lines indicate relationships that involve a high degree of cooperation and communication, but not a direct reporting relationship.

An organization chart should be flexible and should be reviewed as and when business conditions show a significant change.

### **Classifying functional areas of a hotel**

One method of classifying functional areas involves classifying an operating department as either a revenue center or support center. A revenue center sells goods or services to guests, thereby generating revenue for the hotel.

e.g., front office, food and beverage outlets, room service, telephones

Even if the revenue center is not operated by the hotel itself as is the case with the shops in the shopping arcade), the money the revenue center pays to lease the hotel space contributes to the hotel's income.

Support centers include the housekeeping, accounting, engineering and maintenance, and human resources division. These departments do not generate direct revenue, but provide important support for the hotel's revenue centers.

The terms Front of the House and Back of the House may also be used to classify departments and personnel. Front of the house areas are areas where the guests interact with the employees.

e.g., Front office, restaurants and lounges.

In back of the house areas, interaction between guests and employees is less common. e.g., housekeeping, engineering and maintenance, accounting, and human resources. Rooms Division

The rooms division comprises departments and personnel essential to providing services guests expect during a hotel stay. The front office is one department within the rooms division. Others are housekeeping, uniformed services, and the concierge. The functions of the front office are to:

- Sell guestrooms, register guests, and assign guestrooms.
- Coordinate guest services.
- Provide information about the hotel, the surrounding community, and any attractions or events of interest to guests.
- Maintain accurate room status information and room key inventories.
- Maintain guest accounts and monitor credit limits.
- Produce guest account statements and complete proper financial settlement.

## **Front Office Operations**

Traditional front office functions include reservations, registration, room and rate assignment, guest services, room status, maintenance and settlement of guest accounts, and creation of guest history records.

The front office is often organized according to functions, with different employees handling separate areas. This division of duties can enhance the control the front office has over its own operations. Such separation of duties may not be practical in small hotel. The positions typically found in a large hotel include:

- A front desk agent who registers guests and maintains room availability information
- A cashier who handles money, posts charges, and oversees guest account settlement
- A mail and information clerk who takes messages, provides directions to guests, and maintains mail
- A telephone operator who manages the switchboard and coordinates wake-up calls
- A reservations agent who responds to reservation requests and creates reservation records
- A uniformed service agent who handles guest luggage and escorts guests to their rooms

Small hotels may have a single front desk agent who performs nearly all the functions with little assistance.

## **Reservations**

Every lodging property has its own way of monitoring and managing its reservations function. The reservations department is responsible for receiving and processing reservation requests for future overnight accommodations. The purpose of reservations is to accommodate guest requests in a manner that maximizes occupancy and room revenue.

Reservation agents should be true sales people. They should convey the

desirability, features, and benefits of staying at the hotel, rather than simply processing an accommodation request. The agent should reinforce the guest's decision to stay at the property and thank the guest for his or her business. It is essential for the reservations department personnel to work closely with the hotel's sales and marketing division when large group reservations are being solicited or processed. On a day to day basis, reservation agents must maintain accurate reservation records and closely track room availability in order to avoid overbooking. Overbooking can create bad feelings and contribute to lost business in the future if it is not handled properly.

### **Communications**

The telephone department may also be referred to as an Electronic Private Automatic Branch Exchange or EPABX. Their main tasks are to:

- Keep telephone channels of communication open
- Play an important role in the case of fire and keep the hotel connected within and outside the hotel in case of emergency
- Maintain sophisticated telecommunication equipment which may have the following features:
- Make local calls and international calls directly from guest/office rooms

Post call charges automatically onto guest folios  
Have message indicators on telephones  
Voice mail services  
Do Not Disturb  
Room to room connections  
Call waiting  
Wake up call and alarm systems

### **Uniformed Service**

Employees who work in the uniformed service department of the hotel generally provide the most personalized guest service. Among the primary positions within the uniformed service department are:

## **Bell attendants**

They provide baggage service between the lobby area and the guestroom. Bell attendants should have good oral communication skills and display genuine interest in each guest. Depending on the size and complexity of the hotel, bell attendants may be counted to:

- Transport guest luggage to and from guestrooms.
- Familiarize guests with the hotel's safety features, as well as the guestroom and any in- room amenities.
- Provide a secure area for guests requiring temporary luggage storage.
- Provide information on hotel services and facilities.
- Deliver mail, packages, messages, and special amenities to guestrooms.
- Pick up and deliver guest laundry and dry cleaning.
- Perform light housekeeping services in the lobby and entry areas.
- Help guests load and unload their luggage in the absence of a door attendant.
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### **Door attendants**

They are dedicated to welcoming the guest to the hotel. Some of the duties door attendants perform include:

- Opening doors and assisting guests upon arrival.
- Helping guests load and unload luggage from vehicles.
- Escorting guests to the hotel registration area.
- Controlling vehicle traffic flow and safety at the hotel entrance.
- Hailing taxis, upon request.
- Assisting with valet parking services.
- Performing light housekeeping services in the lobby and entry areas.

Door attendants must be well informed about the hotel facilities and the local community. Guests frequently ask door attendants for directions to businesses, restaurants and local landmarks and attractions.

### **Valet Parking Attendants**

Valet parking is generally available at hotels offering world class or luxury service. Specially trained employees park guest and visitor automobiles. The personal attention and security of valet parking is considered both a luxury and a convenience. Valet parking attendants are also responsible for the security of vehicles being moved to and from the hotel entrance. Attendants should not take a car into their care without issuing a receipt to the guest or visitor, usually in the form of a ticket. On the hotel portion of the ticket the attendant should note any existing damage to the vehicle. Vehicle keys must be kept in a secure area, and issued only by qualified personnel. The uniformed service department is responsible for all vehicles under its care and reports information to the front desk so that parking charges can be posted to guest accounts.

### **Transportation personnel**

Already common to most airport hotels, transportation services are gaining in

popularity at other types of properties. Bus or courtesy van service drivers must be well trained and properly licensed to operate the vehicle. Since these drivers are sometimes the first contact the guest will have with the hotel, it is important for them to be polite, efficient, and knowledgeable about the property. It is customary for drivers to provide some information about the hotel while in transit, either through a live spoken presentation or a pre-recorded audio tape. Drivers should also help guests entering and exiting the vehicle. An experienced driver efficiently and carefully loads guest luggage into the van.

Guest privacy must be maintained. Any conversation among guests must be considered confidential and should not be discussed with hotel employees, family, or friends. Drivers must know how to check their vehicles to ensure that all equipment is working correctly. Safety equipment such as fire extinguishers must be checked regularly and drivers must be familiar with their use.

### **Concierges**

Certified concierges may be identified by the prominent gold crossed keys displayed on their jacket lapel. To earn these keys, a concierge must be certified by the international association of concierges, known as Les Clefs d'Or (Golden Keys). While many hotels employ experienced staff to assist guests with special needs, the title concierge technically applies only to members of Les Clefs d'Or. Concierges may provide custom services to hotel guests. Duties include making reservations for dining; securing tickets for theater and sporting events; arranging for transportation; and providing information on cultural events and local attractions. Concierges are known for their resourcefulness. Most successful concierges have developed an extensive network of local, regional, and national contacts for a variety of services. To be highly successful, a concierge should be able to speak several languages. In some hotels, the head concierge is the manager of uniformed services and assumes additional responsibilities for supervising all uniformed service personnel.



## **Housekeeping**

Housekeeping is probably the most important support department for the front office. Like the front office, housekeeping usually is part of the rooms division of the hotel. The department is responsible for the cleanliness, maintenance and aesthetic standards of the hotel. The brief responsibilities of Housekeeping are:

- Clean and prepare guest rooms for sale
- Clean public areas
- Provide laundered staff uniform
- Provide fresh room and restaurant linen
- Decorate the hotel for special functions
- Control the lost and found procedures
- Manage the in-house laundry
- Manage the horticulture and landscaping of the hotel
- Make flower decorations for various venues
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## **FOOD & BEVERAGE DIVISION**

The hotel's food and beverage division generally ranks second to the rooms division in terms of total revenue. Many hotels depend on more than one food and beverage outlet. There are almost as many varieties of hotel food and beverage operations as there are hotels. Possible outlets include quick service, table service, and specialty restaurants,

coffee shops, bars, lounges, and clubs. The food and beverage division also typically supports other hotel functions such as room service, catering, and banquet planning. Hotels that appeal to group and convention business typically generate large amounts of banquet and catering revenues. Catered functions, such as weddings and anniversaries, may also provide significant revenue opportunities for the food and beverage division.

### **SALES AND MARKETING DIVISION**

Sales and marketing responsibilities are typically divided into four functions: sales, convention services, advertising, and public relations. The primary goal of the division is to promote the sale of the hotel products and services. To this end, sales and marketing staff need to coordinate their efforts with the front office and other hotel divisions to effectively assess and communicate guest needs.

Marketing employees strive to attract guests to the hotel. Marketing staff research the marketplace, competing products, guest needs and expectations, and future demand. These employees then develop advertising and public relation programs for the hotel based on their findings. Sales staff, on the other hand, strives to create revenue through the sale of hotel products to guests and groups. Front desk agents also may act as salespersons, especially when negotiating with and registering walk-in guests.

### **ACCOUNTING DIVISION**

A hotel's accounting division monitors the financial activities of the property. Accounting activities include paying outstanding invoices, distributing unpaid statements, collecting amounts owed, processing payroll, accumulating operating data, and compiling financial reports. In many hotels, the night audit and the food and beverage audit are considered accounting division functions. The front office cashiering and guest accounting functions include monitoring cash, checks, credit cards, and other methods of guest account settlement. The most common financial transactions handled by front office staff members are receiving cash payments, verifying personal cheques, imprinting credit cards, making change,

and monitoring guest account statements. In small hotels the front office is also responsible for monitoring the credit status of registered guests.

### **ENGINEERING & MAINTENANCE**

A hotel's engineering and maintenance division is responsible for maintaining the property's structure and grounds, as well as its electrical and mechanical equipment. This division may also be charged with swimming pool sanitation, parking lot cleanliness and fountain operations. Quite often, the operation of the hotel's safety equipment comes under this division as well.

The front office must efficiently exchange information with a representative of the engineering and maintenance division to ensure guest satisfaction. Guest complaints must be quickly relayed to the engineering and maintenance staff for corrective action. Conversely, front desk staff must be informed quickly about maintenance problems that render a room unsuitable for use. They must also be informed when the room becomes ready for sale again.

### **SECURITY DIVISION**

All employees should be concerned about the safety and security of hotel guests, visitors, and employees. Security responsibilities may include patrolling the property; monitoring surveillance equipment; and, in general, ensuring that guests, visitors, and employees are safe and secure. A hotel's security program is strongest when employees outside the security division participate in security efforts. A key role of the security division is to maintain a strong awareness in the hotel's staff of safety issues through training and enforcement of standards.

### **HUMAN RESOURCES DIVISION**

Hotels have increased their investment in and dependence on human resource management. The size and budgets of human resources division have grown steadily, along with their responsibility and influence. Recently, the scope of the human resources division has changed in response to a shrinking labor pool, and

growing pressures from competition. Although techniques have changed, the basic functions of the human resources division remain the same: employment (internal reassignment and external recruitment); training; employee relations (including quality assurance); compensation; benefits; administration (including employee policies); labor relations; and safety.

#### Other Divisions

**Retail outlets:** Lodging properties often establish gift shops, newsstands, or other retail outlets in their lobbies or public areas. These outlets generate revenue for the hotel based on a percentage of sales or a fixed space rental fee.

**Recreation:** Most resorts staff a division dedicated to providing group and individual recreational activities for guests. Golf, tennis, bowling, snorkeling, sailing, walking tours, bicycle trips, horseback riding, hikes, and other activities may be arranged by the recreational staff. The division may also plan and direct activities such as arts and crafts shows or children's programs.

#### **Job Descriptions**

A job description lists all the tasks that compose a work position. A job description may also outline reporting relationships, responsibilities, working conditions, equipment and materials to be used, and other important information specific to the place of employment. To be most effective, job descriptions should be customized to the operational procedures of a specific lodging property. Job descriptions should be task-oriented; they should be written for a position, not for a particular employee. Job descriptions will become dated and inappropriate as work assignment changes, so they should be reviewed at least once a year for possible revision. Employees should be involved in writing and revising their job descriptions.

- A well-written job description can also be used:
- In evaluating job performance
- As an aid in training or retraining employees
- To prevent unnecessary duplication of duties

- To help ensure that each job task is performed
- To help determine appropriate staffing levels

Each front office employee should be given a copy of the job description for his or her position. Final job candidates may also be given a copy of a job description, even before an employment offer is made. This is preferable to having someone accept a job and then decide it is unsuitable because he or she was unaware of the job's requirements.

### Job Specifications

Job specifications list the personal qualities, skills, and traits a person needs to successfully perform the tasks outlined in a job description. Factors considered for job specifications are: formal education, work experience, general knowledge, previous training, physical requirements, communication ability, and equipment skills. Job specifications are often the basis for advertising job opportunities and for identifying eligible applicants; they may also be used to identify current employees for promotion.



## **Qualities of Front Office Staff**

As the Front Office is a critical department in a hotel in view of its revenue generating capacity and influence in image building, the staff working in it assume a special importance.

Great care is taken in the selection of Front Office staff as they play a key role as:

**Salesmen** They motivate the guests to spend more on the hotel facilities

**Problem solvers** Guests invariably approach the Front Office for help in case they have a problem or complaint. The staff have to be diplomatic and resourceful to solve the problems at the shortest possible time

**A reference point** Guests who want information or want to pass on information use them for this purpose

**Coordinators** Since they are a reference point, the Front Office staff are required to co ordinate with other departments, airlines, travel agencies and city tour offices to give the guest personalized service.

**Image builders** As an extension of their salesman's role, front office staff can certainly generate a good image for the establishment in their manner of dress, communication, personal conduct and efficiency.

### **Essential Attributes**

In view of the important role they play, the front office staff must have the following essential attributes:

1. A high sense of personal grooming: Uniforms must be clean and neatly pressed . Hair should be groomed well. It is preferable for ladies to tie their hair up in a bun. Nails should be manicured. A soft cologne is preferable to heavy perfumes. Jewellery should be restricted to one ring and a necklace for ladies. In short, the front office staff must be seen at their best at all times.
2. Personal hygiene: This is imperative to front office personnel. As
3. they are constantly exposed to hotel guests, a clean appearance helps to project a good image not only of themselves but of the establishment as well.

4. Self confidence: This is necessary as front office personnel meet guests of different countries, statuses and cultures. They should be comfortable and feel at ease in dealing with these people.
5. Communication must be correct and clear: It is preferable that front office staff know more than one language. It helps in communicating with guests who cannot speak English.
6. Diplomacy is the greatest attribute required: Very often there are situations when a guest is irate over something, a diplomatic dealing helps in diffusing the explosive moment.
7. Calmness to take the busy demands of front office operations: Being the nerve centre of the hotel, the front office is constantly in touch with guests and therefore invariably comes under tremendous pressure. The guests always expect personalized priority treatment and the pressure of demand never ceases. Coupled with this are difficult guests who can unnerve a person. The front office staff should thus have a high degree of tolerance for pressure of work and be calm and composed at all times.
8. Ability to remember names and faces: This single attribute distinguishes the good from the average amongst the front office staff. Every individual has an ego and his name is most precious and personal to him. If the front office staff can call most guests by their names, thus immediately flatters them and personalizes the guest experience. The guest begins to feel he is welcome as people recognize him by name.
9. Good manners: As the hotel is a meeting place for social elite, all the grace and etiquette associated with good society comes into play. Guests of all statuses come to stay in the hotel and they are used to good manners and politeness. Wishing a guest by the time of the day and saying "Thank you" are basic etiquette shown.
10. Ready smile : This is very becoming to front office operations. Guests like to be handled by a cheerful staff at the desk. The smile exudes cheer to the guests and puts them at ease.
11. Physical fitness: Front office operations require the staff to stand for long hours at a stretch. The staff must be sturdy, agile and active.

12. Quick decision making ability: Guests often approach the front desk with problems and requests. Front office staff must be able to decide quickly a course of action that satisfies the guest., at the same time keeping the interest of the organization alive.
  
13. Possessed with the attributes mentioned above, the front office staff could make a fine team that is an asset to the hotel



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