

THE MYSTERY DEMYSTIFIED: A MYSTERY SHOPPER'S EXPERIENCE WITH HOTEL SERVICES AND PRODUCTS

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Hospitality operations depend greatly on measuring the quality of services and products delivered to their customers, several methods are used, but mystery shopping is the most preferred. Mystery shopping is a process that uses industry professionals to evaluate the products and services offered by hospitality operations through living the actual guest experience and engaging in normal guest - staff encounters and interactions, leading to final evaluations to be reported to concerned management in order to improve the overall performance. The aim of the study was to practically show how mystery shopping is carried out, documented, and used as basis for continuous improvement, in order to achieve this aim the following objectives were acknowledged: a) to show how customers experience and evaluate hotel services and products; b) to propose a mystery shopper interactive scoring observations checklist model. Conclusions regarding mystery shopping practicalities, preparation and applications were reached and shown.

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JEL Classification: *L83, M1, O1*

INTRODUCTION

Mystery shopping is used frequently by organizations in the fields of financial services, leisure services, retailing, motoring, hotels and catering, and government departments (Wilson, 1998). The main benefit for these entities is that it gives them a very clear insight into what is happening when their customers meet their staff (Hudson et al., 2001).



Despite the popularity of mystery shopping for performance evaluation in various important areas of business little discussion of the technique has appeared in the academic literature (Finn and Kayande, 1999).

The aim of the study was to practically show how mystery shopping is carried out, documented, and used as basis for continuous improvement, in order to achieve this aim the following objectives were acknowledged:

1. To show how customers experience and evaluate hotel services and products.
2. To propose a mystery shopper interactive scoring observations checklist model.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Service quality and customer satisfaction

The demand for quality services and the severe competition within service industries make it necessary that service organizations focus on providing service quality and at the same time customer satisfaction (Bateson, 1989; Wang, 2006). It is suggested that consumers evaluate a service based on its degree of quality and level of satisfaction (Oliver, 1997).

Service satisfaction is a function of consumers' experience and reactions to a provider's behaviour during the service encounter; it is a function of the service setting (Nicholls, 1998). Service quality is an attitude or global judgment about the superiority of a service (Robinson, 1999). A wide variety of approaches to defining quality are evident, for example, quality has been defined as being about value (Feigenbaum, 1991); conformance to standards, specifications or requirements (Levitt, 1972; Crosby, 1988; Luthans and Davis, 1990; Tellis and Gaeth, 1990); the consistent delivery of services and products based on standards established by individual properties or chains (Rey and Wieland, 1987); meeting or exceeding customers expectations (Gronroos, 1983; Parasuraman et al., 1985; Rabbitt and Bergh, 1994) and more prosaically as delighting customers (Peters, 1989).

Hospitality experiences

A business can give any of three economic offerings: commodity, good, or service. Experiences are a fourth economic offering. When a

person buys a service, he purchases a set of intangible activities carried out on his behalf, but when he buys an experience, he pays to spend time enjoying a series of memorable events that a company stages - as in a theatrical play - to engage him in a personal way (Pine and Gilmore, 1999; Boopen, 2006). Experiences are internal in nature and, therefore, individualized (Knutson et al., 2009).

Customers endure burdens to experience the benefits. Burdens have both a monetary component (economic cost) and a nonmonetary component, for example, inconvenience or incompetent service (Berry, 2009). The foundation of the growing service economy is the service encounter, the time when the consumer interacts directly with the service (Shostack, 1985; Abdel Azim, 2010).

The hotel is a system whose vital aim is to satisfy (and hopefully delight) the customer (Erto and Vanacore, 2002). Those who seek to go beyond mere service excellence and work to stage new experiences will take the lead in creating new value in the hospitality industry (Pine and Gilmore, 2002).

The measurement of service quality in the hospitality industry

Determining the quality of the service encounter has provided management with a challenge they have yet to consistently overcome (Douglas and Douglas, 2006). Service quality is measured to be sure the customer is delivered the product or service requested or needed, where numerous techniques are available including: customer surveys, questionnaires, focus groups, telephone interviews, visits to customers, customer comment cards, and mystery shoppers. Selecting the best method requires balancing the organization's strategic goals and the cost of achieving them (Wilson, 1993; Dale and Boaden, 1994; Ford and Bach, 1997; Wilson, 2000).

Mystery shopping

The customer is both the recipient and the judge of the service. Therefore, to design the hotel service, customers' needs and expectations should be identified and translated into hotel quality elements. Vice versa, to assess the hotel service quality, the specific impact of each quality element on customer's satisfaction should be taken into account (Erto and Vanacore, 2002).

Customer opinion can be used to benchmark areas of weaknesses against competitors in order to develop and improve the quality of services (Feigenbaum, 1991; Barsky, 1996).

If an organisation is communicating the expectations of management and customers through setting service standards, there is thought to be a need for measurement of performance relative to these standards. Mystery shopping can provide this measurement as it aims to collect facts rather than perceptions (Wilson, 1998).

Mystery shopping can be defined as the use of individuals trained to experience and measure any customer service process, and the processes and procedures used in the delivery of the service by acting as potential customers and in some way reporting back on their experiences in a detailed and objective way. Ideally results from this technique should be used more for directing training and for rewards schemes rather than for disciplinary purposes (Hair et al., 2003; Market Research Society, 2008).

Mystery shopping surveys can evaluate service quality, and should provide useful information when the shoppers are representative of the customer population (Finn and Kayande, 1999).

Data collected by mystery shoppers can be reported in the form of rating scales, checklists, and open-ended responses. The results are then used to compare the performance of particular outlets and their employees, to monitor outlet performance over time, and to identify areas where outlets are in most need of improvement (Finn and Kayande, 1999).

Training mystery shoppers is important, especially with regard to the briefing of shoppers on their circumstances and needs, also in terms of data collection skills (Wilson, 1998).

In selecting the mystery shopper, there are two options whether to use in-house personnel or external shoppers (Erstad, 1998). Companies that use in-house mystery shopping programs usually conduct all mystery shopping duties with internal personnel. Shoppers are generally regional managers or corporate personnel who are generally unknown at the property level, the main advantages are cost minimization and the possession of extensive knowledge of the company's objectives and products (Erstad, 1998; Stefanelli, 1994). The use of external mystery shoppers may have certain drawbacks, high costs on one hand, and on the other hand there may be problems with consistency and accuracy of evaluations (Beck et al., 2004). Selection is also important with regard to the personality of the shopper; most situations require the shopper to adopt a neutral rather than an aggressive or defensive approach in the service encounter (Wilson, 1998).

METHODOLOGY

A case study approach was adopted as it is an ideal methodology when a holistic, in-depth investigation is needed (Feagin et al., 1991). Case studies tend to be selective, focusing on one or two issues that are fundamental to understanding the system being examined.

Case studies are attributed with the ability to enhance understanding and to establish cause and effect (Cohen et al., 2000). It is suggested that this methodology is eminently suitable for hospitality research because of the inherent strength in accessing data (Gibson, 2003). Yin (1994) presented at least four applications for a case study model:

1. To explain complex causal links in real-life interventions.
2. To describe the real-life context in which the intervention has occurred.
3. To describe the intervention itself.
4. To explore those situations in which the intervention being evaluated has no clear set of outcomes.

The hotel property chosen for the case study is a five star international chain affiliated property that is supposed to adopt and follow the highest quality standards and procedures. The hotel is located in Cairo suburbs. It features 360 rooms and suites including 43 deluxe rooms, four executive suites and one presidential suite, 286 superior rooms, 23 junior suites, one diplomatic suite in addition to one luxurious villa and one royal suite. For food and beverage facilities there are 6 outlets that feature a wide selection of dining and entertainment options. It is worth noting that the hotel includes three outdoor swimming pools and conference rooms with a capacity for up to 2250 persons.

The inspection went through two important stages; the first was a preparatory stage where the inspector had to study the standards, policies, and procedures of the hotel chain, get familiar with the particular outlets of the property to be inspected. In addition some staff - inspector encounters scenarios were prepared to help build up a complete hotel experience. The second stage was the actual inspection experience, which followed a sequence that starts with:

1. Consumption of products and services.
2. Developing experience.
3. Analyzing the experience into components.
4. Building up a feeling of satisfaction or dissatisfaction of each experience component.
5. Writing a diary like report to explain the reason behind the scores to be given on interactive scoring observations checklists.

6. Assigning scores to satisfactory or dissatisfactory experience components on interactive scoring observations checklists.

This sequence was applied to all sections inspected. The following evaluation criteria were the basis for the checklists items formation:

- Standards and procedures (Policy).
- Intuition (Guest recognition).
- Interaction (Positive answers, politeness, and smiles).
- Initiative (Problem solving, offering more).

All four categories were regarded as having the same importance and consequently the individual items on the interactive scoring observations checklists were valued through three scores: *zero* for dissatisfactory, *one* for fair, and *two* for satisfactory.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The inspection was executed on the rooms division operations of the property visited, and so eight areas were considered which were:

1. Reservations.
2. Bell Service.
3. Check-in.
4. Check-out.
5. Telephone operator.
6. Hotel room.
7. Housekeeping.
8. Laundry service.

Based on the hospitality experience a report was compiled to avoid any data loss, afterwards the interactive observations checklists were filled up, then the scores of each area inspected were calculated leading to a holistic evaluation of the inspected areas both qualitatively and quantitatively. The following sections show a practical hotel rooms division inspection and how the experienced events were reported and graded on specially prepared checklists.

Reservations

27.11.2008 - 16:30

Inspector intended to reserve for two nights (4-5 12 2008), and for two persons (Mr and Mrs Inspector). Hotel operator was phoned; operator 1 answered after two rings properly, and placed the call to the reservations department.

Reservationist 1 answered the phone after one ring, was fully attentive to every reservation need. No call hold all through the phone conversation. Offered two room categories (ground – upper) giving room rates and benefits. At first there was no availability for the required dates, reservationist 1 did not give alternative dates for the reservation, instead offered to reserve for one night as there was no availability for the second night. This reservation was transferred to the waiting list and was not confirmed. Inspector was not addressed by name at all. Reservationist 1 mentioned that there was a shuttle bus to nearby attractions but Inspector found later on from receptionist 1 that such service was not available. Reservationist 1 ended the call using a positive clause.

28.11.2008 - 12:10

Operator 2 answered after one ring and advised the Inspector to call for reservation after one hour as the reservationist on duty went to pray (Friday prayer), which was an unexpected surprise; worldwide there is no such thing.

28.11.2008 - 13:10

Operator 2 answered after two rings properly, and placed the call to the reservations department. Reservationist 2 answered the phone professionally; the Inspector was put once on hold for 20 seconds but did not know why. Reservationist 2 was not attentive to the Inspector's needs as the reservation details had to be repeated more than once by the Inspector. Reservationist 2 found that there was no trace of the reservation previously done. Inspector had to reschedule and made a reservation for two nights (3-4 12 2008). Reservationist 2 did not give any room categories alternatives, and asked the Inspector to give a credit card number, till the Inspector got his credit card, reservationist 2 engaged in a conversation with one of his colleagues about a complimentary room and needed the advice of Mr. X (manager). Reservationist 2 got the credit card number but stated nothing about the cancellation policy. Reservationist 2 only repeated the reservation details upon Inspector request, but did a good job in writing an important note related to a medical request. There was no mentioning of hotel facilities or Inspector name, but the call was ended positively.

Proposed check points for reservations (First contact)

- **Standards and procedures**
 1. Phone answered promptly.

2. Calls were not put on hold for longer than 30 seconds.
 3. Asked for caller's personal information.
 4. Room category and room type booked.
 5. Room rate informed.
 6. Arrival and departure date identified.
 7. Repetition of agreed upon arrangements.
- **Intuition**
 8. Ask for alternative dates in case rooms are not available.
 - **Interaction**
 9. Caller was greeted with friendly tone.
 10. Callers name is mentioned during phone call.
 11. A word of thanks for calling and booking.
 - **Initiative**
 12. Help with room choices.
 13. Special requests quoted.
 14. Method of reservation confirmation offered.

Bell service

03.12.2008 - 14:00

Upon entering the hotel no bellman approached to help. After check in bellman 1, was called by receptionist 1 and greeted the Inspector in a friendly manner.

Mr and Mrs Inspector were helped with their luggage to their room but no means of transportation was offered e.g. mini-car (taftaf). Hotel facilities and recreational services were explained. Bellman 1 did not turn on all room lights, did not show the bathroom, did not show or explain how to use safe or mini-bar, and did not explain the heating/air-conditioning system. There was no indication of the nearest emergency exit to room.

Bellman 1 explained hotel's services and facilities available in the surrounding area, the breakfast location and service hours.

Inspector was asked if anything else was needed before leaving the room. Bellman 1 left the room with a friendly goodbye and wished a pleasant stay.

Inspector had to change rooms to be closer to the main building; this was done with the help of bellman 2 who was very friendly and professional.

At 22:10 on the way back to room Mr and Mrs Inspector were approached by an English speaking senior lady (who was part of a group

checking-in) asking for directions to her room (11002), the rest of the group came after her looking for their rooms with no bellman escort.

Upon check out, bellman 1 came to help with luggage after 5 minutes of calling for luggage down, he brought a luggage trolley as well. Bellman 1 escorted Mr and Mrs Inspector to their car and bid them farewell.

Proposed check points for bell service

- **Standards and procedures**
 1. Guests were helped with their luggage to their rooms.
 2. At room, lights are turned on and room showed.
 3. Staff know all about hotel's services and facilities.
 4. Hotel facilities and services were explained.
 5. Staff know the hotel outlets operating hours.
- **Intuition**
 6. Guests were acknowledged immediately, with friendly greeting.
- **Interaction**
 7. Room was left with friendly goodbye and wish pleasant stay.
 8. Guest was greeted in a friendly manner.
 9. Guest was asked if anything else is needed before leaving room.
- **Initiative**
 10. Offer extra services according to situation (morning newspapers or child care service if available).

Front desk check-in

03.12.2008 - 13:50

Inspector approached one of the two reception islands. Receptionist 1 greeted Mr and Mrs Inspector but with no friendly smile, he immediately found the reservation, and handed the printed R.C. (registration card) to the Inspector, which needed signature only.

Receptionist 1 was asked if arrangements for the remark left upon reservation was done or not, receptionist 1 replied that he had no idea, but would check, within seconds he found the remark on the detailed room screen bottom remark, it seems that when asked he was looking at the arrivals today list.

Inspector requested a non smoking room, very close to the main building as the Mrs. is carrying, and required a nurse visit at 16.30 daily

during the stay (remark already left upon reservation). Receptionist 1 phoned the clinic and handed the phone to Mrs. Inspector to arrange the matter with the nurse. Receptionist 1 did not give any information on how much such service would cost. Receptionist 1 confirmed room type, rate, departure date but not the time of check out, the key card envelope had no information other than the room number.

When Receptionist 1 was asked about the shuttle bus service to nearby attractions, he confirmed that such service was not available, and in his own words “The distance is not far you could go there by your own car....”

Inspector was escorted to room on foot although there was a clear confirmation during the reservation phase that mini-car (taftaf) service was available on the premises. Inspector was escorted to room 15003, which is located so far from the main building and was not suitable due to the Mrs medical condition already stated to reservation clerks (1 and 2) and receptionist 1.

At 14:05 Inspector phoned receptionist 1 and asked for a room change as room 15003 was not suitable, receptionist 1 was so tense and replied that Inspector did not ask for a nearby room; this argument by receptionist 1 was surprising as receptionist 1 was the one who phoned for the nurse daily appointment confirmation. The Inspector then asked to speak to the shift supervisor; receptionist 1 said that he was the supervisor, so the Inspector asked to speak to the other receptionist. Receptionist 2 was up to the expected standard and said that within 10 minutes room will be changed. The actual change was done after 35 minutes.

Mr and Mrs Inspector moved to room 12003 which was a smoking room. It is worth noting that receptionist 1 asked the Inspector before check in procedures completion for a deposit equivalent to two nights rate (although the credit card number was given during reservation process), Inspector gave receptionist 1 (----- EGP) in cash but was never given a receipt or a printed folio.

Proposed check points for front desk check-in

- **Standards and procedures**

1. Complete check-in in 5 minutes.
2. Offer guest choice of smoking or non-smoking room.
3. Confirm room type, departure date and check-out time.
4. Inform guests about hotel facilities and services.
5. Key card envelope details completed.

- **Intuition**
 6. Protect and respect guests' privacy.
 7. Acknowledge returning guests with their name.
- **Interaction**
 8. Acknowledge guests immediately, smile, and greet courteously.
 9. Mention guest name.
 10. Ask return guests if details are still correct.
- **Initiative**
 11. Registration forms are pre-completed as far as possible.
 12. Ask guests whether they require a wake-up call.
 13. Offer assistance with luggage.

Front desk check-out

05.12.2008 - 10:45

Receptionist 2 kindly greeted the Inspector and asked if someone helped with luggage. The whole time taken for check out was only 5 minutes, a printed invoice was given. Afterwards, the Inspector was asked about the mini bar, and as there was a bottle of water consumed and mentioned by the Inspector, receptionist 2 phoned room service to check, the water bottle was posted, a new folio showing the newly charged amount was presented. Inspector was never asked to complete a guest comment card nor guest satisfaction card. No mentioning of the possibility to help with any future reservations was made. Inspector was never asked about transportation arrangement and was not thanked for patronizing the hotel.

Proposed check points for front desk check-out

- **Standards and procedures**
 1. Complete check-out within 5 minutes.
 2. Ask guests to complete customer satisfaction questionnaire.
- **Intuition**
 3. Discreetly present the invoice.
- **Interaction**
 4. Acknowledge guests immediately and greet courteously.
 5. Thank guest for staying at the hotel and give appropriate farewell.
 6. During check-out procedures mention guest name.
 7. Ask if the stay has been satisfactory.
- **Initiative**

8. Ask guests if arrangements for luggage pick-up are made.
9. Ask after payment if further reservation can be made.
10. Ask if transport has been arranged or assistance needed.

Telephone operator

27.11.2008 - 16:30

During the first reservation attempt, hotel operator was phoned; operator 1 answered after 2 rings properly and placed the call to the reservations department.

28.11.2008 - 12:10

During second reservation attempt, operator 2 answered after one ring and advised the caller to phone again after one hour as there was no one on duty in the reservations office, reservationist 2 was on duty alone and he went to pray Al Gomaa (Friday prayer).

03.12.2008 - 17:00

When Inspector wanted to call the laundry, this was done through the operator, operator 1 placed the call immediately.

04.12.2008 - 09:00

Inspector phoned the operator, operator 2 answered after 2 rings, he was asked to connect the Inspector to housekeeping, operator 2 answered that he himself would take the order. The Inspector asked for shower gel, shampoo, and 2 slippers. At 09 30 operator 2 was phoned again as the order was not delivered. Operator 2 apologised, and the order was delivered at 10 00. At 10:05 guest relations were phoned, guest relations officer answered, she was told that the housekeeping order took a long time to be delivered, and that the room was so smelly and needed ventilation and full linen change.

03.12.2008 - 22:00

Inspector phoned hotel from his mobile phone and asked to leave message to room 12003 as no one was answering in the room and showed concern, message was taken by operator 1 properly, and was found later on by Inspector.

03.12.2008 - 22:15

Inspector phoned for a wakeup call, phone was answered after 12 rings, operator 1 answered, registered the wakeup call time and said ok,

never repeated time and room number for confirmation, with no positive note at the end. As a general note no one of the operator staff addressed Inspector by name. No call hold was done at all.

Proposed check points for telephone operator

- **Standards and procedures**

1. Phone is answered promptly and within 5 rings.
2. Calls are not put on hold for longer than 30 seconds.
3. If call must be returned, it does not exceed 20 minutes.
4. For wake-up calls, operator must confirm time and room number.
5. Operator provides messages within 10 minutes of receiving.
6. Operator must be able to provide information about hotel services.

- **Intuition**

7. Operator must ask guest's permission before placing on hold.
8. Protect, secure, and respect guests' privacy.

- **Interaction**

9. Greeting includes hotel and employee name and offer of assistance.
10. Caller is addressed by name.
11. Operator listens carefully and finally confirms main points of call.
12. Operator must have a friendly voice tone.

- **Initiative**

13. Operator must apologise for any delays or interruptions.
14. If needed, messages are taken.

Hotel room

03.12.2008 - 14:05

Room 15003

Room was fully furnished but needed thorough cleaning, sofa was full of stains, carpet needed stain remover, and room corners were occupied by spiders. Room phone face plate was not there, no available information about hotel departments or outlets extensions, emergency extensions were consequently unavailable. Inspector needed to phone reception for a room change but could not (did not know what number to dial), had to phone operator (assumed that the number to dial was zero) for call placement.

03.12.2008 - 14:40

ROOM 12003

Was a smoking room, which was not the Inspector's request, it was smelly as if it had not been ventilated for a month or so, this had been confirmed when Inspector found a completed guest questionnaire in the room instead of finding a new one, it had the date of 4 11 2008 on it.

In room safe deposit box instructions form was partially torn out, and the inside of the safe deposit box needed changing as the paper board inside was badly stained.

Room phone face plate was not there, no information about hotel departments or outlets extensions were available, no emergency extensions were there as well. All in room printed material had lots of finger prints and food stains. Room curtains especially black-outs were too short to block early morning light.

Traces of sediments and rust were all over the metal items in the bathroom. Holes in bathroom walls were evident, that could be a rich environment for insects and fungi. Hair dryer seemed never been cleaned before, it even had a yellowish tinge. Basin could not be filled up with water as it lacked the rubber blocker. Curtains hangers were missing.

Air conditioner was perfect, and water flow and temperature were excellent. Balcony had a great view with easily used sliding doors. The room door-eye needed to be changed. The Room door frame was corroded and the lock frame is half broken. There was no remote control batteries cover, even the batteries were twisted. There was no internet usage instructions booklet, even there was no pricelist.

Proposed check points for hotel room

• **Standards and procedures**

1. Room must contain information about available safe deposit boxes.
2. Fire safety plan available.
3. Emergency procedure booklet available in room.
4. Emergency extension stated on face plate of room phone.
5. Room number must be written on phone plate.
6. Must be able to adjust and achieve comfortable room temperature.
7. Must be able to adjust and achieve comfortable water temperature.
8. Curtains must be unstained, fit well, close well.

9. TV/radio's must receive all channels clearly.
10. Bathroom sink drains must flow well.

Housekeeping

04.12.2008 - 09:00

Mr and Mrs Inspector went to have breakfast at 10:10. At 10:45. Mr and Mrs Inspector returned to their room and found houseman 1 cleaning, he kindly asked Mr and Mrs Inspector to enter the room as he was nearly finished, but Mr and Mrs Inspector waited outside in front of the room. After 2 minutes, a housekeeping supervisor 1 came and apologised sincerely.

Inspector asked for duvet change and explained that the room was so smelly, and that the curtains blackouts were not blocking light, housekeeping supervisor 1 ordered houseman 1 to bring a new duvet from the store, houseman 1 had an argument with housekeeping supervisor 1, they both verbally quarrelled, and finally housekeeping supervisor 1 won and ordered houseman 1 to use air freshener before leaving, both worked on cleaning the room.

Inspector asked for bed cover change, housekeeping supervisor 1 agreed that it would be done at once, this was never done till Inspector left the hotel the following afternoon.

After they both finished cleaning (houseman 1, supervisor 1), room was still in a non hygienic state, traces of makeup powder (from previous room occupant) was still on the dresser, finished mineral water band was still there on the dresser. It is worth noting that no toilet hygienic ribbon was used or noticed in the two rooms occupied.

Entrance and leaving of room was done in the proper way, and do not disturb sign was respected all the time.

Proposed check points for housekeeping

• Standards and procedures

1. All areas of the hotel clean and tidy.
2. Do not move trolleys in corridors before 8 am and not after midnight.
3. Respect "Do not disturb" signs.
4. Provide full room cleaning within 20 minutes.
5. Handling phone calls including requests according to standards.

• Intuition

6. Housekeeping trolleys must not interfere with hallway traffic.

7. Housekeeper must keep room doors closed; or must keep room doors blocked by trolleys.
- **Interaction**
 8. Immediately acknowledge guests, greet in friendly manner.
 9. Entering and leaving guest's room procedures respected.
 - **Initiative**
 10. Pick up trays in corridors promptly out of visibility of the guests.

Laundry service

03.12.2008 - 17:00

Inspector called operator 1 who in turn placed the call to laundry, laundry order taker 1 answered after the first ring in a friendly manner and offered his services; normal laundry service, semi express laundry service, and express laundry service. He informed the Inspector about laundry return time. Inspector asked for his laundry to be picked up, which was done after 5 minutes. Inspector name was always mentioned by laundry order taker 1.

Some belongings were intentionally left in the pockets, which were immediately returned.

Laundry items were returned at the exact time mentioned, and all the standards were followed during delivery. The total of all items laundered cost was clearly written on the delivery voucher.

Proposed check points for laundry / dry cleaning

- **Standards and procedures**
 1. Laundry is picked up within quoted time.
 2. Laundry is returned within quoted time.
 3. Laundry must follow all of guest special instructions.
 4. Personal belongings left in items are returned immediately.
 5. Upon laundry return cost must be clearly written on the delivery voucher.
- **Intuition**
 6. All items sent out together must be returned together.
- **Interaction**
 7. Laundry order taker handled call courteously and professionally.
 8. Entering and leaving guest room according to standards.
- **Initiative**
 9. Used laundry lists and bags are replaced upon pick-up.

10. Information about laundry services, pick-up time offered.

CONCLUSIONS

Hotel Experience

The inspected property is in great need of rooms' furnishings and maintenance improvements. Minimum quality standards adherence was felt by Inspector while being served all over the hotel, as if staff is performing their duties unwillingly or lack proper training. Quality education for all staff members according to the level and needs of each is a must to achieve guests' satisfaction.

Mystery Shopper practicalities

Mystery shopping is a critical artistic process, the inspector has to get familiar with the chain's policies, procedures, and standards, has to live a hotel experience as a guest, has to try every product and service within the range of areas inspected, has to create situations to test and evaluate staff attitude and performance under normal circumstances and under pressure and during difficult situations, important points to keep in mind:

- Get enough information regarding policies, procedures, and standards of the property to be inspected.
- It is necessary for an inspector to go through and live the hotel experience like any guest.
- Decide upon a scenario through which to experience various hotel products and services and in a way to measure staff attitudes and behaviours.
- Never to uncover identity.
- Record all observations as soon as possible, never depend on memory.
- Always adhere to objectivity.
- Use a standardised tool (an interactive scoring observations checklist) that could be easily compared with other inspections done or to be done.

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