

## **FY.BSc**

### **Chapter 4: Guest Services**

#### **Mail and Message handling**

Mail handling is a very important activity of the front office department of the hotel. When guests are away from their homes because of any reason may be business, official, personal or any they need a contact address where they can receive their urgent mails, couriers, fax, parcels etc. Very often guests travelling and staying at hotels need to be contacted by their family or their colleagues of their office. Thus, they may receive letters, parcels and packets at the hotel address. The guest might also want to communicate with them. The hotel in such cases acts as an agent for receiving or forwarding such mail or messages. All the mails addressed to the hotel are received by the front office and depending upon the hotel customs handled by the front desk, bell desk or information desk. The way the mail is handled by the front office shows the efficiency and attitude of the hotel staff. It is a vital duty of the front office department to hand over all mails to the respective guest without any delay. Any delay and carelessness shown by the staff may result in great dissatisfaction.

Following are some of the sources of mails and messages

- Fax
- Emails
- Telegrams
- Telex
- Letters and Parcels

#### **Mail Handling**

The term “mail handling” covers up both incoming and outgoing mail. The mails received at the bell desk counter are date and time stamped and then these are sorted out at the counter itself. The mails are sorted as guest mails or hotel mails and then they are arranged in an alphabetical order. The hotel mails are further divided into official mails and employee mails.

**1) Incoming mail:** Mail that is coming from various destinations to the hotel is called “Incoming Mail”. Incoming mail is stamped with the date and time of receipt and details like senders name, date of receipt, time of receipt, receivers name etc. are entered in a register called the “Mail and Message Register” for future record. The mail is then sorted and arranged alphabetically

Sorting Incoming mail: Incoming mail is sorted into “Guest Mail and Hotel Mail”. The “Hotel Mail” is again divided into “Official Mails” and “Employee Mails”.

- i. Guest mail: The incoming guest mail is sorted in three categories i.e. mail for the
  - a) In-house guests or Present guests
  - b) Checked-out guests or Departure/Past guests
  - c) Expected arrival guests or Future guests

**a) In-house guests:** The guest mail is first arranged in ALPHABETICAL ORDER and then checked against the INFORMATION RACK to identify the present guests. Wherever applicable the room no is entered with the help of pencil on the letters and the guest mails are delivered in the guest rooms by the bell boy. If a guest is not in his room, in that case the mail is placed in the appropriate room no pigeon hole in the mail and message rack and is handed over to him when he comes to the bell desk/information counter to deposit or collect his keys.

### **Mail and Message Rack**

**(a) Checked-out guests:** Sometime the hotel receives mail for the guests who have already departed from the hotel after having stayed for some period. If a guest is expecting mail or parcels to arrive at the hotel post his departure, the hotel to avoid any embarrassment as to what to do with such mail and how to hand it over to the guest quickly, ask the departing guests to leave their contact details or forwarding address and for how long they would want their mail to be redirected to that address at the time of leaving. In other situations when there is no forwarding address mentioned the contact details on the Registration card are used to forward guest mails.

A mail is forwarded to the past guest with the help of a special card called "Mail Forwarding Card". Many hotels keep these cards in the stationery folder in the room while others keep these cards at the Front Desk and give them to the guest at the time of departure. This card contains the address to which and the dates/period till by which the guest would like all the mails received by the hotel after his departure to be forwarded. Employee who is forwarding the mail makes sure an appropriate entry is made in the Mail Forwarding Card. These cards are filed alphabetically and when the expiry date is reached they are cleared out systematically. Any letter received after the expiry date is either returned back to the sender or in case the permanent address of the guest is available, is redirected to him at his permanent address. The remaining mail is still in alphabetical order and checked against the Mail Forwarding Cards and where applicable they are redirected. Details of mail redirected are entered on the reverse of the Mail Forwarding Card.

**b) Expected arrival guests:** Before receiving mails of these guests it must be verified thoroughly that they have a guaranteed reservation with the hotel. General mail for guests yet to arrive is marked with the date of arrival and kept in the back office in the alphabetically marked pigeon holes of "hold mail" rack. An indication is made in the reservation record about this awaited mail i.e., in case of Whitney system the words "Awaited Mail" is written on the Whitney slip. In case of diary system it is recorded in the diary against his name in remarks column and in case of Computer system it is updated in the computer. The information is then marked on advance reservation slip/movement list. On the night before the arrival date, the expected arrival guest mail along with the reservation record is sent to the front desk and is kept with the receptionist in special slot on the day of arrival of the guest and when the guest arrives, the receptionist hands over the mail to the guest at the time of registration.

Incoming guest mails may further classified into two categories:

- a) Ordinary guest mail
- b) Registered guest mail

**a) Ordinary guest mail:** The mails whose delivery record is not maintained by the delivering agency are known as ordinary mails. But, hotel still keeps a record of all received mails at the mail receiving desk in a mail log book to avoid any kind of future discrepancy.

**b) Registered guest mail:** The mails whose delivery record is maintained by the delivering agency are known as registered mails. The postman maintains the record of delivery by asking the addressee to sign the delivery report as a token of receipt of the mail. It is advisable not to accept tampered registered mails. When registered mails are received, they are recorded in the mail log book and the guest's signature is taken at the time of delivery.

ii. Hotel Mail: The incoming hotel mail is sorted in two categories i.e. mail for the hotel official purpose or for the employees of the hotel.

a) Official Mails

b) Employee Mails

a) Official Mails: The official mails are sent to the concerned and respective departments.

b) Employee Mails: The Employee mails are sent to the time office to be placed in the mail display board, from where the employees may collect their mails.

**2) Outgoing mail:** Outgoing mail of the hotel includes mail of the hotel and guest. It is classified as:

a) Hotel Mail

b) Guest Mail

**a) Hotel Mail:** Outgoing hotel mail is handled by the individual departments. The various departments have their own record keeping staff who maintains record of all outgoing mails. Large hotels use Franking Machine for postage. If the volume of mail is high the use of Franking Machine saves lot of time. A record needs to be kept of the quantity and costs of the mail being sent out.

**b) Guest Mail:** Besides the outgoing mail of Hotel, the hotel also provides the facility or service to the guests staying at the hotel such as posting their letters, sending parcels etc. to their desired destination. Generally the bell desk keeps stamps, envelopes, letter and parcels scale. The stamp folder is used to prevent the stamps from getting lost. The folder contains separate divisions for various denominations. The stamp folder should be kept under lock and key. Any letter or parcels posted for guests must be weighed by using the letter and parcel scale to ensure that correct amount of postage is affixed and a voucher of the charges is sent to the cahiers desk. Here the hotel needs to ensure that the correct and complete address of the receiver as well as the contact details of the sender are mentioned clearly on the mail or parcel and the required charges be paid in advance to the hotel.

Some hotels use a book called postage book to keep the record of postage used. All mail for dispatch if franked by a franking machine or if the stamps are used should be entered into postage book.

The procedure of sending ordinary mail for guest is simple. The guest leaves his mail (to be posted) at the Bell Desk where it is weighed and then the necessary stamps are affixed and posted. In case of

Registered mail the mail is sent to post office, which issues a special official receipt. These receipts are retained as they are required to be produced in case a claim for clarification from the guest.

### **Message Handling**

Receiving messages for guests in their absence, recording them and communicating them to the guests as soon as possible is an important function of the front desk staff. A message can be received either by phone or in person. The need for receiving message for the in-house guest is when the guest is not in the room. He may be out of the hotel on work or for any reason. Very often people come over to the hotel to meet the guest in person or people related with the guests might want to leave a message or talk to the guest over the telephone. When the guest is not available in the hotel then a MESSAGE needs to be taken on his behalf and then communicated to him or her. The recording of guest messages can be done manually or by computer. In case of manual message recording system "Message Slip" needs to be filled out. Usually hotels prepare the slip in triplicate. The top one or the original copy is placed in the key and mail rack and is delivered to the guest when he comes to collect his room key, the second is slipped under his room door, and the third remains in the message book for reference called book copy. A Message Slip should be filled out completely and the complete details, name and contact details of the visitor/caller should be noted so that the guest can be informed of the same. The message noted should be repeated and confirmed in order to ensure that the message noted is correct and complete.

Hotels using computers have automated systems for delivering messages to guests. The telephone in the guest room has a message indicator that can be switched on by the front desk in case any message is waiting for a guest. The message light will flash on the telephone instrument in the guest room. This prompts the guest that there is a message for him and he may call the front desk to receive it. In some hotels the message details may also be fed into computer and the guest may view it on the television screen in his room.

Sometimes hotel also receives message for the guests who are expected to arrive or have already departed. Guests who are expected to arrive in future will have their messages filed in alphabetical order and a note is attached to their reservation file to remind the receptionist on the pending message and messages received for guests who are expected to arrive at a hotel on a particular day should be attached to their registration cards at the front desk. Message for the guest who has checked out will be checked against mail forwarding record and if necessary redirected.

The accurate handling of messages and their delivery is very essential. In case a message is received, and if not promptly given to the guest concerned may cause problems or embarrassment which could result in a strong complaint.

### **Left Luggage Procedure**

There is a designated luggage room where guests may store their luggage during their stay or until their next stay or visit.

Documented evidence exists for luggage control /storage & return items stored are tagged individually.

The Concierge team member will write the name, room number and pick-up date at the tag.

A tag is issued, showing individual receipt number and baggage details which are handed over to the guest.

Always hand over luggage carefully as per the guest instructions.

All guest luggage and other guest items to be stored and handover in a secure manner.

Receive the luggage tag from the guest for verification.

Identify and verify that the tag is corresponding to the details in the log book.

Ask the guest for a brief description of the luggage.

Evidence exists to show that luggage is only released upon receipt of a valid and matching luggage tag.

The receptionist will take both tags, from the luggage as well as from the guest, and throw it away.

If a guest does not have a luggage tag, you will let the Front Desk Manager handle it.

Guests and porters do not have direct access to the luggage room.

For security reasons, normally all hotels do not allow left luggage facilities for non-hotel guests.

Handover the luggage to the guest as per the concierge standard procedure.

In case of delivery, fill out the acknowledgement receipt.

File the acknowledgement receipt in the file after delivery.

Take the receiving signature on counter receipt section of the left luggage or luggage storage form.

Inform the Chief concierge that the task is completed.

Always check/verify the details and then only handover the luggage.

For security reasons, normally all hotels do not allow left luggage facilities for non-hotel guests.

Handover the luggage to the guest as per the concierge standard procedure.

In case of delivery, fill out the acknowledgement receipt.

File the acknowledgement receipt in the file after delivery.

Take the receiving signature on counter receipt section of the left luggage or luggage storage form.

Inform the Chief concierge that the task is completed.

Always check/verify the details and then only handover the luggage.

Safe Deposit Locker

Safe deposit locker is a facility provided by hotels to the in-house guests to keep their valuables and important documents in safety during their stay at the hotel. Hotels may provide this facility with or without charges as per the policy. Nowadays most hotels provide in-room safes with codes for locking. The safe deposit lockers have one key only for a guest and a second independent key with the front office cashier. So it takes the guest key and the cashier key to open the locker.

Procedure for issuing safe deposit locker:

Look for an empty locker on guest request



Hand over the safe deposit locker registration card to the guest to fill up

Write down the locker number on the registration card

Have the guest sign the card at two places – one as a specimen and the other as a confirmation signature

Deposit the card in the rack against the locker number

Turn the cashier's key on the locker

Let guest use his/her key to open the locker

Leave the premises to give privacy to the guest for keeping the valuables

Lock with the cashier's key after the guest has locked with his/her key

Procedure for withdrawal from safe deposit locker:

Escort the guest to the safe deposit locker

Request the guest to open with his/her key

Open the locker with the cashier's key

Ask the guest to put date and signature on the reverse of the registration card to monitor when he/she has opened the locker

Leave the guest and return only when the guest is ready. Ask the guest to lock with his/her key and then lock with cashier's key.

Return the card to the safe deposit locker

Procedure for surrendering safe deposit locker:

Escort the guest to the safe deposit locker

Request the guest to open with his/her key

Open the locker with the cashier's key

Ask the guest to put date and signature on the reverse of the registration card to confirm the return of the key

Let the guest empty the locker in the cashier's presence

Take possession of the locker key

Lock the locker with both the keys

Return the keys to the rack

Post the appropriate charge (if applicable) for the use of the safe deposit locker.

### ***Handling Wake-up calls for Guests***

It is very important to handle wake up call accurately and promptly for guests in hotel front desk operations, If Front desk staff fails to give the wakeup call to guests then this can lead to inconvenience to guest eg: Missing flights or important meetings and lead to guest dissatisfaction.

### **Taking down Wakeup Call for guests:**

#### **Automated process:**

In most of the hotels guests can set wakeup call from their room telephone, hotel mobile application or in-room entertainment system (T.V)

Proper instructions must be displayed on the telephone instrument, TV screen or on a tent card next to the telephone or in-room entertainment system.

The procedure of setting the wake-up call from the room must be well aware to all front desk staff, in case the guest asks for the same then the staff should be able to give clear instruction.

Once the guest enter the wakeup call from his room the information will be updated to the EPBX system and also to the front desk property management system (If an interface is available between telephone system and property management software)

Even if guest had set the wakeup call on his own from the in room telephone, the front desk or guest service staff should always give the guest a reminder call manually.

### **Manual Process:**

Guest can also give the wakeup call request directly to the front office staff at the reception or calling from the room.

Greet the guest as per the time.

Take down the below details on to the wake- up call log book / wakeup call register:

Guest Name

Room Number

Wake up date

Wake up time

Any special request ( Eg: Tea / Coffee with wakeup call)

Repeat the details written with the guest again for re-confirmation.

Wish the guest a pleasant continuation when leaving the counter or at the end of the call. ( Eg: Good night, Have a nice day ahead etc.)

Call the Room service and inform them about the special request if any. Note down the name of the Room service staff to whom the information was passed.

Update the details on the PMS (property management software) by accessing the reservation record for this room. (This step may vary according to the property management system the hotel is using.)

Cross check the details entered on the PMS with what is written on the wakeup call log book.

### **Performing Wake-up calls:**

Print 'Wake-up call Report' sorted by time from the PMS for the required date.

Cross check with the wake-up call log book and make sure that there is nothing missing or not updated on the system.

Automated Wakeup call or 1st wakeup call would be performed by the EPBX automatically.

The Reminder wakeup call or follow up call or 2nd Wake-up call need to be performed by the Front desk staff or the telephone operator.



Once the 2nd wakeup call is completed ticket mark that reservation on the report and update the

remarks section on the report.

If the Guest does not answer to the 2nd reminder call then try again after 5 minutes.

Security department to be informed in case the below:

Guest doesn't respond to the reminder call.

Guest telephone is out of order.

Guest telephone is having continuous engaged or busy tone.

One of the Front desk staff members to go along with the Security and knock the guest room to give the wakeup call.

All such incidents should be recorded in detail on to the hotel log book / incident book.

Duty manager should check the wakeup call report and the same to be filed on a daily basis

### **Guest Paging Procedure**

What is Paging?

Paging is the process of locating a guest in a given area within the hotel premises.

The concierge or bell desk team then writes the guest details on the paging board and deploys a bell boy to do the paging with the board.

In earlier days the paging board had bells which draw the attention of the guest when it is shaken.

Nowadays the hotels use digital paging boards with LCD or LED display or simply a large Android or iOS tablet.

Standard Process for paging guests:

The purpose of this SOP is to page the guest in a professional and friendly manner.

While writing the guest name on to the paging board, repeat the name of the guest to confirm the spelling.

Guest could also miss his paging because of any wrong spelling.

Don't use salutation as the names can be misleading at times.

Check on the computer if the guest has left a locator a special functionality in which the current location of the guest is updated on to the guest's reservations.

**Locator** - This new function is commonly found on the hotel's property management system (PMS).

If the guest has left a locator on his reserver then contact the guest.

When a request to page a guest is made, advise the caller to hold while the paging is taking place or take down the message from the caller as per the hotels standard.

Have the guest name clearly typed in block letters on a clear page and place it on the paging board.

Check and recheck the spellings, nobody likes to see their name is spelt wrong.

The bell boy then walks to the specified areas mentioned below.

Page for the guest in all restaurants, poolside, gym, games arena, the beach area etc..

The paging board is held up so that it is in clear view of all the guests.

The bell on the paging board when rings draw the attention of the guest, some have manual bells while others have electric or battery operated.

When the guest is found pass on the message if the guest is not found, leave the message in the guest room.

When the guest is found if the caller is holding the telephone line then, the bell boy should escort the guest to the place where the telephone is located.

For emergency or distressing messages, the hotel Duty Manager should contact the guest when located and deliver the message discreetly

**References: Hotel Front Office Operations**

**Author: Dr.Jatashanker Tiwari**

**Oxford Publications**