

Conserving a Precious Resource—Keeping Valued Room Attendants Productive, Injury Free and Satisfied in their Work.

Some things don't change. According to the International Society of Hospitality Consultants (ISHC), three of the top ten global issues and challenges facing the Hospitality Industry in 2006¹ are familiar concerns.

- Changing labor conditions
 - shrinking labor force – aging population
 - union concerns – growth of unions and expiring contracts
 - rising health care costs and benefits
- Escalating operating costs
 - labor costs and labor shortages
 - changing brand standards and “raising the bar” via increased services and/or amenities
- Evolving customer expectations
 - customer sophistication in use of technology in selecting lodging
 - customer resistance to a “chain mentality”

Smart hoteliers are familiar with these challenges. They have been working to solve them for years and understand the answer lies in the effective utilization of a precious resource – their employees. They understand that keeping a trained, quality work force is critical to staying profitable. Housekeeping departments, typically one of the largest labor pools in a hotel, present one of the greatest areas of impact from these challenges. Smart hoteliers work to maintain a healthy and productive work force. They invest in their employees by developing good processes, implementing on-going training programs and utilizing proven material handling principles, such as the ProHost[®] System, offered by Hostar International, Inc.

As it competes for customers, the industry continues to add more services and amenities to the guestroom experience, adding layers of complexity to cleaning a guestroom. A growing number of hotel chains market their guestroom beds as a luxury amenity. Pillow top mattresses are layered with three sheets, duvets and throws, all crowned with multiple rows of pillows. The impact has been to add a minute per bed in bed making time and laundry operations processing up to a third more linen. While more work has been added, the time allotted for accomplishing the work, in general, has not increased.

¹ Top Ten Global Issues and Challenges in the Hospitality Industry for 2006 / International Society of Hospitality Consultants / December 2005

These upgrades to the guestroom significantly increase material handling events. Glassware, coffee supplies, bath amenities, and linen and terry are cycling through the hotel facility. Room attendants and housemen deliver more supplies to the guest floor and guestrooms than ever before. Pushing over-laden carts throughout the day can take a toll on employee well-being—especially an aging work force. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported 20,410 injuries and illnesses among maids and housekeepers in 2003 that resulted in work days missed. Nearly 30 percent of cases were back injuries.

Some managers were caught off guard and did not put training programs and processes in place to assist their staff, and now face disgruntled employees. “Hotel workers and union representatives say employees are running ragged trying to clean the same number of hotel rooms even as the list of tasks becomes longer. They say injuries are piling up, too, as they have to handle heavier mattresses and bedding each day.”²

Smart hoteliers looked for answers by focusing on communication, training, and the implementation of new processes. Industry leaders are partnering with Hostar International, Inc., to put an effective material management system in place in their hotels. The ProHost[®] System has been delivering a win-win solution for housekeeping managers since 1989. Claudia Berg, President of Hostar International, Inc. comments, “Hostar has worked with industry innovators from the start. We continue to look to partner with hotel owners and managers that are “change agents”. We find they understand the benefits of our product and they really utilize the ProHost[®] System to its full potential.”

Hotels that have implemented a ProHost[®] System have discovered that a sound material distribution process is one of the keys to keeping their housekeeping employees satisfied and productive. It is part of their multi-pronged strategy to develop better systems and improve quality and service. Working toward improving their processes, as they introduce new amenities and services, effective housekeeping managers have implemented training programs for managers and employees, utilized focus groups to communicate

² Amenity Creep Making It Almost Impossible for Housekeepers to Clean a Hotel Room in 30 Minutes, the Pace Required to Clean 15 Rooms per Shift /Oscar Avila, Chicago Tribune, Knight Ridder/Tribune Business News

concerns and solutions, and supported employee health and safety programs. These hotels have discovered that much of the stress and frustration in a room attendant's day results from problems in the hotels' distribution process.

Hotels that responded to these concerns by implementing the ProHost® System, replaced maldistribution of linen and supplies with a sophisticated materials management program, developed in partnership with Hostar. They now deliver accurate inventories of linen, terry and supplies to the room attendants. Several of these hotels chose to utilize the Power Assist option for their room attendants' carts (ProHost® Mobile Suppliers). Room attendants are able to drive their materials from room to room. As a result, these hotels have been able to maintain, and sometimes increase, their employee productivity while improving employee satisfaction in their work.

Enabling older workers to remain productive in the work force has recently become a key initiative in Singapore. Two-hundred organizations are joining the Tripartite Committee on older workers to develop technical innovations to facilitate the hiring and retention of older workers. Raffles, The Plaza Hotel in Singapore has been operating with the Hostar's ProHost® Power Assist Mobiles since 2000. Fifty-six year old, LIM Min Kee has worked as a housekeeper in Raffles, The Plaza Hotel for more than seventeen years. She was recently quoted as saying "Learning how to operate the buttons [on the ProHost Mobile Supplier] for different functions was quite simple. The cart helps to save my strength and allows me to work faster."³

William Berg, Vice President, International Sales, Hostar, stated, "During the past couple of years we

have seen increased interest in time and labor saving initiatives by the leading hotels in Singapore. Better materials management procedures that guarantee daily delivery of all necessary items to service the guestrooms, coupled with power assisted housekeeping equipment has made work easier for workers at the Shangri-La Hotel and the Raffles Plaza." Westlink Marketing Services Pte Ltd is the contact for the Hostar International Inc.'s product in Asia. Linda Lim, Director, Westlink Marketing Services, is enthusiastic about the benefit possibilities offered through implementing the ProHost System in a housekeeping department.

Hostar continues to provide innovative solutions to housekeeping departments. The newest version of the Mobile Collector, a unit that is used to collect dirty linen, terry and trash from the guestrooms, is now available with a rising platform. The rising platform improves the ergonomic motion required to remove the soiled linen. The room attendant or house attendant can remove the linen from the Collector without bending. The new version of the Mobile Collector also has an increased capacity to meet the needs of hotels that have added luxury bed and bath linen and terry.

The challenges facing hoteliers for 2006 may seem daunting to some. They may be facing increased challenges by union organizations to force change. The largest hotel union in the USA is gearing up for battle in 2006. "For the first time in history, the national union has timed its contracts so they will all expire within a few months of each other, starting with Los Angeles in April"⁴ Those smart hoteliers that have created sound operating practices to meet the needs of business trends will fair better. Some things just don't change.

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³ A Boost for Older Workers / The Straits Time, A Singapore Press Holding Publication, Friday, January 27, 2006

⁴ The USA's Largest Hotel Union Targeting Hilton Hotels in New York City for a Major Labor Battle / Juan Gonzalez, Daily News, New York, Knight Ridder/Tribune Business News, March 2, 2006,