



IN FRONT OF THE GUEST · SEASON 1: OPERATIONS · MODULE 1: FRONT OFFICE · LESSON 4

Arrival Starts in the Parking Lot

In the first seven minutes, the guest decides whether they chose the right hotel.

In five lines

Before anyone asks them for a document, the guest is already keeping score: Did anyone see me arrive? Did anyone smile at me? Do I know where to go? The first seven minutes — from the door to the front desk — involve no paperwork, and that is exactly why they are pure craft: eye contact, gesture and a managed wait. A hotel can have the best check-in in the world and lose everything in the corridor before it. This lesson brings order to that no man's land which, worked well, is everyone's land.

The script, step by step

- 1. The first look.** Whoever walks in with luggage has to meet a pair of eyes in the first few seconds: doorman, bell staff, front desk agent or whoever happens to pass by. A “welcome, come on in” on the way is worth as much as an entire front desk.
- 2. The luggage and the gesture.** If there is someone to help, they step forward — they don't wait to be called. If there isn't, words make the gesture: “Leave them here where you can see them, they're safe; I'll be right with you.”
- 3. The managed wait.** If there is a line, the wait becomes attention with three free tools: eye contact with each person, an “I'll be with you in a moment” with the first name of whoever is serving, and a visible order (whoever arrived first knows it, and appreciates that you know it too).
- 4. The transition to the desk.** The first sentence is never “Your ID?” First the welcome and the journey; the paperwork, afterward. The order of the sentences is the order of the craft.

With limited resources: how to hold the standard

If you don't have...	How to hold the standard
Bell staff or doorman	The front desk agent steps half a pace out from the desk with their eyes and their words: they point the way, guide, reassure the guest about their luggage. The function exists even when the position doesn't.
Welcome touch (water, towel, cocktail)	Material courtesy is replaced by the courtesy of attention: nobody waits without being seen. Nobody remembers the water; everybody remembers being invisible.
Air-conditioning or comfort in the lobby	Brief honesty and speed: “I'm sorry about the heat, we're working on it — I'll have you checked in in two minutes, and your room is nice and cool.” Discomfort that is acknowledged bothers half as much.

In front of the guest

DO	DON'T	NEVER
See and greet everyone who walks through the door, whether or not they are “your” guest. Announce the wait and keep to it.	Keep your eyes on the screen when you hear the door. Serve first whoever looks important. Huddling and chatting behind the desk.	Argue with a colleague or a supplier in full view of the lobby. Tell a guest about the workload or the hotel's problems.

Common mistakes

- ◆ Believing arrival starts at the front desk: it starts on the last stretch of the guest's journey, and they are already scoring you there.
- ◆ Leaving the lobby “without an owner” at shift changes: the seven critical minutes don't care about handovers.
- ◆ Managing the line by appearances: the discreet guest sees too — and writes reviews.
- ◆ Confusing speed with attention: serving quickly while looking at the screen is processing; serving well is looking.

THE GOLDEN RULE

**“Nobody is invisible in your lobby.
A wait that feels seen lasts half as long.”**

This lesson's exercise

Play guest in your own hotel (in your head or for real): walk from the door to the front desk with a stopwatch running. How many times was that guest seen? How many seconds were they alone, with no point of reference? Write down the longest blind spot: that is your first improvement project. In the answer that follows, I share how I would solve it.

Further reading: Hotel Operations, Volume II of the Hospitality Collection — Chapter 1, Front Office.
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