



IN FRONT OF THE GUEST · SEASON 1: OPERATIONS · MODULE 1: FRONT OFFICE · LESSON 6

Assigning Rooms Is a Craft

The system suggests rooms. Judgment assigns stays.

In five lines

For the system, all rooms of the same type are equal. For the guest, no two are alike: the one that vibrates next to the elevator, the one with the afternoon sun, the one far from everything when you have a baby in your arms. Assigning means matching the hotel's real map with the real people arriving today — and anticipating the conflict before the phone rings. It is one of the most invisible jobs in the Front Office, and one of those that prevents — or manufactures — the most complaints. This lesson turns it into a method.

The script, step by step

- 1. Know your real map.** Every front desk agent must know by heart which rooms are “good” and why, and which ones have fine print: noise, orientation, distance, partial views. If you don't know, ask to walk through them during a planned slot in your working day: it is work time well spent and the best investment in your career.
- 2. Read the day's arrivals — what is on record, not what you assume.** Before assigning, review what each reservation says: the booked category and the commitments made; the needs expressed and recorded (accessibility, safety, comfort, the crib requested); the documented incidents that are still relevant. What the reservation doesn't say isn't made up: you ask the guest or apply the neutral protocol. Five minutes of reading prevent five room changes.
- 3. Match with judgment, not in list order — and judgment has a hierarchy.** First, the booked category and the commitments made. Second, the needs expressed and recorded: the crib requested, the accessibility asked for, the “away from noise” on record. Third, the documented incidents that are still relevant: last year's noise complaint. And with all of that, the objective suitability of each room. An occasion the guest has mentioned — an anniversary, a birthday — gives context to the attention (the congratulations, the touch the house authorizes), but does not by itself allow you to infer a need or a room preference: for assigning, only what the guest has expressed and left on record counts. Being a family or a couple, or traveling with a baby, is not by itself a need: if the information isn't on record, you ask (“Do you need a crib? Would you prefer the ground floor?”) or assign by neutral protocol — never by stereotype.
- 4. Anticipate the conflict.** If you know a room has fine print and there is no other left, it is assigned according to the documented protocol to the reservation it objectively affects least — by type of stay, intended use and commitments made, never by assumptions about the people — and you win the game by communicating it yourself, first, with an alternative ready. And if no option meets what was committed, the hierarchy has one last rung: escalate to the person in charge, communicate transparently, offer an informed alternative and the compensation that applies.
- 5. Block and communicate.** A well-thought-out assignment is worth nothing if Housekeeping doesn't know what to prioritize. The assignment is finished when whoever is cleaning knows which room goes first.

With limited resources: how to hold the standard

If you don't have...

How to hold the standard

A sophisticated assignment system	A paper map of the hotel with your own codes (noise, view, sun), made once and updated by everyone — and, next to it, the assignment hierarchy in writing: 1) category and commitments; 2) needs expressed and recorded; 3) relevant documented incidents; 4) objective suitability; and with no compliant option, escalation, transparency, alternative and compensation. Judgment doesn't need software: it needs shared memory and written rules.
Rooms ready on arrival	An order of priority agreed with Housekeeping according to actual arrival times, and a managed wait: luggage held safely, an alternative (pool, coffee shop) and a specific time committed to — and kept.
The promised category (overbooking)	An objective, documented criterion: which reservation does the change affect least — by type of stay, occupancy and commitments made — and what real compensation applies? Never by the guest's personal characteristics. It is communicated head-on, first, with the best alternative already booked. Never let them find out on their own.

In front of the guest

DO	DON'T	NEVER
Present the room as chosen for them: "I've given you a quiet one, as you asked last year."	Debate the assignment out loud with a colleague in front of the guest. Convey that "it is what it is."	Promise a specific room number you can't guarantee. Hide fine print you know about and that they will discover at 2 a.m.

Common mistakes

- ◆ Assigning rooms in the order the reservations come in, without looking at who each one is: two minutes of efficiency, two days of complaints.
- ◆ Saving the best rooms "just in case" until they go unused: the best room left empty is wasted judgment.
- ◆ Not recording the reason for a room change: whoever runs into it next year won't have your memory.
- ◆ Treating the guest's request as a whim: for them, that request IS the hotel.

THE GOLDEN RULE

**"The system suggests rooms.
Judgment assigns stays."**

This lesson's exercise

You have 6 rooms left: two with sea views, one next to the elevator and three on the ground floor facing the courtyard. Three reservations arrive today, all in the same booked category and with no special commitments: a couple who, when they mentioned their anniversary, left on record their preference for a room with a sea view, if available; a family who requested a crib and the ground floor; and a repeat guest with a noise complaint documented last year. Assign all three applying the lesson's hierarchy and — this is the important part — write the sentence you would use to present each assignment to each guest. In the answer that follows, I share my version.