



IN FRONT OF THE GUEST · SEASON 1 · MODULE 4: BUTLER AND PERSONALIZED SERVICE · LESSON 20

Discretion: What You See, You Keep to Yourself

*Inside, we serve.
Outside, it doesn't exist.*

In five lines

Guest-contact staff see private lives every day: who travels with whom, what is being celebrated, what is being mourned, what is kept in the nightstand. That access is a professional privilege with only one thing asked in return: absolute silence. Discretion isn't a desirable quality of the craft — it is the craft: the trust of a thousand guests who don't know you rests on your never telling what you see. And in the age of social media, the rule has become more serious: a story told "in confidence" or an "innocent" photo can cost a reputation — yours, the guest's and the hotel's, in that order.

The script, step by step

- 1. The two-lives rule.** What happens inside the hotel belongs to the guest; your professional memory is a safe with no master key. Not to the curious colleague, not to the family at dinner, not to your group of friends: the juicy anecdote is exactly the one that isn't told.
- 2. See without looking.** Discretion starts with the gesture: don't examine belongings, don't read papers left in view, don't let your gaze linger where it makes people uncomfortable. The guest must feel that their privacy doesn't arouse your curiosity — because it doesn't.
- 3. The face of having seen nothing.** Awkward situations happen: the couple's argument, the guest at a bad moment, the unexpected visitor. The professional walks on by with perfect naturalness, serves what needs serving and doesn't change their manner by a millimeter the next day.
- 4. The exception that proves the rule.** Professional silence has only one limit: safety. Anything that puts a person — especially a minor — or the hotel at risk is not kept quiet: it is reported to whoever is responsible, through the proper channel, with the same discretion. Keeping quiet about a risk isn't discretion: it's negligence.

With limited resources: how to hold the standard

If you don't have...	How to hold the standard
Written confidentiality rules	The rule lives in the team's culture: the veteran who cuts off a piece of gossip with "that's not talked about here" trains people better than any manual. Be that veteran, whatever your age.

In front of the guest

DO	DON'T	NEVER
Treat every piece of guest information — their face, their company, their habits — as classified material. Change the subject when others gossip.	Discuss “in confidence” within the team what you saw: the back of house has thin walls, and stories have long legs.	Photograph anything of the guest or their spaces. Post anything, not anonymously, not “so nobody can tell who it is.” Recognize a guest outside the hotel and give away their stay (“You stayed with us!”) unless they make the first move.

Common mistakes

- ◆ Believing internal gossip is harmless: a team that gossips among itself sooner or later gossips outward.
- ◆ The anonymized anecdote that isn't: if the context gives the person away, changing the name isn't discretion.
- ◆ Confusing discretion with coldness: you can be warm, close and airtight at the same time — in fact, that is the exact blend of the craft.
- ◆ Keeping quiet about a real risk so as “not to get involved”: the lesson says it clearly — that is no longer discretion.

THE GOLDEN RULE

**“Inside, we serve.
Outside, it doesn't exist.”**

This lesson's exercise

In the changing room, a colleague starts describing in detail what they saw in a suite this morning. The others laugh. Write down what you do and what you say, exactly — and what you would do if what they were telling revealed a risk to someone. In the answer that follows, I share my response — and we begin Module 5: Restaurant and Bars.

Further reading: Hotel Operations, Vol. II of the Hospitality Collection — Chapter 4, Butler Service and Personalized Service.

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