

The Delicate Incident: Alcohol, Conflict, Emergency

*First calm, then control,
always the record.*

In five lines

Sooner or later it comes: the guest who has had too much to drink and is bothering others, the argument that escalates, the real emergency. In those minutes, the whole hotel's peace of mind rides on how a single person acts — and the professional response has an order that is not improvised: de-escalate first (the low voice, the space, the dignified way out), contain next (protect others, isolate the situation, ask for support) and always record. The rule that governs it all: the goal is never to win the incident — it is for it to end with the least possible harm to everyone, including the person at its center.

The script, step by step

- 1. De-escalate with your voice and with space.** A voice lower than theirs (volume is contagious in both directions), a respectful distance, their name if you know it, and the dignified way out up front: "let's talk it over here, where it's calmer." Most incidents are defused when someone stops climbing the ladder.
- 2. Protect the scene.** If there is an audience — and in a hotel there always is — the priority is to separate: invite the person to a space apart, put distance between them and other guests, ask a colleague to look after those affected. An incident without an audience loses half its fuel.
- 3. Contain without touching and ask for support early.** Physical contact is the last resort and only to protect against imminent harm — never to impose. And support is requested before you desperately need it: raising the alert in time isn't weakness; it is the difference between an incident and a serious incident. If the situation is beyond what the hotel can handle, the appropriate emergency services or authorities are called without hesitation.
- 4. Close with a record and with care.** Once the moment has passed: a report in the authorized channel — time, objective facts, only the strictly necessary data of those involved, action taken; access restricted to whoever needs it, retention in line with the protocol and secure deletion when the period expires — and the human close — the affected guests looked after, the team that lived through it supported and the information passed to management so consequences can be decided with a cool head. What was handled well and recorded can always be defended.

With limited resources: how to hold the standard

If you don't have...	How to hold the standard
Security staff on site	The protocol is carried out by whoever is there — server, front desk agent, executive housekeeper — with the same three phases: de-escalate, protect others, raise the alert. Nobody has to be the hero: containing and asking for support is the complete response, not half of it.
A written hotel protocol	The minimum protocol is agreed in the briefing and fits in three lines: who responds, who gets called, where it is recorded. Three agreed lines are worth more than a manual nobody read.

In front of the guest

DO	DON'T	NEVER
Low voice, a dignified way out, separate from the audience, look after those affected, record everything.	Argue the substance with someone who is in no state to reason. Threaten consequences that aren't yours to decide.	Humiliate or expose the person in front of an audience — making a public example of someone creates an enemy of the hotel. Touch anyone except to protect against imminent harm. And never look the other way at a sign of violence toward someone vulnerable: that is always acted on and reported.

Common mistakes

- ◆ Answering volume with volume: you've just doubled the incident.
- ◆ Handling it alone out of pride: whoever didn't raise the alert in time turned their courage into problem number two.
- ◆ Forgetting the collateral victims: the family at the next table also needs a couple of sentences and a small courtesy.
- ◆ Not recording it "because in the end nothing happened": it did happen — and the record of what almost happened is next month's prevention manual.

THE GOLDEN RULE

**"First calm, then control,
always the record."**

This lesson's exercise

Midnight: a guest who has had too much to drink raises their voice at the bar and starts bothering another table. Write your complete sequence of action — approach, phrases, handling the audience, support, close and record. In the answer that follows, I share my version.