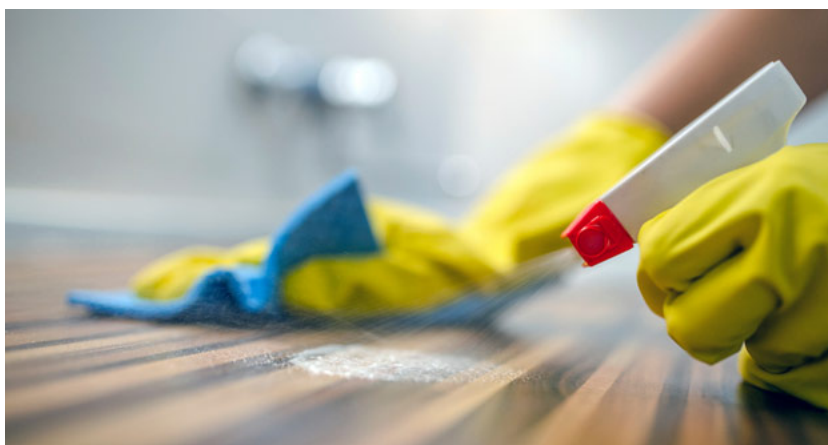


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# Spending More on Housekeeping Doesn't Make Hotels Cleaner

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The M3 Center for Hospitality Technology and Innovation at the University of South Florida Sarasota Manatee (USFSM) recently published its *Gradebook for Cleanliness in Hotels*, an analysis of housekeeping expenses per occupied room and guests' scores for cleanliness from 1,139 hotels across 15 brands. The report primarily addressed the question of whether spending more on housekeeping actually makes a hotel look cleaner to guests.

What researchers found after analyzing the data is that more spending does not, in fact, equate to better service scores. In fact, upper-upscale brands, which spent the most on housekeeping in 2017, did not have the highest cleanliness scores compared to upscale and even upper midscale brands, something that surprised Faizan Ali, Ph.D., assistant professor at USFSM's College of Hospitality & Tourism Leadership and research associate at the M3 Center. "This may be due to the guests' higher expectations for the cleanliness in the upper upscale hotels than in upscale and upper midscale hotels," Ali explains, adding that the reasons behind these results may require further investigation.

*LODGING* caught up with Ali to discuss the research findings and what they mean for hotel owners and operators.

### What do these results mean for hoteliers when evaluating the effectiveness and efficiency of their housekeeping departments?

The results of our research show that spending more on housekeeping does not guarantee an increase in guest satisfaction with hotel cleanliness. These findings led to the conclusions that high standards of operations can be achieved without straining a budget when the right practices are in place. In other words, spending more money on cleaning rooms is not the solution.

### The analysis showed that during busy months with higher occupancy, cleaning costs of occupied rooms were, in fact, lower. Can you explain this phenomenon?

Over 65 percent of housekeeping expenses are housekeeping salaries and wages. As occupancy increases in the busy months, staff time can be used more efficiently, therefore, decreasing the average cost of cleaning per room.

### The report also found increased housekeeping costs for most of the hotels from 2016 to 2017. How significant were those increases? From where did most of those increases stem?

Thirteen out of 15 brands increased expenses for housekeeping in 2017 from 2016. This increase ranged from 0.1 percent to 3.63 percent. We believe that these increases are somewhat expected with the regular

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"Get feedback, and work hard to get that feedback. It is not an easy thing to have people give you feedback, and it's not easy for people to give feedback, particularly when it's constructive. It is so critical as you find your career path that you know where your strengths and weaknesses are."

-Leeny Oberg, EVP & CFO, Marriott International

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inflation rate considered.

For most of the brands, the increase in the annual total housekeeping expenses per occupied room was mainly related to the increase in housekeeping and laundry salaries and wages. At the same time, seven brands decreased other housekeeping expenses POR by 0.78 percent to 4.98 percent, but it did not significantly affect the increase in total housekeeping expenses. As expenses related to housekeeping and laundry salaries and wages were found to be almost 75 percent of total housekeeping expenses, these types of the expenses were the most influential among all expenses of the housekeeping department.

**What would you recommend for hotels to improve their housekeeping operations, and get closer to that "A" service score?**

The results of our study show that spending more money on cleaning a room does not guarantee higher guest satisfaction with cleanliness in a hotel. However, smart management of housekeeping costs may help to achieve higher guest satisfaction. We found that the largest category of housekeeping expenses is spent towards housekeeping salaries and wages (over 65 percent). Therefore, this area provides the most opportunities for managing costs and potentially achieving a higher cleanliness score while spending less. In the report, we provided some recommendations for maximizing the return on the dollars spent on housekeeping salaries and wages. The recommendations focused mainly on training the housekeeping staff.

We worked only on one aspect of the problem regarding guest satisfaction with cleanliness in a hotel. We examined if there is any relationship between the housekeeping expenses and the guest satisfaction. However, other factors also may influence the guest satisfaction with hotel cleanliness: for example, the guest expectations and perceptions about a brand or a hotel, the service level of the hotel (e.g., luxury, upscale, economy), the age of the property, the time between the renovations, and current maintenance. These factors also should be taking into consideration while evaluating the efficiency of housekeeping operations in further research.

**Can you elaborate on what effective room attendant training looks like, and where hotels might miss the mark?**

We recommend a few effective training principles to maximize the return on the dollars spent on housekeeping salaries and wages. First of all, the training of housekeeping staff should be a continuing process. People tend to remember details of a process for only a short period of time. Thus, housekeeping staff should be trained on an ongoing basis to achieve higher performance.

Also, the training should focus not only on cleaning the rooms efficiently but also on the impact that efficient cleaning has on the hotel business continuity. The staff should understand the impact their work has on the overall business. This will motivate staff to do their work well.

Technology can play a significant role in ensuring the effectiveness of housekeeping operations. For example, using a software to keep track of guest complaints is important to identify negative trends that may impact guest satisfaction. If guests who stay in a particular room complain about the water pressure in the bathroom, that lets management know that the problem may not be random but requires a thorough investigation and fixing.

The other recommendation is to have more efficient housekeepers train less efficient housekeepers. This will help to perform ongoing training, reduce the cost of the training, and overcome communication barriers. The difficulties in communication also can be eliminated if the housekeeping staff is trained in their native language.

In addition, implementing special programs for employee recognition can help to retain skilled and experienced employees and, as a result, increase housekeeping efficiency and reduce the turnover of housekeepers.

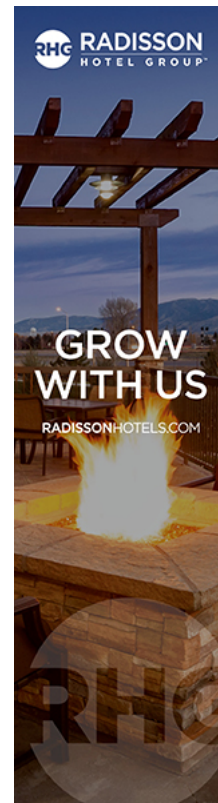
**What else should hoteliers take away from this report?**

The hoteliers may compare their expenses for housekeeping to average expenses of 15 brands. The report also provides the following metrics for such comparison: total housekeeping expenses per occupied room, as a percent of room revenue, as a percent of total revenue, and average brand cleanliness scores.

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