

Hotel Concierge: Aligning Hotel Services and Vendors with Service Standards via the Concierge By [Shujaat Khan](#), Chief Concierge, The Capital Hilton



Understand that when a guest needs a babysitter, limousine, audio visual equipment, massage or other ancillary service, the request is usually made of the Concierge. After all, in most guest service directories you will find a lengthy list of services provided by the Concierge. Often, guests view these services as hotel services, rather than a service provided by an outside vendor. Each vendor's timely, professional and seamless delivery of these services is critical to the guests lasting impression of their hotel experience.

If every in house service is delivered flawlessly, yet the babysitter or limousine requested arrives 45 minutes late, or the audio visual company delivers equipment that does not function properly right before your big presentation, then the memory is likely to be "the hotel was ok, but the babysitter or car was so late that we missed the first half of the show, or my presentation was a disaster as the hotel's equipment malfunctioned." This type of service failure infuriates your guests and will be remembered much more than the fabulous housekeeping, the friendly door staff, or the excellent food.

To ensure that your guests never encounter the disappointment of service failures, use your experienced lobby Concierge as a trainer and a quality control inspector when enlisting the services of external vendors. Your Concierge serves as the eyes and ears of the lobby. Their primary goal is to exceed each guest's expectation and to facilitate the smooth delivery of requested services.

The professional Concierge develops relationships with vendors that can provide services to their guests with the same enthusiasm and level of professionalism as the Concierges themselves. If a limousine driver is disheveled or if the rental car arrives less than pristine, then the lobby Concierge is in the best position to remedy these issues before the guest is aware of them.

As professional lobby Concierges for many years, we enforced the hotel standards with each vendor we used. Drivers, babysitters, massage therapists, personal assistants, translators and others were required to arrive at the Concierge desk at least 15 minutes prior to the needed service. They were required to dress and speak in a professional manner. If they were providing equipment for the guests, the equipment would be tested to ensure proper functioning. The appearance of the service provider and their equipment was monitored and corrected when necessary. On many occasions, we would require that the car be quickly vacuumed, that the Goth looking babysitter wash the black make-up off their face and remove their multiple piercings or that the floral arrangement be replaced with one that exactly meets the guests' specifications.

The Concierge staff is in a unique position to remedy service deficiencies before the guest is made aware of them. Having a finger on the pulse of the city in which they work, the Concierge is often the first to know about and the first to react to vendor deficiencies.

Concierges use a variety of techniques to make sure that the vendors they use are delivering a very high quality of service on a consistent basis. The goal is to make sure that they meet or exceed the standards of the hotel they work for. Some of the commonly used processes involve the following:

Providing vendors with a list of standards:

Limousine companies would be given detailed steps to follow which included:

- Check in with the Concierge at least 15 minutes prior to the planned departure time.
- Arrive clean and odor free in a pressed uniform with a name tag.
- The vehicle should be in excellent condition including windows, air conditioning, seat belts and sufficient gas to complete the trip.
- There should always be a current daily newspaper and magazine in the back seat for the passengers' to read.
- Sealed chilled water bottles should be available for passengers' consumption.
- In the vehicle, the driver should reconfirm the passenger's intended destination.
- The driver should confirm that the temperature of the vehicle is comfortable for the passenger(s).
- The driver should inform the passenger(s) of the anticipated travel time to reach their destination.
- The driver should thank the passenger(s) at the end of the trip and wish the passenger(s) a pleasant day.

The vendor was required to sign a copy of the sheet indicating that they understood and would abide by the requirements if called by the Concierge to provide services for guests. This let the vendor know that we were serious and uncompromising about the delivery of guest services.

All vendors were required to post these standards in an area viewable to all their employees.

Meeting with vendor employees and attending staff meetings:

On occasion, as the Chef Concierge, we would participate in vendor staff meetings as a guest speaker. The focus of our conversation was always on excellent service delivery and consistency. At the end of our talks, the vendor's staff would be clear about the importance of the role they play in creating favorable impressions with the guest(s).

Special presentation by affiliate members (SPAM) at local Concierge association meetings:

Most major cities in the USA have a local association through which we can call upon a variety of contacts to provide services to our guests. These vendors are provided an opportunity to speak to us a group and talk about the services they provide. Concierges are given the time for an open forum discussion to discuss the standards.

Panel discussions with restaurant managers:

The Washington Area Concierge Association holds a panel discussion with restaurant managers and Concierges. The panel consists of three Concierges and three restaurant managers. The Concierges are asked to discuss challenges and service failures that they have encountered. The discussion is focused on improving service to our guests.

Presentations at annual Les Clefs d'Or meetings:

Every year several vendors are provided an opportunity to meet and speak with Concierges from around the country. This four day meeting provides us with a unique opportunity to meet with the vendors and establish a great working relationship on a personal basis. The vendors give a presentation to all attendees informing us of changes and improvements in their organization. An open forum discussion offers all members to get their questions answered at the end of each presentation.

Shopping vendors via the Concierge:

This technique is quite often used by many Concierges around the country. Often, there are occasions when we have to help some of our colleagues by providing services to them. When we arrange an airport pick up for a colleague, we ask them to fill out a check list at the end of the ride and inform us of any service deficiencies or delights they encounter.

Partnering with dependable vendors who provide high quality products and services is critical to the guests' impression of their hotel experience.

When your guests make what appears to be an impossible request, will your vendors come through for you? Partnering with your preferred vendors will increase the likelihood of guest, management and vendor satisfaction. It will ensure value to the clients and create a win win situation for all involved. A satisfied customer is likely to bring more business to your hotel through positive referrals. If you create a dissatisfied customer, you are unlikely to reap the benefits of them returning to your property or recommending your property to their associates and friends.

Understand that if you appreciate and value your vendors, they will appreciate and value your business. Small gestures go a long way in maintaining good vendor relationships. Having the professional lobby Concierge facilitate vendor alliances makes sense and can ensure that deficiencies are corrected before the client is disappointed.

Then UICH Director of the Americas and a past President of Les Clefs d'Or USA, Shujaat Khan's hospitality career spans three decades. His career began at the Watergate Hotel as a Guest Service Agent. He was quickly promoted to Reservations Manager, Sales and Meetings Coordinator, Front Office Manager and Head Concierge. Currently, he is the Chief Concierge at the Capital Hilton Hotel, in Washington DC. Mr. Khan's dedication to hospitality excellence is demonstrated by his deep commitment to fostering growth and professionalism among Concierges. For over a decade, he has served on the Board of Directors for Les Clefs d'Or, USA. He was instrumental in developing a training program for Caribbean hospitality professionals. In 2006, Mr. Khan conducted "The Art of the Concierge," training classes in Antigua, Anguilla, St. Maarten and St. Barth. This year he is scheduled to conduct classes in DC, Miami and a few other US Cities. Mr. Khan can be contacted at 202-639-5712 or Shujaat.Khan@hilton.com.