

Evaluation of Uniforms and Footwear of Hotel Staff from Front Office Desk and Housekeeping Department

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Abstract

Uniforms of employees are functional and pleasing outfits of a specified material, colour, and pattern. They are designed to go with the ambience of the work-area. Many hotels prefer that through the uniforms, their employees retain the feel of the region and showcase the culture and tradition of the place. Apart from creating a brand image of the hotel, uniforms must be comfortable for the staff to wear for long hours while performing their duties. Uniforms should not interfere with the work of the staff. Presently, there aren't any hotel-specific guidelines for this. Along with careful selection of material, there are many considerations for designing uniforms such as image of employee and property, climatic conditions, comfort in wear, work and working conditions.

A study was conducted through observation and interview method to study uniforms of hotel staffers. An attempt was made to understand the perceived comfort and discomfort associated with the uniforms. Seventy-five employees from hotel industry were interviewed comprising mainly of housekeeping and front office staff i.e. 52% and 41% respectively. Around 14% respondents said that the uniform is not suitable for the job. 'Uniform interfering with performance' was reported by 37%. The 'design' and the 'fit' both are concerns here. The feel of 'comfort' is also affected by the fact that whether the uniform is like the usual attire the staff is used to. Uniforms are not only important for the employees but play a vital role for the organisations and also serve a purpose for the clients. Hence, their design commands careful considerations.

Introduction

Staff uniforms are a common feature of most of the successful businesses. Everyone from doctors to fast food workers are expected to wear specific attire. Staff uniforms serve a variety of beneficial purposes for the business.

Uniforms reveal a tremendous amount about an organization and communicate to customers an image of professionalism and reliability. Though uniforms play an important role in influencing customer expectations, one element often forgotten is how uniforms heavily influence employees as well. The presence of uniforms instantly makes a business look more professional and higher class. It gives the appearance of a well-established business and brings in more profit.

A survey revealed that customers prefer to see uniformed employees in various Services including Transportation, Hospitality, Health care and Household Services etc. In these settings, the customers surveyed indicated that, all other factors being equal, they would definitely or probably use the service where the employees were in uniform.

Research in the hospitality and service industries show that employees who enjoy wearing their uniforms had higher self-perceptions of job performance, better attitudes about their work, and higher levels of job satisfaction. Likewise, employees who disliked their uniforms had lower levels of job satisfaction. Levels of employee satisfaction directly correlate with customer satisfaction.

Role of Uniforms:

Uniforms play a vital role in creating the desired look and feel of a venue with the ability to convey the complete identity of an establishment. Creating uniforms that work with a venue's brand provides an opportunity to tell the venue's story and be a key element of the customer experience. Whether it is sophisticated and stylish beach resort or an upbeat modern mix influenced by the latest fashion, the uniform selection ultimately reinforces the venue's offering. In effect, uniforms work as a further extension of the venue's architectural design and décor and when executed correctly provide the focal point needed for the complete picture. The main elements in creating uniforms appealing to employees are appearance and function. Employees care about how they look. An attractive uniform can greatly enhance self-esteem, which in turn improves attitude. The extremely important factor is the fit. Baggy/too loose or tight garments can make employees feel uncomfortable and self-conscious. Then they are less confident in interacting with customers. Other important details include color, fabric, and style, which should reflect the company brand.

Uniforms should be sturdy enough to handle daily wear and tear. They also should not inhibit job performance. For example, waiter's uniform must have pocketsto fit a notepad. The uniform of the housekeeping staff should be comfortable and not interfering with their work. Impractical uniforms can increase stress and make job performance difficult.

In short, well-designed uniforms can build employee self-confidence and morale. In particular, studies show that employees believe that their credibility increases while wearing a formal style uniform, making them far more confident and professional while interacting with customers. This translates to better service, and in turn positively affects a company's long-term profitability. When managers and employees feel connected to the company, they exhibit higher levels of loyalty and commitment to the job, which translates to better customer connections.

There has been much talk recently around sensory marketing and the touch points for evoking customer senses. An opportunity exists for venues to build a brand platform that integrates the senses. Uniforms are a key factor to this formula leading to a richer and lasting customer impression. Along with careful selection of material, there are many considerations for designing uniforms such as image of employee and property, climatic conditions, comfort in wear, work and working conditions.

Uniforms of employees are functional yet pleasing outfits of a specified material, colour, and pattern. They are designed to go with the ambience of the work-area. Many hotels prefer that through the uniforms, their employees retain the feel of the region and showcase the culture and tradition of the place. Apart from creating a brand image of the hotel, uniforms must be

comfortable for the staff to wear for eight to ten hours while performing their duties. Employees in Hotel industry are exposed to all kinds of hazards every day in various service, production and operational departments. Many banquet or dishwashing employees get sprain or strain injuries due to repetitive pulling or lifting. Housekeeping employees generally get hurt because of working long hours in awkward bending / reaching positions. Kitchen employees may fall or slip due to inappropriate shoes. Presently, there aren't any hotel-specific guidelines to help reducing and preventing workplace injuries.

Staff uniforms are a quick and simple way to clean up the appearance of any business location. Scattered staff in a variety of outfits can make a store seem crowded and confusing. When every employee is dressed alike, the entire setting instantly takes on a sleeker and more organized look and feel. A simple visual scan of a location can give the manager an idea whether it is well staffed or not. Customers also appreciate uniformed staff because they can easily approach the right person for assistance. Here are the reasons which make uniform an integral part of work culture and also the lifestyle at times.

- **Industry demands:** There are certain service industries which are focused on the customer, like the department store, restaurants or hospitals. These industries demand that the workforce looks more united and eager to serve the customer, so the role of the uniform becomes very important. When the workforce is wearing a pleasant uniform the customers approach them more confidently. There are some jobs where the health and safety element demands a uniform. For instance, anyone working on roads or in other dangerous areas require highly visible clothing. There are also many jobs which require steel cap and boots.
- **Uniform as perks:** Some consider it as an honor and a kind of perk to receive uniform. Uniforms results in considerable conservation of time and energy of the personnel, as he doesn't have to choose again and again the clothes to be worn at the work place. Also a lot of money is saved by eliminating the need to buy new work clothes. Even if the uniform is nothing more than aprons and coveralls, it proves to be cost saving alternative for staff as it prevents wear and tear on their own clothes and/or protects clothes.

To keep up with the hidden competition of work wear, men and women are devoting large amounts of their hard earned money each year. By providing a uniform this competitive element is removed from the workplace, bringing everyone on one level and encouraging a team environment.

- **Sense of belonging:** If the work force wears the same clothes at the work place then they share a feeling of commonness and belonging, which otherwise gets very difficult to achieve. Uniform makes everyone feel equal and part of a group and so every staff starts acting as a member of a team. Uniforms are very important and they foster traits which are very necessary for a person as an individual and an organization as a whole to thrive and prosper.
- **Promotion of a Company:** Businesses having chain operations of stores, hotels or restaurants benefit greatly from staff uniforms. The 'recognizable look' unifies all the individual businesses in the chain. Customers find familiarity and security leading to repeat

visits. Staff uniform is a fantastic way of promoting a business, whilst instilling the company's branding into the public consciousness.

The negative side

Employees may interpret differently whatever is the standard dress code set by the company. Fashion-conscious employees may not like how the uniform looks on them, which can make them feel self-conscious while wearing it. Some independent-minded employees may see the uniform as a symbol of control by their employers and might resent having to wear it.

An ill-conceived uniform can hinder the performance of the employee. For example, the billowing sleeves of the uniform of a cocktail or food server may accidentally come in contact with food or drinks. A uniform made of heavy material may be uncomfortable in hot weather, which can limit employees' effectiveness. Some uniforms may fetch negative or rude feedback from customers or the general public. A worker, who wears a funny or loud outfit as uniform, may be the subject of taunts or mocking comments.

The present study

A study was conducted through observation and interview method to study uniforms of hotel staffers. An attempt was made to understand the perceived comfort and discomfort associated with the uniforms. Seventy-five employees from hotel industry were interviewed comprising mainly of housekeeping and front office staff i.e. 52% and 41% respectively. The female respondents were 59 % and male were 41%. Most of them (57%) were from the age group 21 to 30 years. 52% respondents were from Housekeeping department, 40% from Front Office and 8% from other departments. The total experience in the Hospitality industry of the majority (60%) of respondents was noted as 1 to 5 years. Approximately 72 % respondents have been working on the present post for 1 to 5 years.

Results

The survey indicated that only 8% staffs have 'Saree' as their uniform, a majority of them working at the Front desk. Only 7% reported about the uniform being 'Skirt -Top' with / without blazer. All of these respondents were from the in Front Office. About 07% respondents working mainly in Food and Beverage section have uniforms comprising of 'Shirt, Trouser and Apron'. Regardless of the gender, most of the hotel staffs (75%) reportedly wear Shirt and Trouser with or without coat / blazer as their uniform.

Cotton, Teri-cot and Polyester / synthetic fabrics are used for various hotel uniforms. The sarees are of synthetic or georgette material. The colours of the uniform mentioned were mostly neutral colours such as white, black, brown, beige and cream. Dull, dark green colour is also used in many uniforms. The uniforms for some of the female staffs were in red, yellow and purple colours. The accessories used with the uniform are mainly tie and badge and in some cases certain buttons. The shoes are formal close type, flat or with heels in colours such as black and brown.

Approximately 14% respondents said that the uniform is not suitable for the job. ‘Uniform interfering with performance’ was reported by 37%. The ‘design’ and the ‘fit’ both are concerns here. In the initial stage of the job, the feel of ‘comfort’ is also affected by the fact that whether the Uniform is like the usual attire the staffs are used to wear. For example a woman used to wearing traditional Indian clothes may not be comfortable in uniforms based on the style of western wear. When probed regarding the ‘Comfort felt in the saree draping method suggested by the hotel’ and about ‘Being comfortable in stockings’ only one respondent said ‘No’ in each case. Using a rating scale, the hotel staff members assessed their own uniforms on various criteria mentioned below.

UNIFORM ASSESSMENT	Percentages			
	Poor	Average	Very Good	Excellent
Crease Resistance	00	24	41	35
Comfort	00	20	55	25
Feel	01	27	48	24
Temperature of the fabric	01	35	53	11
Sitting comfort	03	29	39	29
Water resistant	11	41	35	13
Flame resistant	12	48	21	19
Insect resistant	07	41	36	16
Durability	03	23	49	25
Wear-ability	03	28	46	23
Ease of movement	01	25	47	27
Wearing comfort	01	29	47	23
Sleeve pattern	01	41	32	26
Sleeve length	07	39	39	15
Overall fit	11	26	46	17
Fabric	04	29	47	20
Neckline	03	33	45	19
Colour	12	33	44	11
Material	05	32	47	16
Socs/Stalkings (NA – 17)	07	43	21	12
Shoes	08	43	35	14
Fit for heels (NA – 03)	04	55	27	12
Tip of toes	09	47	30	13
Mid-feet	05	51	32	12

Though most of the staffs rated their Uniform as ‘very good’ and ‘excellent’ on various criteria the percentages indicating ‘average’ and ‘poor’ ratings cannot be ignored. These can be probed further to derive guidelines for designing uniforms more appealing to the employees.

Conclusion

Uniforms are not only important for the employees but play a vital role for the organizations and also serve a purpose for the clients. Hence, their design commands careful considerations. The

material of 'Uniform' should have good draping and should be elastic / expandable to be suitable for reaching / stretching work postures. High-dimensional safety materials can be used which satisfy global safety requirements such as 'infection-prevention material' and 'flame-retardant material'. It is a good idea to ask the staff to assess the uniforms and take their suggestions into consideration for designing new uniforms.

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