

BREAKING THE MOULD

From Food and Beverage to Head Housekeeper at The Athenaeum Club, Charlotte Shaw shares how cross-department experience, people-first leadership, and a passion for raising the profile of housekeeping are shaping a more collaborative and respected future for the profession.

Could you share your journey to becoming Head of Housekeeping, and key experiences that shaped your leadership style?

From an early stage, I recognised that a career in hospitality was the right path for me. While I did not initially have a specific department in mind, I was certain of the industry and remained open to the opportunities it could offer. I began my career in Food and Beverage while studying at college and university, gaining experience across a range of settings including pubs, restaurants, hotels, and both restaurant service and events.

After graduating from The Edge Hotel School with a degree in Hotel Management, I secured my first role in London within Reception. From there, I progressed steadily, ultimately achieving the position of Hotel Manager at a four-star property. Following this, I felt ready to take on a new challenge.

This led me to housekeeping, where my experience across Food and Beverage and Front of House was recognised as highly transferable and valuable to the team. At the beginning of 2020, the industry faced unprecedented change, requiring rapid adaptation across all departments. During this time, I found housekeeping to be the most rewarding area of my career.

Working closely with a diverse team, I valued the opportunity to support individuals from a variety of backgrounds and language abilities, helping to build their confidence and encourage pride in their work. Enabling team members to see their roles from a new perspective and recognise their contribution was particularly fulfilling.

Drawing on my experience across three departments, I have been able to foster stronger collaboration between teams, promote mutual understanding, and contribute to more streamlined and effective service delivery.

Being part of the London and Southeast UKHA committee has also created a whole new depth to the



industry and the amazing professionals that we have within hospitality.

What are some lesser-known tips or efficiencies you've discovered that maintain high standards while keeping your team motivated?

Demonstrating a genuine interest in team members, both



professionally and personally, is key to effective leadership. Taking the time to understand each individual's strengths and development areas enables you to utilise their skills in a way that enhances overall service delivery.

By creating tailored opportunities and assigning responsibilities that allow individuals to excel, you foster confidence, engagement, and a stronger sense of purpose. This, in turn, encourages continuous improvement and a shared commitment to achieving high standards.

How has technology changed housekeeping in recent years? Are there any tools you now consider indispensable?

Technology is continuously evolving, with computers and mobile devices regularly introducing new systems and programmes that enhance operational efficiency. While change can sometimes present challenges, guiding the team through new technologies in a structured and supportive way - encouraging curiosity, open discussion, and hands-on exploration - can significantly improve engagement.

As confidence grows, team members begin to recognise the practical benefits of these advancements, particularly the ability to access real-time updates. This not only reduces errors but also improves overall efficiency and turnaround times.

Furthermore, technology facilitates stronger collaboration by connecting like-minded professionals, making it easier to seek advice, share insights, and ask questions. Knowledge-sharing is essential, and fostering an environment where information is openly exchanged supports both individual development and collective success.

What advice would you offer someone aspiring to a long-term career in hotel housekeeping or hospitality management?

Maintain an open mind and seek an organisation that aligns with your values and long-term vision, and that is committed to supporting your development throughout

your career. Embrace mistakes as valuable learning opportunities - they often provide the greatest insight and can lead to unexpected growth.

With ongoing staffing challenges and shifting guest expectations, what strategies have you found effective in maintaining service quality and team morale?

Actively listening to team members and creating a safe environment in which they feel confident to share their perspectives is essential. Involving them in decision-making and organisational change fosters a sense of ownership and accountability. It is equally important to provide transparent feedback, both positive and constructive, so individuals understand their impact and areas for development.

When challenges arise, encouraging open discussion around what happened and how similar situations can be prevented or mitigated in the future promotes learning and continuous improvement.

By cultivating an inclusive environment where employees feel valued and recognise that their contributions make a meaningful impact on the business, you encourage curiosity, engagement, and advocacy - motivating them to recommend the organisation to others.

What would you like to see evolve in hotel housekeeping over the next 1-3 years?

I would like to see a continued shift in how housekeeping is perceived across the industry. Housekeeping is not simply a job; it is a profession that requires passion, resilience, and a strong team ethos. It offers a wide range of transferable skills and valuable learning opportunities that can be applied across the wider hospitality sector.

While recognition of hospitality as a long-term career is steadily increasing, housekeeping would benefit from greater visibility and acknowledgment of its contribution. Elevating the profile of the department will be key to attracting, developing, and retaining talent, and to ensuring it continues to grow alongside the industry.