

A JOURNEY IN SERVICE

In this interview, we sit down with Biserka Ivanova, Group Head Housekeeper for Firmdale Hotels, whose inspiring journey from arriving in London without English to leading award-winning housekeeping teams exemplifies dedication, curiosity, and a love of service. Drawing on over two decades of five-star hospitality experience, Biserka shares the lessons that shaped her leadership style, the innovations transforming housekeeping, and her vision for attracting new talent into this vital profession.



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

My journey in Housekeeping began in 2003, when I arrived in London as a newcomer to the city and the language. I started my career as a Room Attendant, immersing myself in the fundamentals of housekeeping and guest service. From the very start, I was fortunate to work exclusively in five-star properties, where learning from some of the most talented professionals in the industry shaped both my skills and my approach to leadership.

Over the years, I progressed through every role within the Housekeeping department - Room Attendant, Public Area Attendant, Housekeeping Porter, Valet, Supervisor, Office Coordinator, Assistant Executive Housekeeper, Head Housekeeper, and eventually Group Head of Housekeeping. Each position taught me invaluable lessons and reinforced my belief that every role, no matter how junior, is essential to creating exceptional guest experiences. Being part of day-to-day operations allowed me to grow through practice, reflection, and the mindset that there is always room to improve.

The training opportunities provided by each company I worked for were instrumental in building my confidence and broadening my perspective. I've always believed there is so much to learn if you remain curious and open. One of the most memorable lessons came from a Room Attendant who had dedicated 15 years to perfecting her craft. From her, I learned how to create an impeccable five-star bed - an art form shaped by meticulous attention to detail and genuine pride in her work.

These experiences have instilled in me a deep respect for the team, a commitment to nurturing talent, and a leadership style grounded in humility and continuous learning.

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

It all starts with details (which is one of our values - attention to detail) - to stop, concentrate and note the smallest niceties. Good planning and organising, followed by simple and clear working practices. Effective communication and coordination at all levels is essential - follow it up and at the end of the day, recognise your team (and yourself) with a big applause for the efforts and dedication to the work. I advise everyone to encourage constructive feedback with focus on constant improvements to ensure you don't remain stagnant.

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

Technology has transformed housekeeping, making it more efficient and impactful than ever before. Innovative housekeeping software, advanced cleaning products, and modern techniques are helping teams save time, conserve energy, reduce costs, and optimise resources. Most importantly, these advancements allow us to focus on what truly matters: delivering personalised, memorable experiences that delight our guests.



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

Dedicate yourself to learn all the steps and details you can in order to become the best in your field. Love your work and be proud of the difference you are making.

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

A smile is a universal language that transcends cultures and backgrounds. In my view, the most effective leadership - leadership that inspires loyalty and drives excellence - begins with a kind word and a genuine commitment to connection. When a team feels united and supported, there is no challenge too great to overcome together.

Each colleague brings unique strengths that are essential to our shared success and to creating memorable experiences for our guests. By fostering a culture of quality, attentiveness, and an eye for detail, we inspire everyone to give their very best. And when we succeed, we make it a point to celebrate those achievements as a team.

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

I would like to see more young people choosing Housekeeping as their career. They need to know more about it and what opportunities are available within the sector waiting to be discovered. Housekeeping offers an amazing opportunity to build skills in management of all kind of resources, project management, people skills, admin, customer service, design and maintenance knowledge, procurement management and much more.