Atul Gawande’s recent book, *The Checklist Manifesto*, catalogues the ways checklists can be used by businesses to help manage employee behavior. Outside of the case study fields in Gawande’s book (aviation, construction, the medical field), checklists are widely used by businesses of all types to mitigate undesirable employee behavior and to manage simple, complicated, and complex problems (Gawande, 2009, p. 49). Marriott International—the employer of this author—has incorporated checklists in all of its brands. With The Courtyard brand in particular, checklists are used on a daily basis to manage simple, complicated, and complex issues stemming from a large-scale organizational change.

The Courtyard—one of Marriott’s Select Service brands—has recently undergone a repositioning in its market. The lobbies and rooms have been completely renovated and a new “made to order” food and beverage outlet has been constructed for morning and evening service. The physical changes to the properties, the changes to employee roles, and change to the service delivery strategy have been sweeping. To help manage the simple, complicated, and complex problems that accompany the transition, Marriott utilizes a plethora of checklists. One series of checklists for high guest-facing employees (e.g., front desk clerk, bistro serve, etc.) outlines the expected service behaviors they should display. An example from these checklists (Table 1) addresses how to greet a guest. It provides the antecedent to perform correct greeting behavior and is used by both employees and their supervisors to ensure that the correct behavior is performed in the proper order.

When employees do not complete all of the above steps, they can clearly see what areas were not addressed. The supervisor then provides verbal feedback on ways that they can deliver all the steps in the future.

A more complicated problem for Courtyard properties is the daily maintenance and operation of the food and beverage (F&B) outlet. Because the outlet involves different operations (i.e., food service, specialty coffee, bar operations), correctly preparing each area takes great oversight. This is accomplished by using checklists. The checklists for the F&B operation
are handled both by the employees working in the outlet and their manager. The checklists systematically highlight how to prepare and/or provide service in that area. Sample checklist items are found in Table 2. These checklists help employees manage the complicated problem of opening and operating the F&B outlet, but the tasks are broken down into manageable (even memorizable) steps that can be completed with ease.

Finally, the process of transitioning a Courtyard property to the new business model presents a complex problem. The entire process is managed with checklists that track construction progress, finance, and employment factors (e.g., job changes, training, orientation) from the start of a property’s transition to its “business as usual” phase. The checklists resemble the project-tracking checklist Gawande describes when he visits the build site of a commercial construction company. The Courtyard checklist is a
compendium of process steps and is adaptable to changes in the business environment. Without this checklist and its organic flexibility, managing the complexity of opening or renovating a Courtyard in the new business model would be impossible.

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