


# From The Roaring '20s to the Present

## Development of the Chicago Door Staff

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Coinciding with the beginning of the Roaring '20s, post-World War I prosperity drove the expansion of multi-family housing in Chicago, and spurred development of spacious luxury rental and cooperative buildings catering to Chicago's elite. Elegant apartment-hotels, such as the Belden-Stratford, provided shorter term housing options. Many large residential buildings were developed along north Lake Shore Drive and expanded into nearby neighborhoods while similar developments appeared in Hyde Park, the near south and west sides, and elsewhere.

At "fancier" buildings, visitors were greeted in elegant lobbies and announced to residents by uniformed elevator operators prior to being whisked up to their destinations in a manually controlled elevator car. Buildings with multiple elevator shafts frequently had a "starter," whose job was to coordinate operations, schedule the operators, hold elevator and front doors open when needed, ensure the elevator cars and the lobby and elevator floors were clean and presentable, and generally be the building's principal interface with the world beyond the lobby.

The Roaring '20s halted with the Crash of '29. Development of new, large residential buildings, according to most sources, was paused during the Depression and did not resume in earnest until after World War II. As new buildings were designed and constructed, advancements in elevator technology eliminated the need for operators and starters in most locations. Eventually, older buildings began to convert their manual elevators, and completely eliminated the need for human operators. Yet, the functions of announcing visitors, directing vendors, and accepting packages and deliveries for residents remained unchanged.

Elevator operators and starters therefore became the basis for "Door Staff" operations in many buildings, and their position as a bridge between the outside world and residents continued to provide valuable, often vital, functions for vertical communities.

Thanks to the growth of internet shopping, the COVID-19 pandemic, rapidly changing work routines and technologies, and expanded delivery of groceries and meals, the role of the Door Staff has rapidly become more complex and integrated into the lives of residents than ever before. Ever increasing wages and benefits make it imperative that Associations maximize value for this significant part of their budget.

○ **For an association to get full value from its continuing substantial investment in a Door Staff, the following should exist:**

1. A comfortable working environment, reflecting the building's respect for the staff and the importance of their work.
2. Clear standards for employee behavior, including attendance, demeanor and grooming.
3. Consistent supervision, including scheduling, feedback to staff members on performance, and appropriate correction - or discipline - when standards are violated.
4. Detailed written instructions for routine tasks - admitting visitors, for instance - as well as for infrequent situations, such as correct handling of process servers.
5. Detailed, understandable emergency procedures and a regularly updated contact list.
6. Annual review of security procedures and customer service topics to ensure each team member grasps more than just the basics of their positions.

**Environment** - Nothing is more destructive to good customer service than requiring employees to work in uncomfortable or non-functional surroundings when solutions are possible. Have a cold lobby? Make sure the staff have space heaters or cold-weather gear; better yet, both. Avoid requiring duties physically impossible to carry out, such as opening doors for residents or visitors if the door cannot be seen or easily reached from the Front Desk.

