

Valet Parking

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Introduction



Theft or damage to customers' vehicles is always a sobering occurrence. Customers leave with negative feelings about their visit and those feelings may create lasting memories which spur them to visit your competitors instead of returning to your establishment. The potential loss costs associated with valet parking operations demand attention from management to ensure that reasonable controls are in place.

Guidelines for controlling the possibility of loss fall into several categories:

1. Employee Selection
2. Procedures, Training and Supervision
3. Vehicle Identification and Key Custody
4. Garaging Practices
5. Return of Car and Exit of Guest
6. Help the Guest to Help You Protect Their Vehicle

1. Employee Selection

The person hired for the job of moving high value (\$10,000-\$150,000) vehicles should exhibit skills and maturity equal to the task. A detailed job description will help when reviewing applications and conducting interviews.

Some of the essential skills/qualifications include:

- Possession of a valid driver's license
- Ability to operate vehicles equipped with a manual transmission
- Sufficient manual dexterity to operate the variety of vehicles encountered on the job

Selection tools which can help include Motor Vehicle Reports (MVRs) which summarize the driving history of the applicant. The accumulation of accidents or moving violations indicates behaviors which may increase the likelihood of having accidents with guests' vehicles. A standardized set of criteria should be used to provide uniformity while reviewing the MVRs of applicants. MVRs should be pulled upon hire, after an accident and annually, and made part of the driver's file.



Additional background checks on prospective employees to identify historical criminal behavior such as theft of vehicles, automotive electronics, vehicle contents, or high value components (airbags, etc.) may be the best way to prevent theft losses. Criminal background checks, credit checks, reference checks and checking with previous employers may be appropriate measures depending on employment practices within your state.

Caution should be used when evaluating applicants who've recently moved into the state as their records may be more difficult to verify. Managers and supervisors should also exhibit care when accepting applications from friends or relatives of existing employees: the possibility exists that a theft ring could be trying to penetrate the operation.

2. Procedures, Training and Supervision

A procedures manual or booklet should be developed for the employees as a training, orientation and reference guide. This will help ensure uniform training and orientation of new hires and provide a standard measure to evaluate existing employees' job performance.



To ensure and reinforce proper job performance, supervisors, managers, or members of the security department should check on the attendants periodically to ensure that procedure is being followed.

3. Vehicle Identification and Key Custody

Identifying the vehicle as it arrives is a critical step in securing the vehicle. Most firms use a two or three part ticket. Two part tickets allow the car to be matched to the owner, but three part tickets allow for the positive identification of the key as well.

Valets should initial the ticket when the vehicle arrives and when the vehicle is delivered as a means of identifying who has been in the vehicle (in case contents are later discovered missing).

Where practical, have the vehicle owner sign the ticket which stays with the car. This will provide an additional means of positively identifying the owner prior to departure. If this is not practical, the valet could request the owners name and print it on the ticket.

Each valet should have a designated color code or number identifier encoded on the tickets. This will allow management to track losses to specific valets and increase accountability. Another method is to have the valets initial the tickets.

Some firms have included a basic auto diagram on the back of the ticket to allow the valet to indicate existing damages at the time of check-in. Others have installed video surveillance equipment for security and for monitoring the condition of vehicles as they arrive. Both ways are good defense when disputing a fraudulent claim.

Vehicles must never be left unattended with keys in the ignition, glove box or visor. The practice of pulling vehicles forward to be left idling for the next runner should be discouraged unless specific controls are designed to protect the vehicle (guard, double gates, infrared gate opening devices, etc.).

Key control is a critical issue for all valet operations. Positive control of keys should be exercised:

- Store keys in a lockable box in a lockable room away from where the cars are stored,
- Consider the use of key locks which make the keys unusable except by attendants,
- Outside keyboards should be avoided,
- No keys released without ticket or positive identification of vehicle owner - - NO EXCEPTIONS,
- Keys should NEVER be left in unattended vehicles. It is too easy and too tempting a target for thieves



Lost Ticket procedures should be defined and clearly communicated to all valets. The vehicle should not be released until the ownership has been established. One method is to compare photo identification to the name on the registration or the rental agreement. The registration and/or the rental agreement should also be matched to the vehicle.

A form outlining these procedures will assist the valet to confirm the ownership prior to releasing the valet's and the owner's signature agreeing that the vehicle is released. This form should be stapled to the ticket and filed.

4. Garaging Practices

Garage areas should be very well lit with no concealed hiding spots where hijackers or thieves could congregate. Video surveillance of the entire storage area is preferred, and is considered critical whenever the attendants cannot view any part of the storage area from the valet station.



Protocols should be established for traffic patterns especially wherever there are vision barriers, blind spots, or tight turns. Rules governing the use of horns and lights should be clearly communicated.

Blocking or stacking vehicles is a practice where valets leave keys in the cars which are blocked in by other vehicles and could not be moved without first moving the lead car(s). While this will work as long as keys are removed from the cars which will be exposed as the first car moves out to the pickup area, the temptation to hurry makes the valet operation vulnerable to thefts and should be discouraged.

5. Return of Car and Exit of Guest

When a guest arrives to pick up a car, verify the ticket number and ask for identification to compare against the ticket in the car. Exercise caution when dealing with guests who allege that they are picking up cars for friends, have lost their ticket, or are obviously intoxicated.



Be prepared when a guest returns to pick up a vehicle which has been damaged. Fill out paperwork ahead of time to minimize the guest's wait. Have pictures ready for your report and for the guest. If you have worked out an agreement with the claims department to use certain repair shops in the event of an accident, provide a sheet with the contact names and addresses for the guest. While they will be unhappy that their vehicle was damaged, they will not be further frustrated if the situation is addressed calmly and professionally.

6. Help the Guest Help You to Protect Their Vehicle

Publish guidelines on posters and signs where vehicles are dropped off and picked up. This will provide prompts to guests that your establishment cares about their vehicles security (and inherently their continued patronage).

Offer reminders to the guests that they should not leave valuables in plain sight, and that they should be willing to offer identification if requested.



Vehicle theft and damage happens way too often in a valet parking setting. Efforts to minimize damage and theft, and excelling at customer service will give a competitive edge to competition.