

7 things you're almost certainly overlooking on your opening checklist

A closer look at where even well-built pre-opening checklists tend to break down, pulled from a real audit of a 250-plus item checklist built with the University of Houston's Conrad N. Hilton College of Global Hospitality Leadership.

Most pre-opening checklists get built once, under deadline pressure, and never really get looked at again.

They accumulate tasks the way a garage accumulates boxes: useful once, rarely re-examined, and nobody's sure what's still relevant.

We audited a 250-plus item pre-opening checklist that Pacer built in partnership with the University of Houston's Conrad N. Hilton College of Global Hospitality Leadership, a leading hospitality program. It has real history behind it across thousands of real openings. Even that checklist was missing the same things most teams miss. These are patterns, not guesses.

Here are seven of them, and a quick way to check for each one in your own process.

No flag for which tasks are actually milestones

Not every task carries the same weight. Some can slip a few days with no real consequence. Others, if missed, push your opening date. If your checklist treats all tasks as equally urgent, your team has no way to triage under pressure.

CHECK

Can anyone on your team name the 15 to 20 tasks that would delay opening day if missed, right now, without checking?

DO THIS

Flag your milestone tasks in the plan itself and cap the list at 20. Review those milestones at every weekly opening call and let the rest of the schedule move around them.

Tasks with no description or stated reason why they matter

A task that says "confirm vendor contract" tells someone what to do, not what happens if they don't. Without that context, a busy manager will deprioritize the wrong things, not out of carelessness, but because nobody told them which corners are safe to cut.

CHECK

Pick five random tasks from your checklist. Do any explain the impact of missing the deadline?

DO THIS

Add one line to every task naming what happens if it is missed. Start with the milestones, where a wrong call costs the most, and work outward from there.

One-size-fits-all tasks that don't apply to every location

A checklist built for a full-service property hands a limited-service location a stack of irrelevant tasks. Someone still has to read each one and mark it not applicable, wasting time and burying what actually matters under noise.

CHECK

How many tasks on your list typically get marked not applicable at a given location?

DO THIS

Tag every task with the location types it applies to, then deploy only the tasks that fit. A limited-service opening should never receive a full-service task.

No visibility into how tasks depend on each other

Openings rarely fail because one task was late. They fail because one late task quietly delayed three others nobody realized were waiting on it. A flat list can't show you that chain before it costs you days.

CHECK

If one task slipped a week today, would you know immediately which other tasks are now at risk?

DO THIS

Map predecessors for your milestone tasks first. Once each one is linked to the work waiting on it, a slip surfaces the whole chain instead of a single late date.

Timelines that don't move when the opening date does

Almost every opening date shifts at least once. When it does, someone has to manually recalculate every deadline counting down to it, or worse, nobody does, and half the checklist is quietly out of sync with reality.

CHECK

The last time your opening date moved, how long did it take every deadline to catch up?

DO THIS

Set every deadline as an offset from the opening date rather than a fixed calendar date. When the date moves, the schedule moves with it and nothing needs recalculating.

No mechanism for the field to improve the checklist

The people running an opening always find things the checklist missed. Without a path for that knowledge to make it back into the master version, you relearn the same lessons at every location, forever.

CHECK

When your team on the ground finds a gap, where does that feedback actually go?

DO THIS

Close every opening with a 15-minute debrief and name one owner for the master checklist. Fold the changes in before the next location starts.

No single, current version everyone is actually using

This is the quiet one. Even a well-built checklist fails if half the team works off a version from three revisions ago. Once it's emailed around and edited in isolation, "the checklist" stops meaning one thing.

CHECK

If you asked five people on your team for the current checklist right now, would you get five identical files?

DO THIS

Retire the emailed spreadsheet. Keep one live version everyone works in, with status visible to the field and not only to you.

None of these seven gaps are complicated to spot. What's hard is seeing them in your own process.

A checklist that's been in use for years starts to feel complete just by virtue of being familiar. If you want a more specific read on where your own team stands, not just on the checklist but on the coordination and visibility around it, Pacer offers a free two-minute survey for that.

Built from a real 250-plus item checklist audit, grounded in patterns across thousands of openings.

Two-minute survey to discover how in-control your openings are

A free assessment that scores how much control you actually have over your next opening or transition, and where the biggest gaps are likely showing up. No email required to see your result.

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