

Student Learning Log

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The reception/front office at the Marriott Highcliff Hotel in Bournemouth is essential for managing customer expectations and ensuring the hotel works well. The front office of a hotel, as stated by Vallen & Vallen (2014), acts as the hotel's public image, influencing the guest's experience and serving as their main point of contact for assistance.

The tasks in this area are diverse, as highlighted by Bardi (2010). They oversee visitor check-in and check-out, manage reservations, provide concierge services, and address guest feedback or concerns. The manager is crucial in supervising these activities and ensuring that all jobs adhere to the hotel's quality standards. O'Fallon & Rutherford (2010) emphasise the significance of close collaboration between the front office and various departments, like housekeeping and room service, to ensure seamless service delivery.

The front office staff plays a crucial role in influencing the guest's perception of the hotel. Tewari and Jatashankar R. (2016) underline that the efficient management of operations significantly influences the guest's stay experience. Therefore, it is essential to focus on guest connection management by comprehending the individual demands and preferences of each guest and swiftly addressing them. One significant finding in the front office operation is the extensive dependence on technology. Technology significantly influences contemporary front office operations by improving productivity and minimising human errors, from reservation systems to visitor profile management (Johnston and Clark, 2005).

This hands-on experience enhanced the theoretical knowledge I acquired during my academic studies. The importance of proactive collaboration, good communication, and technological proficiency in delivering outstanding guest service was confirmed. Moreover, I incorporated these insights into my personal growth and professional development (ASET, 2023; QAA, 2018).

Ultimately, the front office experience highlighted the intricate nature of the department's operations and the necessity of possessing a versatile skill set to accommodate various guest profiles and expectations (Wood, 2013). At the beginning of my internship at the Marriott Highcliff Hotel in Bournemouth, I intended to study the details of guest service operations, with a specific focus on the reception/front office department. I utilised the Gibbs Reflective Cycle (Gibbs, 1988) to ensure that I derived valuable insights and action plans from my experience. During my time there, I observed firsthand the practical application of technical skills

and work-based abilities by shadowing a reception supervisor. Competencies like effective communication, team building, task management, and execution of personal abilities were crucial in meeting guest service standards (Jones & Lockwood, 1989). Consistent and professional communication with the customers bolstered their faith in the hotel's ability to cater to their needs. Effective communication enabled the reception to coordinate smoothly with other departments such as housekeeping or room service, emphasising the significance of communication in completing back-house activities (Fayol, 2016).

The front office staff demonstrated teamwork by collaborating seamlessly to maintain consistent guest experiences, even during shift changes. In addition, excellent task management allowed the front desk to handle numerous check-ins and check-outs easily and effectively, especially during busy periods (Walker & Miller, 2010).

While working at the reception/front office of the Marriott Highcliff Hotel in Bournemouth, I established the following learning goals:

Comprehend the complexities of front office operations. I aimed to fully comprehend the daily operations, tasks, and duties of the front office department. I intended to become acquainted with all the tasks related to the profession, ranging from managing reservations to interacting with guests (Bardi, 2010).

Cultivate robust communication and interpersonal abilities. The front office represents the hotel and necessitates outstanding communication abilities. I focused on improving my conversational abilities by using various communication tactics tailored to the visitors' requirements and backgrounds (O'Fallon and Rutherford, 2010).

Enhance problem-solving skills: The front desk often deals with unexpected situations and problems. One of my primary objectives was to cultivate rapid and efficient decision-making and problem-solving abilities (Vallen & Vallen, 2014).

Acquaint myself with the hotel-specific software. Mastering technology is crucial for contemporary hotel management. Hence, another goal was to master the Marriott's specialised front office software as outlined by Johnston and Clark (2005).

Understand departmental coordination: The front office collaborates with several hotel departments to ensure a comprehensive guest experience. Therefore, comprehending this interaction and promoting efficient communication between departments was crucial (Wood, 2013).

Absorb the culture and values of Marriott International. I strived to comprehend and exemplify the ideals and service standards established by Marriott International in its operations (Tewari, Jatashankar R, 2016).

During the placement, I aimed to consistently match my performance with the learning objectives, regularly reflecting on progress and pinpointing opportunities for enhancement. ASET (2023) and the QAA (2018) highlighted that self-reflection and defining specific targets are crucial elements of successful work-based learning and have a vital role in personal and academic growth.

I faced a notable case when a guest complained about a noisy neighbouring room. The supervisor's adept handling of the matter, tactfully coordinating with visitors from both rooms, highlights the significance of possessing not only technical expertise but also interpersonal skills in overseeing guest service operations. Weiner's (1985) attribution theory was applied in this case, where the supervisor attributed the problem to external, uncontrolled factors to appease the upset guest without unfairly accusing the neighbouring room.

Contemplating this event and the supervisor's involvement brings to mind Lewin's (1939) leadership styles framework. The supervisor demonstrated a democratic leadership style by engaging the visitor in the problem-solving process, effectively managing their expectations and successfully addressing the situation. Nevertheless, this event also indicates a chance for enhancement - conducting soundproofing inspections beforehand could have prevented such instances entirely (Jones, 2013). This encounter enhanced the theoretical information I acquired through academic and practical means during my learning process. The statement highlights the significance of ongoing education, flexibility, and a detailed comprehension of the ever-changing hospitality sector. It emphasised the importance of efficient communication, collaboration, and strong task management abilities in guaranteeing smooth guest service operations. This confirms that these crucial skills are not just theoretical knowledge but are also valuable in real-world applications (Baker, 2017). After reviewing my time in the reception/front office at Marriott Highcliff Hotel in Bournemouth and comparing it to my goals, I intend to pursue a meticulously designed action plan for my future growth, starting with an Advanced Business Communication Course. My experience at the Marriott underscored the need of outstanding communication skills (Vallen & Vallen, 2014). Despite making substantial

improvements throughout the placement, I intend to enroll in a full corporate communication course to enhance this ability further.

Technical Competence: I intend to concentrate heavily on mastering the technical tools utilised in front-office activities, as mentioned by Bardi (2010). I will be looking for training opportunities for hotel-related software systems. I think acquiring additional technical abilities would improve my workflow efficiency and result in a more streamlined operation.

Expand Interdepartmental Desire: I aim to gain a comprehensive understanding of housekeeping and food and beverage management to grasp their integration with the front office (Casado, 2011). I aim to have a comprehensive understanding of all hotel operations.

Improve skills in managing customer complaints. The guest service complaints scenario offered significant learning opportunities (O'Fallon and Rutherford, 2010). In order to be better prepared for such events in the future, I am focused on enhancing my problem-solving and conflict-resolution abilities, which are essential for effectively managing challenging conditions.

I intend to build a robust professional network in the industry (Wood, 2013). This would not only offer learning opportunities but also facilitate joint endeavours in the future.

Ongoing Education - Market Trends: It is important to keep abreast of the most recent trends and developments in the hospitality sector. Attending industry-specific seminars, webinars, and workshops will help me consistently update and improve my expertise.

This action plan sets the groundwork for my continuous growth as a dynamic professional in the hospitality sector. My shadowing experience at the Marriott has given me a realistic understanding of the theories I've studied throughout my academic career (ASET, 2023; QAA, 2018).

Ultimately, this experience acted as a reality check, enhancing my knowledge, and helping me to adjust my understanding while pinpointing the disparities between theory and practice. The knowledge gained can be used to enhance future strategies and operations, particularly in managing visitor complaints or concerns.

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