

Placement: Customer Experience and Service Skills

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**Placement: Customer Experience and Service Skills
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Lecturer: Jemma Smith

I confirm that I have not used any AI tools in the research and creation of this assignment. I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated materials as my own work. I confirm I have copies of my drafts, notes, and other resources I used, which I may be asked to provide in evidence.

In this portfolio I will be reflecting on my experiences whilst working in a front of house role during my placement within El Pescador. I will be using Rolfe's reflective model as a basis for my portfolio. Rolfe, et al's model is designed to simplify the reflection process by guiding users with three fundamental questions (University of Wollongong, 2023). By using the three questions, 'What?' 'So What?' and 'Now What?' I can reflect on my experience within El Pescador and use my knowledge to further develop in the future. This portfolio will consist of three written sections highlighting different elements of my customer service experiences. The first will discuss the development of my skills in customer service such as any challenges I faced and how I dealt with said problems whilst providing an exceptional service level. Hospitality workers need some basic yet essential skills such as communication and interpersonal skills (Venkatraman, Joshi, Parasnis, 2019).

The second element will focus on the role I undertook and the tasks I was set, I will reflect on the customers I served and how I improved my service standards. Customers may require varied levels of service depending on their situation in that present time (Cousins, Weekes 2020, p10). Therefore, I will have to make my own judgment as to the customers' wants and needs. I will also be describing how I developed my skills working as part of a team and keeping consistency with customer morale. An increase in morale will improve employee moods leading to an increased work ethic therefore improving customers satisfaction (Sania, Kalpina, Javed 2015).

There will also be a chance for me to reflect on how I handled specific incidents and how I can better handle them in a more professional manner in future. Errors are essential for personal and professional development (Frese, Keith, 2015). The final written section will be an overall reflection of what I have learned during my placement and how I can use that to further develop my career in the future.

Reflecting on my shift at El Pescador, I was given key opportunities to further develop my communication skills with customers. Working in the customer service industry you learn to adapt (Nathan, 2024). For example, the first table I was tasked with serving ordered a bottle of red wine. When serving the wine, I demonstrated the correct procedure by presenting the bottle to the host of the table before opening. Once presented I opened the wine and offered the host a glass ensuring I kept the bottle label facing the host. After the host agreed the wine was sufficient and had not oxidized, I poured everyone else a glass before topping up the host's glass. In recent years the market for wine has risen within restaurants (Ruiz-Molina. Gil-Saura. Berenguer-Contrí, 2010). Communicating with the customers was vital so they understood the procedures I was following. Employees' relationships and attitude towards the customers play a key role in customer satisfaction (Mathe, Scott-Halsell, and Roseman, 2013). Communication proved to be important when I

was serving a different table a bottle of wine and after presenting the bottle I offered to pour a taster to the host, but they asked if they could serve the wine themselves.

Over the course of my placement, I faced a set of challenges within my role as a server. Within my development as a member of staff I have been confronted with challenges to become innovative whilst continuously developing my skill set and knowledge of the industry (Woerkom, Meyers. 2018). One such challenge was when I was explaining the menus to the customer as there were three menus, the *Al a Carte* menu with meat and vegetarian dishes, the set menu, the separate menu for the daily fish and finally the drinks menu. The menu type and variety of the menu should aim to enhance customers experience (Davis, et al 2018 p28). With such a wide range of choices on the menu, El Pescador hopes all their patrons can enjoy their experience.

I was walking the customers through finding the fish menu as the way to access it was by scanning a QR code from the board on the table. QR codes rose to popularity between 2020 – 2021 (Grzymkowski, 2023). El Pescador changes their fish menu daily due to availability, so they prefer to use an online menu to be more environmentally friendly. By using QR code menus, restaurants can contribute to a more sustainable and eco-friendlier practice (Ozturkcan, Kitapci 2023).

As I was explaining the purpose of each different menu to the table another staff member approached the table and interrupted me to re-explain the menus. After the interaction I requested that for a future table I am left to independently explain and answer customer questions until I request help from a senior staff member. If more experienced staff members repeatedly interject when I am responding to customer queries it can create a barrier between myself and the customers. To gain customers' trust they must believe you are reliable (Khadka, Maharjan, 2017). With constant interruptions from other staff, the customers may believe I do not understand my job role and will be less likely to approach me with further inquiries, which prevents me from developing my customer communication skills.

During my placement at El Pescador I undertook the role of a server being tasked with taking drinks orders for my section and serving patrons their meals. These are all tasks I can complete with my previous college and job experience but the staff members at El Pescador seemed unsure of letting me work independently. Due to this lack of trust, there were multiple occasions where I was interrupted, or I had staff members take over the task I was halfway through. The lack of trust was disheartening as I was keen to prove my abilities to the managers but felt unable to showcase my skill set sufficiently. Team members must be able to work together and balance each other out whilst working in an organized fashion to deliver an excellent service (Calender, 2021). Without the much-needed trust between staff

it is difficult to find balance and successfully work together. Despite talking with the manager about my experience working on assorted styles of bars I was unable to help the bartender when they appeared to be overwhelmed with drink orders.

Throughout the night there were multiple large parties booked therefore I was unable to achieve a more meaningful connection with customers. I was unsuccessful in gaining any feedback from smaller tables as every time I attempted to communicate with them another staff member would call me away and instruct me to clear and relay empty tables. This was despite the manager encouraging me to strike up a conversation with customers in an effort to gather feedback and ensure the customers were content with their service. The satisfaction of customers through exceptional service is vital for ensuring a business thrives (Mmutle, Shonhe 2017). There are many who agree that customers are key to business. Hill, Brierley and MacDougall (2017 p3) states by offering best value to customers, you can better secure their loyalty.

During my placement there were task opportunities I was unable to assist with. Unfortunately, due to how El Pescador was run, I was unable to partake in certain tasks like taking food orders. This is because staff members at El Pescador add the food to the till system themselves and I was not given an opportunity to learn their system. I was also unable to prepare drinks and work alongside staff at the bar because of the distinct lack of trust between the managers and myself. For future shifts, I would like to be given the opportunity to perform my job role as best I can and display my skill set without staff interjecting.

Reflecting upon my experiences in El Pescador, I found the most challenging aspects of my placement to be the lack of tasks I was set with. I felt as though I was not trusted to complete even small tasks such as taking any food orders and inputting any drinks orders on the till as I was not allowed behind the bar. I believe this was due to the evident lack of trust as the managers did not understand my previous experience in a front-of-house role. To learn from these experiences, I feel it would be best to take control of opportunities and show the initiative to complete tasks independently. Learning from these experiences I hope that in the future I will be able to offer my skills to help others learn in a unique way to how I was taught. I would like to give others the opportunity to expand and develop their skill set without redirecting them to simpler tasks. To improve on my own skill set I could improve my working methods within a team and better understand how other staff members work. In doing this I can work as part of a team better to ensure a smoother service.

In conclusion my time in El Pescador has allowed me to experience a new way of working with different service styles. I am hopeful that over my placement I can continue to learn and develop my skills with customer service.

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