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Student Journal

Component 1

Introduction

Embarking on a placement within the reception department of a bustling hotel presented an invaluable opportunity to delve into the core operations that define the hospitality industry. This reflective journal employs the Gibbs Reflective Cycle as a framework to critically examine my hands-on experiences at the front desk, an area often hailed as the nerve centre of hotel operations. The importance of the front office extends beyond mere administrative duties; it is the primary point of interaction between the hotel and its guests, where first impressions are formed and overall guest experiences are significantly shaped. Gibbs (1988, Oxford)

My journey through this placement was not only about fulfilling the daily responsibilities but also about understanding the profound impact these duties have on the hotel's reputation and the satisfaction of its guests. As suggested by Bardi (2011) and echoed by Tewan (2009), the front office's role is critical in weaving the thread of customer satisfaction through efficient management practices and effective guest communication. Through this reflection, I aim to dissect the elements of my role, evaluate my interactions and challenges, and synthesise my learning to project my future growth in this dynamic field.

This journal will outline the specific tasks I undertook, reflect on the personal and emotional aspects of these experiences, and critically analyse my performance with an eye towards continuous personal and professional development. By integrating theoretical insights with practical experiences.

Description of the Experience

Throughout my placement, my primary responsibilities involved managing guest interactions at the front desk, which included check-ins, check-outs, and responding to various inquiries. These tasks are fundamental to front office management, as outlined by Bardi (2011) and Tewan (2009), emphasizing the importance of precision and efficiency in creating first impressions that resonate positively with guests.

Feelings and Emotions

During the initial stages of my placement, I frequently felt overwhelmed by the fast-paced nature of the work and the high expectations set for guest service. However, as I navigated through these challenges, I found a sense of accomplishment in resolving guest issues effectively, which significantly boosted my confidence. Solomon (2018) highlights the emotional aspects of hospitality, stressing the need for genuine care and empathy in every guest interaction.

Evaluation of Performance

Evaluating my performance, I observed that my strengths lay in direct guest interactions where my communication skills greatly facilitated service delivery. Conversely, my ability to handle multiple tasks simultaneously needed improvement, particularly during peak hours. Hammer (2016) and Tesone (2010) discuss the critical nature of these skills in optimizing front office operations and enhancing guest satisfaction.

Analysis of the Impact

The interactions I had with guests and colleagues deepened my understanding of the strategic importance of the front office. According to the Cornell School of Hotel

Administration (Corgel et al., 2011), the front office is not just the heart of operations but also a critical point for implementing hospitality strategies that ensure guest loyalty and satisfaction. This understanding reshaped my perspective on the role of customer service in hospitality.

Reflection on Ethical and Cultural Considerations

My placement also exposed me to a diverse clientele, necessitating an adaptable and culturally sensitive approach. Encounters that required understanding and respect for cultural differences were common, and I learned to navigate these with tact and sensitivity, as advised by ASET (2013) and Vallen & Vallen (2014). These experiences underscored the importance of cultural competence in the global hospitality industry.

Conclusion and Lessons Learned

Reflecting on my overall experience, the placement was instrumental in solidifying my understanding of the hospitality industry's dynamics, particularly in the front office department. The practical application of theories from Fallon & Rutherford (2011) and Wood (2013) during the placement was invaluable in linking academic knowledge with real-world practice. I have emerged with a clearer understanding of the nuances of guest service management and a heightened appreciation for the operational complexities of a hotel.

Action Plan for Future Improvement

To further enhance the skills developed during my placement, I have outlined a focused action plan targeting key improvement areas:

1. **Enroll in Advanced Customer Service Training:** To improve my communication and problem-solving skills, I plan to undertake advanced customer service training. This will deepen my understanding of customer psychology and equip me with strategies for handling complex situations, enhancing guest satisfaction.

2. Practice Effective Multitasking Techniques: Addressing peak times at the front desk requires efficient multitasking. I aim to practice prioritization and time management techniques to manage tasks seamlessly and reduce guest wait times.

3. Engage in Cultural Sensitivity Workshops: Given the diverse nature of hotel clientele, I will participate in cultural sensitivity workshops. These will provide the skills needed to effectively navigate cultural nuances, ensuring a welcoming environment for all guests.

Component 2

Practical Task- Scenario



Zsuzsy C

wrote a review Feb 2024

3 contributions



Highly recommend

I stayed for business a couple of times!

Really lovely staff at reception , rooms are clean

nice . Restaurant staff always friendly really nice !At

Breakfast everything fresh and delicious!

Dinner menu give you a great selection . So far what

ever I tried always delicious. Really like to stay here

when in in the area !!

(Fig 1. "Tripadvisor review on Mercure Hotel" source:

https://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Hotel_Review-g186463-d20316023-Reviews-Mercure_Newport_Hotel-Newport_South_Wales_Wales.html)

Response:

Dear Zsuzsy C,

Dear Zsuzsy C,

Thank you for your glowing review and for choosing our hotel for your business stays! We are delighted to hear that our reception staff made a lasting impression with their warm hospitality and that the cleanliness of our rooms met your expectations. It's fantastic to know that our restaurant staff contributed to your experience with their consistent friendliness and that both our breakfast and dinner offerings were to your liking.

We pride ourselves on providing a varied menu that caters to all tastes, and we're thrilled that we've been a highlight of your visits. Your recommendation is highly valued, and we eagerly await the opportunity to serve you again!

Warm regards,

Darius Berlan, Duty Manager

Letter of Complain

Response:

Hotel Mercure Newport

05.11.2024

Mrs. Joanna Blake

558 Longford Road

Swansea, SA1 2AR

Subject: Your Recent Experience at Mercure Newport

Dear Mrs. Blake,

As the Duty Manager of Mercure Newport, I offer my sincerest apologies for the issues you encountered during your recent stay with us. We aim to provide a consistently high standard of hospitality, and it's clear from your feedback that we failed to meet both our own expectations and yours. I personally take this matter very seriously and am committed to addressing the concerns you raised.

Upon receiving your complaint, we conducted a thorough review of our housekeeping protocols. Ensuring the cleanliness of our facilities is paramount, and in response to your feedback, we've refined our training programmes and implemented additional quality checks to uphold a standard of excellence (Bardi, 2011). We are dedicated to ensuring that all guest rooms meet our stringent cleanliness criteria consistently.

Additionally, we acknowledge the Wi-Fi issues reported during your stay. Reliable digital connectivity is crucial for our guests, whether they are traveling for business or leisure. We have taken immediate steps to enhance our network infrastructure to provide a dependable connection moving forward, aiming to prevent future disruptions (Tesone, 2010).

Your comments regarding noise disruption were also taken seriously. To address this, we've updated our room allocation process and reinforced our soundproofing measures to ensure a peaceful environment for all guests (Tewan, 2009). We understand that the quality of your rest is crucial, and we are committed to providing a serene and restful stay.

We were particularly concerned about your impressions of our customer service. Excellent service is the cornerstone of what we aim to offer at Mercure Newport. In light of your experiences, our front desk and customer service teams are undergoing advanced training focused on enhancing communication skills and guest interaction quality (Solomon, 2018). We want to ensure that every guest feels valued and receives the highest level of service.

As a gesture of our commitment to restoring your faith in our hotel, we are pleased to offer you a complimentary two-night stay in our executive suite, including a dinner for two at our premier restaurant. This is our way of inviting you to experience the true standard of hospitality that Mercure Newport strives to deliver (Hammer, 2016).

We take your feedback to heart as it is invaluable in helping us improve and refine our services. It has prompted us to examine our practices closely to ensure they meet the high expectations our guests have of us (Corgel et al., 2011). We are more focused than ever on enhancing our operational standards and guest experiences.

We sincerely hope to have the opportunity to welcome you back and demonstrate the improvements we have made. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me directly if you wish to discuss this further or need any assistance with your future stays.

Thank you once again for your valuable feedback. We look forward to the chance to serve you again under improved circumstances and are confident that your next stay with us will meet, if not exceed, your expectations.

Warm regards,

Darius, Berlan, Duty Manager, Mercure Newport

Component 3

Portfolio-4 elements

Key Skills Required for Hotel Front Office Operations

The front office of a hotel serves as the critical interface between the hotel and its guests, making the skills of the staff in this department essential to the overall guest experience and operational success. As the face of the hotel, the front office is where first impressions are made and lasting relationships are initiated. This essay explores the essential skills required in hotel front office operations, namely customer service, communication, organisational, and problem-solving skills. These competencies are not just beneficial but crucial, as they directly influence guest satisfaction and shape the hotel's reputation. These skills are analysed through the lens of recent academic literature and illustrated with real-world examples from the industry, forming the backbone of effective hotel management.

Front office staff are tasked with a variety of roles that extend beyond mere reception duties. They act as ambassadors of the hotel brand, personal assistants to guests, and adept problem solvers. Their ability to perform these roles effectively depends on a blend of trained skills and innate aptitude. The importance of these skills is further magnified by the competitive nature of the hospitality industry, where hotels strive to differentiate themselves through superior guest service and operational efficiency. Thus, the development and refinement of these skills are continuously pursued through both formal training and day-to-day experience (Bardi, 2011).

By examining the roles and responsibilities of front office personnel, this discussion highlights the multifaceted nature of their job. It delves into how each skill set—customer service, communication, organisational, and problem-solving—plays a pivotal role in ensuring that every guest interaction adds value to the guest experience and enhances the operational harmony of the hotel. Each skill is interconnected, with excellence in one area often bolstering performance in another, thereby creating a synergistic effect that drives the success of the hotel's front office operations (Tesone, 2010).

Customer Service Skills

Customer service skills are paramount in the realm of hotel management, as they fundamentally ensure guest satisfaction and foster loyalty. Corgel et al. (2011) argue that the quality of service delivered by front office staff is directly correlated with guests' overall perceptions of a hotel. Front office personnel, often the first and last point of contact for guests, are in a pivotal position to influence the guest experience. Superior customer service involves not only meeting but exceeding guest expectations through personalised greetings, swift problem resolution, and the anticipation of guest needs before they are expressed.

For example, the Ritz-Carlton hotel chain is renowned for its exceptional customer service, largely due to its policy that allows staff to spend up to £2,000 at their discretion to enhance a guest's stay (Solomon, 2018). Another notable example is the Shangri-La Hotel, where front office staff are trained to recognise return guests by name, thereby creating a personalised and welcoming atmosphere that significantly boosts guest satisfaction.

Communication Skills

Effective communication is crucial in the fast-paced environment of hotel front offices. Tesone (2010) notes that communication skills extend beyond simple interactions with guests; they also encompass internal communications among staff and between departments. These skills ensure that information regarding guest needs, preferences, and potential issues is accurately and efficiently shared, thereby facilitating a seamless operation.

Marriott International exemplifies this through its implementation of a unified communication platform that enables front office teams to provide personalised service and promptly address any issues. Another example is the InterContinental Hotels Group, which uses digital tools to maintain real-time communication across hotel departments, ensuring that guest preferences and requirements are communicated instantly and accurately (Hammer, 2016).

Organisational Skills in Hotel Front Office Operations

Organisational skills are crucial for the efficient operation of a hotel's front office, where the coordination of various tasks must be executed flawlessly to ensure guest satisfaction and operational success. These skills involve meticulous planning, detailed scheduling, effective use of technology, and adept management of human resources. Tewan (2009) outlines that the strategic deployment of property management systems (PMS) is vital in enhancing organisational capabilities within hotel operations. The Hilton Hotels chain, for example, has integrated advanced PMS solutions that facilitate the efficient management of bookings and guest interactions, significantly enhancing operational efficiency.

Ongoing training is crucial for maintaining high standards in organisational skills. Tesone (2010) emphasises the importance of continuous professional development for front office staff to ensure they are proficient in the latest operational protocols and technology. The Novotel hotel chain, for instance, has implemented regular

training sessions that focus on streamlining operations and enhancing guest service through efficient organisational practices.

Problem-solving Skills

Problem-solving skills in the hotel industry encompass the ability to quickly identify issues and implement effective solutions. Front office staff often encounter situations requiring immediate attention, such as handling overbookings or addressing guest complaints. Johnston et al. (2012) emphasise the need for staff to not only recognise problems but also creatively solve them in a way that maintains or enhances guest satisfaction.

A notable example of effective problem-solving in action is Hilton Hotels' "Make it Right" policy, where front desk agents are encouraged to resolve guest issues promptly. Similarly, the Four Seasons Hotels have implemented a proactive service recovery system where staff are trained to anticipate potential issues and resolve them before they escalate, ensuring that guest grievances are addressed efficiently and effectively, thus maintaining a high standard of guest service and satisfaction (Fanthorne, 2004).

Conclusion

The success of a hotel's front office is fundamentally reliant on the proficiency of its staff in mastering critical skills such as customer service, communication, organisational, and problem-solving abilities. These skills are not merely operational necessities; they form the core of guest interaction and satisfaction, directly impacting the reputation and financial performance of the hotel.

In conclusion, the collective impact of customer service, communication, organisational, and problem-solving skills in the hotel front office cannot be overstated. By empowering employees and leveraging technology, hotels can not only improve the effectiveness of their front-office operations but also enhance guest satisfaction and loyalty.

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14. Tripadvisor review on Mercure Hotel source:

https://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Hotel_Review-g186463-d20316023-Reviews-Mercure_Newport_Hotel-Newport_South_Wales_Wales.html)