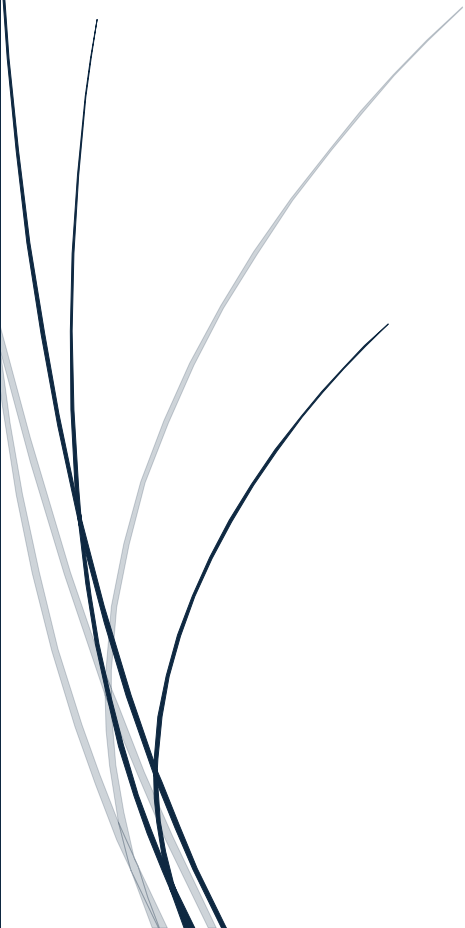




3/25/2024

Customer Service in Placement.

A reflective Portfolio.



BMGM 4003

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Introduction.

This portfolio is a reflection of my own experience as a student in placement at the Delta Hotel by Marriott' restaurant in Swansea. It sums up all the culinary knowledge gathered here, along with customer service skills I have learned and personal growth. It also reflects on challenges I have faced by being there, how I have responded to them and if the situations might have been handled differently.

While on placement, I have been mentored by Chef Jack Brown, a respectable and skilled culinary professional whom I have come to admire and respect. Most days I oversaw the morning buffet, where, having an open kitchen, I had to deal with customers directly, making their preferred breakfast. Afterwards, I was prepping for lunch. Sometimes, Chef Brown had me using my previous culinary experience and imagination. All in all, it was a noteworthy experience for me, and whereas I was already experienced as a chef in my own food business, and in previous employment, I was able to build my knowledge and gain skills I did not have.

1. Customer Service Skills

As a current food business owner and a previous Chef in various jobs in Swansea, I had a vast culinary experience and training. The Grand Hotel, Q3 where I have met my current placement mentor, Chef Jack Brown, That Place, Bluebell are among my previous workplaces. A few years back I have opened my food business which was mainly focused on pizza and pizza related products. The setup was a custom-built static caravan in my back garden, from where I have sold food for a year, until planning permission forced me to move my business. In my current location, I have expanded the menu to include traditional Romanian food, beside pizzas and other pizza-related products. Regarding my training, when starting placement, I have already finished my Level 3 Food Hygiene and Safety. While on placement, I have updated my Food Hygiene and Safety training and did the Food Allergy Training.

Therefore, the training and previous skills set have helped me while doing my placement. Knowing that I was not a beginner in the kitchen, has made Chef Brown confident enough to put me in charge of cooking breakfast most days. While doing that, I learned how to prepare enough for a set number of guests. Because of the open kitchen setup, I was dealing with customers directly, receiving orders to cook their preferred breakfast, usually omelette, poached eggs, porridge, sausages, boiled eggs or eggs Benedict and others.

However, I have also encountered some challenges. A customer wanted an omelette with cockles, spinach, and lover bread, and unfortunately, we did not have the latter in stock. I have stayed calm and apologised to our guest, saying that we are out of stock and that we were awaiting delivery on it. I offered to make the omelette without the lover bread for him instead, and he agreed, asking me to use only egg whites. As I was quite busy, I haven't realised I made the omelette using whole eggs. But the guest was nevertheless content, as he came and thanked me for a delicious meal.

Good customer service is described as friendly and polite behaviour no matter the circumstances, communicating effectively, meeting guests needs or exceeding them, listening to customers intently, being able to adapt communication methods and/or service (Cousins and Weekes, 2020). Given that the kitchen was lacking a staple product, I was able to provide the guest with a viable option. However, I realise that while in a busy environment, my focus drifts, as I did not follow customer's request for using only egg whites.

Another challenge I have encountered was that a customer was dissatisfied with the bacon, as it was too crispy. Even though the bacon was freshly cooked, the fact that it stayed a while in the hot pan on the open buffet, it became too cooked for the guest's satisfaction. I took notice of his preference and whenever he orders his usual poached eggs, I also cook fresh bacon.

2. Customer Service Experience and Feedback

As within every business, beside Standard Operation Procedures, which is the guide for performance, there are also Rules of Conduct, as a training for employees to recognise and follow rules of accepted behaviour (Tesone, 2010). The placement interview had several hypothetical situations to customer service delivery and by relying on my previous experience I gave good answers.

Food and service quality are generally measured by a generalized set of attributes, which do not fully grasp the customer's experience, therefore it is recommended that a restaurant puts the customer first when analysing customer's experience and the success of the service (Wood, 2015). At Mariott, the management is actively monitoring customer's feedback and communicating it back to the staff through a WhatsApp group. Based on the feedback, they set goals and give instructions on what needs to be rectified or what required more attention, such as paying attention so that all ingredients and products are stocked and to reorder when stock is low. This is in line with Fernandez (2023), who highlights the value of maintaining good communication within the company, to praise good feedback and to engage employees into better outcomes when the feedback is negative.

As a placement worker, I have had good reviews and compliments both from the customers, being satisfied with their food and from the management, as my physical appearance is always professional and tidy. Receiving constructive feedback is valuable for a professional in training, as it reveals the areas which he excels at and the areas in which he needs to improve, thus, with more practice and guidance, the trainee can acquire more skills (Fanthome, 2004).

Survey shows that customers' loyalty can be gained by delivering quality food and drinks, followed by good service and lastly by good value for money offers (Chapman, 2024). In the same context, Miller (2023) states that experiences must be uniquely developed and expanded so that customers are enticed to try them.

3. Personal Growth and Reflection

Owning my own business has allowed me to work on my own terms, organising my time and my resources to the best of my ability, while also attending to family matters. On placement, I had to work on a strict routine, waking up at four in the morning, which became a challenge for me as I was also working for myself in the afternoon. I was enthusiastic to work on placement at Marriott restaurant, and it challenged me personally to be more proactive and efficient throughout the day. The long hours of work were satisfying but soon, tiredness took over. I had to rearrange my working hours, not to fall into exhaustion. Another challenge for me was and following orders, as I was so used to organising and making my own recipes and meals. So, in this placement I learned about the importance of kitchen and restaurant hierarchy and how it impacts customer service. A hierarchical structure of management in a restaurant makes it clear who is the authority everyone needs to report to, and it also helps with communicating effectively, as the employees are given step-by-step instructions from their direct superior, and report back to the ones in charge (Walker and Walker, 2014).

Despite having a long history of working in a hospitality environment, the work placement at the Marriott hotel's restaurant has changed my perception of myself and of my own skills, learning that I can always improve myself professionally. Inceoglu et al. (2019) state that such vocational training for undergraduates' changes students views on their own knowledge, their attitudes and skills and helps them strengthen their identity within the world and the workplace as they become more autonomous and confident in their own abilities. And building a professional career with the right attitude and a vision to understand human beings and their needs, is what successful businesses are made of (Susskind and Maynard, 2019).

Conclusion

Personally, I started my placement being enthusiastic about working in a different culinary environment and for such a reputable company, and getting to meet hospitality professionals who could teach me things I was curious about and eager to learn. Suffice to say it did not disappoint as I made good friends along the way and progressed in my personal and career aspirations.

I believe a person never stops learning in his life and being open to it, taking chances and pursuing one's goals brings spice to our existence.

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