

Reflective Portfolio of Practical Tasks

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Reflective Portfolio of Practical Tasks

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Module: Placement: Developing Customer Experience and Service Skills

Module code: BMGM5003

Lecturer: Antoinette Milne

Placement Experience and Reflection

Helen Hayes once said, “An expert at anything was once a beginner.” University placement programs function as internship programs where students are placed under the guidance of a professional and gain valuable skills and knowledge about practice. Placement programs help students bridge the knowledge and practice gap in the theory taught in class and practice found in the industry. Arthur and Koomson (2023) highlight that there are significant benefits of internship programs such as the development of soft skills, enhanced employability, responsibility confidence, and career developmental opportunities. My placement was at Stock by Feasted restaurant where I gained insights on first impression skills, wine knowledge, and customer communication skills.  1

First Impression

First impressions are significant in a fine dining restaurant.  2 Ameli and Garg (2016) highlight in a full-service restaurant with table service, first impressions are crucial in retaining new and return customers. First impressions are the initial perception of the customers in forming thoughts and opinions about the restaurants. Ameli and Garg (2016) note that a good first impression sets the right tone for the customer and improves the return rates of the customers to the restaurant. There are three main factors that contribute to great first impressions in a restaurant. These are “...food quality, service of the restaurant, and the atmosphere” (Ameli and Garg, 2016, p. 102). This implies that the first impression of the customer is heavily influenced by the quality of service provided, the environment of the service, and the service providers. This three-pronged approach posits that it is important for the staff to be hygienic, friendly, and happy, the restaurant atmosphere should be scenic and have a good ambience and the food meet high-quality standard  3

At Stock by Feasted, I was placed as a waiter. As a waiter, I am trained that first impressions begin with the waiters as the first-line contact with the customers. During my placement, I was taught that a customer's impression of the restaurant is made in the first few seconds. Gibbons (2021) highlights that within the first seven seconds of meeting a customer, they develop a solid intuition and opinion about a person and by extension a business. In fact, earlier research, that is Bar et al. (2006) confirms that it takes people approximately 39 ms to form an opinion without any additional information. The truth is that a customer's first glance at a waiter or receptionist they form a perception about an individual based on their facial features. Xie (2022) confirms that the target characteristics that influence first impressions include facial cues. As a server at Stock by Feasted we are constantly taught to smile at our guests. Smiling leaves a warm and lasting impression on customers. If a waiter wants to leave an impression in the first seven seconds, then smiling is a weapon to disarm customers. Min and Hu (2023) determined that customers in hospitality found that employees with broad and happy smiles were warm, welcoming, and competent. Moreover, in the hedonic-oriented service industry such as restaurants, employees smiling resulted in a positive judgment of competence. In the broader industry, smiling has an immense impact on influencing customer purchase intentions (Trivedi and Teichert, 2019). Therefore, the smiling aspect not only positively correlated with first impressions but influenced the customer's intention to sit and dine at Stock by Feasted.

Wine Knowledge

Restaurants such as Stock by Feasted play a significant role in the promotion and sales of wines. Wines play a significant gastronomic appeal role and elevate the restaurant's status. Kim et al. (2019) highlight that restaurants provide wine offering product promotions. This is facilitated through communication of the wines between the customers and the employees. Moreover, wine

promotion is a critical component in enhancing customer satisfaction⁷. Yang and Choi (2022) highlight that knowledge of wine by employees positively improves wine purchasing behaviour among customers in restaurants. The customer's attitudes and behaviours toward purchasing wine in restaurants are heavily influenced by employees' knowledge⁸. Pickering and Kemp (2024) highlight that customers' purchase intentions of wines are heavily influenced by wine cues. For employees to effectively communicate and promote wine offerings to customers and shift their purchase intentions they should be knowledgeable about wine cues. The wine cues include intrinsic factors such as the taste, aroma, and flavour of the wine while the extrinsic cues include the reputation of the wine, production process and region, price of wine, and packaging (Pickering and Kemp, 2024). Employees, especially waiters, should be knowledgeable about wine offerings to effectively recommend the proper wine for their customers.

At Stocked by Feasted, the waiters are charged with the promotion of wines. It's important to know the wine selection on the menu including red and white wines. Stock by Feasted has a few varieties of wine selection of white and red wines. Some of the wines on the menu are Orange wine, a white or amber wine, Syrah Villa Blanch red wine, and Riesling (DeBortoli Wine), just to mention a few. As a waiter, I am trained to offer wine, ask for the customer's preferences, and if undecided suggest a wine offering. One thing about wine selection is that employees must consider customer preferences (Kelkar et al., 2024). It brings me to wine pairings as a way to promote wine in our restaurant. Terrier and Jaquinet (2016) confirm that restaurants should have a comprehensive wine list because it attracts customers. Moreover, it requires the employees to develop a set of knowledge and vocabulary to communicate to the customer. Food-wine pairing forms a very important aspect of wine-purchasing behaviour among customers⁹. The current pairing of food-wine is one of the most important steps that can enhance the selection and purchasing (Terrier and

Jaquinet, 2016). At Stock by Feasted we offer food-wine pairings that encompass even the season. For example, the Orange wine is often paired with squash and pumpkin leaves and recommended for the autumn menu. Anderson highlights that some of the most common food-wine pairings include Riesling and seafood, Chardonnay and chicken, Shiraz and steak, and Pinot Noir and duck. One of the suggestions I would like to make is that there should be a food-wine pair menu for the customers. To elevate the menu further, it can be designed for every season. The menu should fully focus on the wine and provide food offerings that go with different varieties. Terrier and Jaquinet (2016) confirm these recommendations noting the need for food-wine menus that use tent cards displayed on every table which serves to guide customers thus eliminating the financial, and health concerns, time wastage, and public image risks concerned with wine selection.

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Customer Communication Skills

Effective communication skills cannot be overlooked in the provision of great customer service in the hospitality industry. Manningham et al. (2024) underpin the importance of directive and expressive verbal moves for employees in the restaurant sector. Directive and expressive allow the waiter to speak slowly and composed when asking for customer orders. The expressive verbal moves allow the waiter to be friendly, welcoming, and warm in their interaction with customers. During my placement at Stock by Feasted I learned that the waiter should greet the customers, direct them to their table, where possible assist them in sitting such as pulling the chair for them. After this, it's important to give the customers some space to go over the menu without being an overarching figure. During the process of taking orders, I understood the importance of active listening as an integral aspect of communication. Tankovic et al. (2021) note that listening skills are one of the most important skills in the hospitality industry. Responsible listening is crucial in interpersonal relations because it involves receiving, interpreting, and responding to information.

Islam and Kirillova (2021) highlight that active listening among the restaurant staff goes beyond processing information. Active listening entails nodding, maintaining an attentive body posture, eye contact, and cues of agreement. During my placement, I learned that active listening is an important aspect of communication. For instance, active listening entails noting the customer's orders and other extra details such as allergies, how they want the food prepared, and the order of delivering food. Vidak et al. (2022) highlight that feedback is important during employee communication with customers. During my service, I learned that it's important to repeat the order to the customer to ensure all the details of their order are captured. I believe that my skills in verbal and non-verbal communication left a significantly positive impression on my customers. There are many instances I received a compliment, a thank you for my exceptional service. Overall, I received really positive customer feedback about my speed of service, friendliness, and attention to detail even for large orders.

Reflections

The University of Edinburgh (2020) highlights that the Gibbs reflective cycles offer an approach of self-reflection in six -key steps. In the descriptive phase of my experience, I can say the experience taught me many things including how to communicate with customers including taking orders. I learned about the different wine offerings and how to pair the wines with food. I learned how to smile and present myself to the customer. In the feelings step, I felt empowered and confident. I felt strong and capable because I had the skills necessary to advance in my future practice. During the evaluative step, I felt the experience was overall good. It was good because my placement was a period of learning new things, gaining new experiences and insights, and interacting with customers and other staff to gain nuanced, practical, and hands-on skills I had previously been studying in theory. Moreover, the experience shaped how I view the work of

waiters. I now have deeper insights into the experiences and capacities of waiters to provide the best possible service. I believe the placement went well because I had a great mentor. My mentor was gentle, kind, knowledgeable, insightful, and corrected me with care. I now know that being a service waiter is both an art and a science. Now, I have become gentler, kind, and understanding to the waiters due to my practical experience. In my conclusion step, I believe that I gained so much insight, knowledge, and experience in customer communication, service process, first impressions, and wine and food knowledge. Some of the skills I have gained from my experience are clear and expressive communication skills, active listening skills, problem-solving skills, collaboration skills, and customer service skills.

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Leading the to Future

Anjum (2020) emphasizes the significance of practical work in connecting theory to practice, inviting students into the professional world. The placement experience is essential for enhancing students' personal skills and professional development. The skills I gained such as communication skills, active listening, customer service skills, collaboration, and problem-solving skills are useful skills that are applicable in professional life. My future career aspirations are to become a restaurant manager or head of hospitality in a hotel. The skills I gained as a waiter will not only help with the application process but also the execution of my duties. During my placement, the career guidance I received has helped me redefine and rethink my career choice. Hakiki et al. (2023) highlight that internship programs serve as career guidance programs that help the student make decisions regarding their career choices. It helps the student to discover their strengths and realign them with career aspirations and goals. I realized that I have strong communication and problem-solving skills, which has sparked my interest in hotel leadership, specifically in restaurant management or as head of hospitality.

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Conclusion

University placement is a student eye-opener and a taste of the professional world. During my placement at Stock y Feasted, I gained valuable information about first impressions, wine knowledge, and customer service skills. First impressions are important in influencing customer retention. First impressions are related to the food, the ambiance, and the service. Importantly, a smile can be a key factor in attracting customers perception in seven seconds. Wine knowledge is important in ensuring customer satisfaction. Wine knowledge includes food-wine pairing and communicating with customers about wine which improves their purchasing behavior. Stocked by Feasted should focus on developing a wine-focused menu with food pairings. Customer service skills are essential for effectively assisting customers. Key customer communication skills include active listening, clear and expressive communication, providing feedback, and understanding non-verbal cues. The skills gained during the placement are essential for my future in the hospitality industry. Communication, problem-solving, and customer service will form the foundation for my success as a restaurant manager.

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GRADEMARK REPORT

FINAL GRADE

60/100

GENERAL COMMENTS

This paper has been IV'd by Jessica Newport as second marker who agrees with the mark and comments made by Antoinette Milne as first marker.

PAGE 1

PAGE 2

PAGE 3



Comment 1

This is a clear, concise and strong introduction.



Comment 2

It is not necessary to have the, "a" in the sentence.



Comment 3

It is important to review the grammar.

PAGE 4



Comment 4

This is unclear (ms).



Comment 5

It is important to provide an in-text citation, to support this statement.



Comment 6

It is important to provide an in-text citation for this statement.



Comment 7

It is important to provide an in-text citation to support this point.



Comment 8

It is important to provide an in-text citation to support this point.



Comment 9

It is important to provide an in-text citation to support this point.



Comment 10

It can be helpful to briefly explain the principles of food & wine pairing, in order to demonstrate knowledge and understanding.



Comment 11

This is unclear and it is important to provide more detail, for increased clarity.



Comment 12

It is important to provide more detail, in order to demonstrate knowledge and understanding.



Comment 13

Please review the grammar.



Comment 14

It can be helpful to provide detail about your problem-solving skills.



Comment 15

Remember to justify the text.

GRADING FORM: BMGM5003 CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

RALUCA GEORGIANA CHIPARUS ZOSAN

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LITERATURE ENGAGEMENT /10



It is important to provide in-text citations for some statements to support them (please see in-text comments). You have provided the required references. It is important to consider using a wider variety of sources, such as books, videos, for example) Overall, well done.

6

KNOWLEDGE & UNDERSTANDING /30



Your introduction is clear, concise and strong. It can be helpful to briefly explain the principles of food & wine pairing, to demonstrate knowledge and understanding. Guests often want to know why a particular wine pairs well with a particular

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dish and there are guidelines/principles to explain this. Some parts require more detail, in order to demonstrate knowledge and understanding (please see in-text comments).

COGNITIVE & INTELLECTUAL /10

 You have demonstrated some analysis and evaluation. More detail is required to enhance the analysis and evaluation, such as, evaluating the cues used by guests when buying wine (and food), for example.

6

PRACTICAL APPLICATION /25

 You have linked theory to practice and some more detail can help to enhance this (please see in-text comments), such as identifying wine & food pairing principles. You have identified potential challenges and suggested solutions.

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TRANSFERABLE SKILLS /25

 There are a few places to consider reviewing the grammar (please see in-text comments). Some parts are somewhat unclear (please see in-text comments). Remember to justify all the text (see, "Leading the to Future"). Your viva was detailed, clear and professional. Well done.

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