

Portfolio: culinary skills.

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1. Supply and stock management: A definition of stocktaking is offered by Miller as follows: "Stocktaking is a process where you count, check and record the stock levels that you have in. It is vital for managers to know what stock they have on the premises, the condition of it and any items that are running low so they can order the correct items to be used." (Miller, V. 2021). In addition, the purpose of stocktaking is the same for every hospitality business: "the main goal of stocktaking is to create maximum profit from the lowest investment in products, whilst keeping their customers happy." These definitions are offered to explain the importance of this process, and to better understand the benefits of it: in fact, accurately doing stocktaking can help with:

- "Profit/loss calculations.
- Identifying popular items or those that are not selling and may need replacing/discontinuing.
- Calculating wastage/breakages.
- Preventing or spotting thefts.
- Checking sell-by dates.
- Seeing how efficiently staff are using products.
- Ensuring products are used appropriately.
- Identifying any supply chain issues/problems with quality control."

It is also important to effectively and timely manage and order supply and stock in order to avoid potential wastefulness: in fact, as stated in the online blog AssetInfinity "having too much stock can also be dangerous for business. As you would not want your business to lose too many resources & inventories to get wasted or get expired? Therefore, it is important to maintain a balance between out-of-stock and too much stock". (Asset Infinity. 2022).

Based on my personal experience, I've been in charge of dealing with stock management and order supply when I was working in Morgans Hotel as supervisor. I learnt how to deal with suppliers, and how to make timely orderings. It is not easy to deal with suppliers, especially when it comes to misunderstandings or errors: I remember that one time it happened that I received the order for red wine supply, and when I opened it most of the bottles were broken. I didn't know what to do, as I knew that by the time a new order will be arrived we were out of wines: I contacted the supplier and explained the situation, and kindly asked for another order as we urgently needed it, but we had to deal with the problem anyway as we had no wine

stocks left. It has also happened that inexperienced staff members made a mistake when we received food stocks: Hanson offers an explanation of the importance of food storage as "Food storage is a standard operation for maintaining food safety for restaurants and protecting public health from potential foodborne illnesses.

- Proper conditions of food storage must be met to protect foods from the risk of contamination and spoilage.
- Maintaining a consistent temperature and a clean storage environment are the two most important rules of restaurant food storage." (Hanson, E.M. 2022). In addition: "When correctly done, food businesses, such as restaurants, can optimize a food's safety and life expectancy while ensuring public safety. Understanding and applying proper food storage procedures are vital to achieving this. Food handlers must be equally trained on the importance of appropriate restaurant food storage guidelines."

The reason why I want to include this information to support this touchpoint of the portfolio is because I had a negative experience myself regarding food storage: what happened is that I asked a member of my staff, who was not well trained, to sort out the food storage for fish. What then happened is that the waiter accidentally thought that there was no difference of temperature to store fish and meat, and didn't ask for information about it and ended up storing fresh fish and seafoods with steaks and meats.

2. **Meat cooking skills:** The placement experience I had offered me the chance to put in practice rules and regulations about food health and safety: in fact, even if I was aware of these regulations, I had no opportunity to understand how these are put in practice until I had to do the placement, as I've always been in the position of supervising food and beverage department, as a consequence I had the opportunity to be better introduced to these regulations. In fact, the health and safety of food is a very complicated field as there are so many aspects to consider in order to avoid: food contamination (biological, chemical, physical, cross-contamination), such as food labeling terms and food storage. It is vital to have knowledge of dry storage, freezers temperature, refrigerators, and defrosting practices before the actual food preparation. Each ingredient has its temperature and requires a different approach, especially when it comes to meat and fish. It is also mandatory to correctly use knives and chopping boards as, for example, according to Croner-i website: "Chopping boards are a breeding ground for harmful bacteria if they are not kept clean and regularly replaced. Chopping boards and knives used in professional kitchens should be color coded in order to cut down the risk of cross-contamination."

(Croner-i 2018). In fact, this is the first basic I've been introduced to when I started my placement, as well as the importance of the cooking temperatures as, especially for meats: "Whole cuts of meat will generally only have bacteria on the outside. Making sure that the outer sides are cooked should therefore kill any bacteria present. However, when it is minced bacteria can be spread throughout meat products. This is why it is so important to cook foods such as burgers thoroughly until the meat in the middle is no longer pink. Rare and undercooked burgers can have harmful bacteria such as E.coli still alive on the inside and should never be served", in addition, "pork joints and rolled meats or joints should never be eaten pink or rare." In fact, the right attention is needed especially with pork and chickens as pigs can be contaminated with the parasitic *Trichinella* roundworm: if people eat contaminated pork which is undercooked the larvae can mature into adult worms in their small intestine and cause Trichinosis. Raw chicken meat on the other hand "is often contaminated with *Campylobacter* bacteria and sometimes with *Salmonella* and *Clostridium perfringens* bacteria." (CDC, 2020). Apart from having these theories explained I also had the opportunity to learn more about the different meat cooking styles: roasting, grilling, pan frying, flat top, stove (..). I really enjoyed this part as I found it very interesting even for everyday life and helpful as well as I've been taught how to correctly cook meats. Since there are too many aspects to consider and a lot of temperatures to remember in order to cook the different types of meat, I've asked the chef to go on day by day with a focus on the different types of meats so that I could learn without feeling confused. In fact, we took advantage of the Sunday roast dinners and chose to study the different techniques every Sunday: beef, lamb, pork, turkey and chicken. It has been a great opportunity to learn specific knowledge about culinary skills, and I enjoyed it also because I consider myself a very tidy and well-organized person especially in the workplace, so it didn't bother me to use different chopping boards or knives, as well as always keep everything clean and tidy in order to avoid contamination. I remember that we used to cook the meats for the Sunday dinner differently in order to intensify the taste of the meat: for example, we used to marinate the meat with rosemary and garlic to have a succulent taste, or use maple-mustard to enrich the taste of the pork.

3. **Preparation and plating skills:** I had the opportunity during my culinary placement to be introduced to different dishes preparations, including desserts and sauces. I feel like this experience has opened me to other doors of knowledge, as the last time I've been briefly introduced to preparation was back to my diploma studies in Italy. The most famous and demanded dish was the Sunday roast: in fact, the fame behind this dish is due to tradition and culture. "The traditional great Sunday roast originates

from England, and is a meal that was designed to be eaten after a Sunday church service (...)" in addition, the ingredients remained the same as "A traditional feature of the Sunday roast is the Yorkshire pudding. Traditional accompaniments to a Sunday roast include roasted potatoes, roasted parsnips, cauliflower cheese and vegetables such as carrots, cabbage and greens. This is all topped off with plenty of gravy, usually made from the meat juices." (The Inn at Huxley. n.d.). During my placement experience I made different preparation for this meal, including the side dish sauces: one of the most popular was the mint sauce, which I found incredibly easy to prepare as all you have to do is put malt vinegar and sugar into a bowl and stir to let the sugar melt, finally add the mint, and then let it rest. The preparation that I enjoyed the most though was the one to make the chocolate brownie, the reason why is simply because I love desserts and the preparation behind them intrigues me. I also found it an helpful lesson to learn because I had the chance to learn how to actually make a vegan dessert, and because I had no previous experience on making desserts. Overall I feel like learning the preparation process for a dish empowered me as a personal professional growth, as I feel more prepared about ingredients, food regulations, preparations, and makes me feel like this experience has helped me develop another point of view that I did not use to consider: the kitchen brigade. Finally, I consider myself lucky as well, as this experience was based on preparation from scratch, as apart from some desserts, or depending if we were having events, we used to start from frsh ingredients and then come up with a dish, which was satisfying.

4. **Challenges and lessons learned:** Overall this culinary placement experience has helped me developing more in depth practice of cooking techniques and related health and safety regulations, as even if I've been working within the hospitality industry for 8 years I've always been in the position of waiter, and then proceeded to supervisory position, but never had practical experience in kitchen. I was aware of health and safety regulations on a general basis, but being there and actually applying those is completely different as you develop new skills. I also felt like I had more responsibility as it happened that I had to face complaints about food contamination and potential allergies dangers, as a consequence I realized how important it is for kitchen staff to be prepared and have the correct knowledge of how to store and treat ingredients, as well as cooking methods. I've always been interested in culinary practices, even if back to my diploma in Italy I choose to follow a different pathway in front of the house, and I think this has been a great opportunity to make my studies and knowledge complete.

5. Future goals: My goal is to keep going on with my career as manager, hoping that I will have the chance to become a manager for a Michelin star restaurant, and I think that this placement has helped me improve and expand my knowledge as I will be a well-prepared manager for the future. I think that even if I prefer front of house, it is important, especially if aiming to work in a Michelin star restaurant, to have a in-depth knowledge of other departments as this will make you complete as a manager, and might be helpful when it comes to deal with potential complains about food for example, or about cooking techniques, as for example I will be able to understand if a steak is overcooked or rare. I will be more prepared as well to better train my staff for the possibility to open up my own business in the future.

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