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Comm. 491 – Professional Field Experience

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Final Reflection Paper

As the semester rapidly comes to an end during these last couple weeks in December, my internship at the Best Western University Inn is also coming to a conclusion. During my internship I have learned a great deal about the hospitality industry and numerous managerial duties like training new employees and participating in Best Western Corporate calls. This internship has really provided me with great work experience which I will be able to apply post-graduation. However, there has been a lot going on internally at the Best Western which has really impacted my internship experience.

There has been a significant amount of change during the second half of my internship compared to the first half in relation to my job responsibilities and the staff of the hotel. The second half of the internship I was primarily responsible for training new employees and performing the Front Desk Clerk duties and responsibilities. The Best Western University Inn has had a huge turnover of employees in the last few months; ranging from housekeepers to front desk clerks. This turnover occurred because some of my coworkers were in search of higher paying jobs during the holidays and due to other various internal conflicts with certain employees of the hotel. Since we lost a lot of people in the last couple of months, I was responsible for assisting my coworkers in any aspect of the job. This included running items like towels and soap to guest’s rooms and helping maintenance fix any problems with rooms. However, I was still primarily responsible for my internship responsibilities like analyzing revenue reports, training new employees hired in response to the turnover, and creating the weekly schedule for the employees in all of the hotel’s departments. In addition, I also travelled with the hotel’s Sales Manager, Jim McMann, to Lynah Rink, which is Cornell University’s hockey team’s hockey rink, about advertising the hotel to people who come from out of state to watch Cornell hockey games. This was a strategy I created after analyzing the hotel’s annual revenue report and noticed specific trends about when the hotel does less business. I believe that by advertising to Lynah Rink and other youth hockey organizations in the Ithaca area about our hotel can potentially generate a significant amount of revenue during the hotel’s slower months like January and February.

After reviewing my supervisor’s, Terry Terry, final evaluation about my performance while working as an intern, I believe her evaluation was very accurate and fair. I enjoyed working for the hotel throughout the semester despite the fact that I had to commute seven hours almost every weekend back to New York from West Virginia which took a toll on me mentally and physically. Putting that aside, I still learned a lot while working at the Best Western and it really has expanded my hospitality experience which I will be able to use to my advantage when applying for jobs after graduation. I appreciate everything Terry Terry has taught and offered me while working at the hotel and I will be able to use this knowledge when applying and working for an organization I am interested in. Furthermore, Terry told me during my internship that she enjoyed having me as an employee/intern and has also offered me a temporary position until I find a job in the career field I am searching in.

As I mentioned in my midterm reflection paper I have already utilized numerous concepts I learned from my Communication Studies courses at West Virginia University during my internship. However, during the second half of the internship I have also realized that I applied other concepts from various Communication Studies courses and outside the department courses while interacting with guests and my coworkers. From Comm. 316: Intercultural Communication, I was able to implement concepts learned from this class when interacting with members of different cultural backgrounds. Since the hotel gets a lot of business from people visiting Cornell from outside the country, I encounter people who belong to different cultures all the time. I was able to use concepts from this class to assure I communicated professionally and appropriately while interacting with these people. I also used concepts from the persuasion course I am enrolled in this semester while interning at the Best Western in attempt to reach the target room sale’s goals. For example, two weekends ago I had a guest arrive late to the Ithaca area with no room reservation. He noted during our phone conversation that he had called every hotel around the area, but no hotel offered a room rate that he could afford. I asked him what he was looking to pay for a night and he said, “Around $100.” Unfortunately our room rate for that evening was $149 plus tax, but I told him I would drop the rate to $120 plus tax which is the lowest I could possibly do for that evening. The guest still wasn’t too thrilled with this room rate, so I attempted to persuade him with the extra services the hotel has to offer. I mentioned the free continental breakfast, free wireless Internet and the fitness facility the hotel offers its guests. He still wasn’t pleased so I asked him if he was travelling to the airport the next morning. He responded that he was, so I mentioned the complimentary shuttle service our hotel offers. I stated, “You can try and find a room for around $100, but you will end up paying an additional $20 just to get to the airport. If you stay with us for $120, our complimentary shuttle service will take you to the airport at any time you need to go.” After hearing this, the guest took the room for $120. Furthermore, I was also able to use my proficiency in the French language when interacting with guests visiting from various cities in France and used my knowledge from Computer Science when creating financial reports through Microsoft Excel.

After analyzing my entire internship experience with the Best Western University Inn, I have realized there were many beneficial aspects I learned while interning at the hotel. I was able to use my knowledge of Microsoft Office from the Computer Science course I attended at WVU to create revenue reports for the hotel through Excel. I also learned what my supervisor has to tend to on a daily basis and how unpredictable guests and employees can be. However, there were some aspects of the internship that I believe were not as beneficial. As I mentioned previously, the hotel had a lot of turnovers in the last few months. Since this happened, I had to assist my coworkers in duties that are typically the front desk clerk’s duties and the maintenance’s responsibilities. Instead of being able to fully take advantage of performing managerial duties, I had to help out the hotel in any area that needed worked on. I don’t think fixing air conditioners/heaters and running supplies down to rooms are qualities that potential employers are looking for. But, I may be able to use this to my advantage by saying that I was a great team player and did whatever needed to be done to maintain the exceptional service the hotel provides.

Personally, I believe this internship with the Best Western has been extremely valuable to me. It has helped me understand the managerial functions while working in a hotel, how to interact appropriately with guests and potential customers, and the foundation of how hotels successfully operate. At the beginning of the semester, I was determined to join the Air Force as an officer after I graduate in December 2010. However, from this internship and over the course of this semester, I have reevaluated my career goals. Instead of joining the Air Force immediately after graduation, I have decided that I want to take some time and pursue a career in sports sales with a NHL franchise. I believe with my education and professional experience, I am a qualified candidate for many positions within a NHL organization. I hope to take what I have learned at the Best Western and from my course work at West Virginia University and apply them to any position I am offered and interested in.

There have been many experiences while working at the hotel that has helped me grow professionally. From being able to adapt to a company that is understaffed due to employees finding other places of work or from being fired, to working side by side with the General Manager. However, I believe there is one specific altercation that has really helped me grow professionally and personally. During one of our wedding parties I had one guest (obviously intoxicated) request the shuttle service back to the hotel. Unfortunately, it was two hours later than when our shuttle service ran so I was unable to send the shuttle to pick him up because the driver had already clocked out for the night. The guest wasn’t too pleased and responded with very rude and discriminatory remarks, but there was really nothing I could do about it. I offered to arrange a taxi service to come and pick him up, but he continued to respond with rude feedback. Typically I am not a person who takes any abuse from anybody, however since I was at work I tried to do my best in remaining calm. I refused to become involved in a verbal altercation with this guest so I told him what I could do for him and then hung up the phone. The next day the guest actually came up to me and apologized for his behavior during the previous night. While being professional, I accepted his apology, but I will always remember and take into consideration some of the comments he said when quoting a room rate for his next stay.

If I could start the internship over again there would be some things I would change. One, I wish I could have been in Ithaca while interning at the hotel. Driving seven hours every weekend really caused problems with me physically and mentally. Sometimes I would have problems staying awake at work which I think impacted the quality of my performance significantly. It was also hard to stay on top of my assignments and stay focused on school considering I had very little free time during the weekends to do any studying. I believe if I was closer to the area I would have gained more from the internship just because I would have been healthier mentally and physically while performing my job duties. Another thing I would do differently would be to create relationships and network with some of the guests of the hotel. A lot of the guests who stay at the hotel work for prestigious schools and high-end organizations and if I could network with these people, some job opportunities may emerge that I am qualified for.

Overall, I believe the hospitality internship experience has helped me grow tremendously as a professional and as an individual. I would highly recommend anyone who is interested in pursuing a career in hospitality or looking for any other position at a hotel to consider the Best Western University Inn. The management is excellent and the atmosphere of the company is typically great with the exception of miniscule drama that emerges between coworkers. I learned a great deal from Terry Terry, Jim McMann, and my coworkers and I have gained a lot of experience in the hospitality field. I believe I will be able to use the combination of my professional experience and education to portray myself as an established individual to a potential employer in the career field I am interested in. Who knows what will happen in these next couple of months after graduation? If the NHL doesn’t work out for me, I may decide to pursue a management position in a different hotel considering I possess a substantial amount of hospitality experience.