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Work Experience Reflective Report

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Summary

In my final year at high school I found a position working as a kitchen hand at Mordor Café & Bistro. This was a sandwich bar/café that was located in Middle Earth. In this role I would clean dishes, prepare fries and serve customers. Following the November 2016 earthquakes that damaged the Café's Building, the business relocated to a new location. At the new location my role shifted to be more related to food preparation and less customer service.

My time working at Mordor Café & Bistro was my first real employment and gave me experience working in a team environment on a regular basis. I found the experience very valuable and feel that it helped me develop habits that have helped me in my education and employment since. These habits include the way I plan my work and communicate and approach others.

If it had not been for my time in the environment at Mordor Café & Bistro I feel I would have been far less prepared for team projects at university and later for my summer role at Gondor Research Ltd.

1. Acknowledgements

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Table of Contents

1.Acknowledgements.....	1
2.Introduction.....	1
3.Providing Context	1
3.1 Dol Guldur location.....	1
3.2 Gorgoroth Street location.....	2
3.3 Work Environment.....	2
4.Reflecting on the experience.....	2
5.Conclusions.....	4

2. Introduction

Mordor Café & Bistro is a café located centrally in eastern Middle Earth. During my time working at Mordor Café & Bistro there were two locations. The first was located in Dol Guldur shopping centre but was forced to shut due to earthquake damage. The café reopened on Gorgoroth street in Mordor. The first location was a café/sandwich bar that sold fries, sandwiches, coffees and milkshakes. The second location is larger and operates as a café/restaurant that sells coffee and café food during the day and offers larger meals at night. The company also offered catering services for events or hosting of events on site. I played no part in the former but was involved in the later.

3. Providing Context

3.1 Dol Guldur location

While located at the mall, Mordor Café & Bistro was staffed by four people, with the additional presence of one of the two owners at times. This was divided into one staff member in the kitchen, one making sandwiches, and two sharing the duty of serving and making coffee. The space was very small and was located in a corner of the mall. In the kitchen area was two sinks, a dish-washing station, a deep fryer and a fridge. The front of house had a cabinet for food storage, a microwave and a second space in which sandwiches were prepared. There was also a dedicated area of seating for Mordor Café & Bistro customers within the mall.

3.2 Gorgoroth Street location

The new location on Gorgoroth street is a much larger building and as such was staffed by far more people. There were a minimum of 4 individuals in the kitchen for night shifts and 3 further staff in the front of house. The kitchen had much more extensive food preparation space and a dedicated cook-top. The location also had a large storage room in the rear of the building that housed a more sizeable fridge and freezer. There is much more seating at the Gorgoroth street location with the ability to provide for ~100 customers if prepared in advance, or three quarters of that unprepared. The location also had limited outdoor seating that would be brought indoors at the end of each day.

3.3 Work Environment

The environment working at Mordor Café & Bistro changed significantly between the two locations. When working within the mall, the team was smaller and would work closely together. The atmosphere was rather casual and would not change significantly during times where there were many orders to respond to. In this location my role was kitchen-hand. I was responsible for clearing tables, cleaning dishes, preparing fries and serving food. At the second location the environment was less casual and more tense. There was the expectation that all staff would work as hard as they could for the time they were there. Another factor that contributed to the different environment was the difference in experience and seniority between employees. At the Dol Guldur location, all staff worked alongside each other whereas at the Gorgoroth street location, there were trained chefs who were clearly above other staff in the hierarchy. At this second location, my role also included dish-washing however my responsibilities in regards to serving shifted to the front of house staff and I were also expected to prepare deserts and to assist in food preparation in the kitchen.

4. Reflecting on the experience

The hospitality industry was my first experience working in what could be considered a structured or common job. As such, my experiences at Mordor Café & Bistro helped shape my understanding of how to act in the workplace and in concert with my studies, influenced my work ethic and approach.

The biggest event of note from my experience at Mordor Café & Bistro was the changes that occurred following the November earthquakes. This time was understandably stressful for many people and for employees of businesses that had to shut down it was doubly so. This stress was lessened somewhat when the business relocated to its Gorgoroth street address but the differences in the two locations proved to be a huge change to adapt to. The small team of the first location gave way to a much larger operation and this was the largest challenge of my time in the business. In a small team it was easy to have close friendships with my colleagues and this naturally lead to good teamwork. With more kitchen staff alone in the new location it was much harder to establish this environment. This was made more difficult with the clearer hierarchy of Chef at the top and everyone else following instructions. Being able to adapt to this change

allowed me to make the most of the new opportunities and challenges offered by the new environment.

My time working at Mordor Café & Bistro placed me in many situations that either developed skills or taught lessons that were to prove useful in future employment.

Time management:

As a kitchen-hand working in a fast paced environment it would be a common occurrence that I would have several tasks that needed completing, all of which were time sensitive. Although work as a kitchen-hand is not what could be considered high-stakes, there was still pressure to complete tasks to a high standard on time. The time management required for this environment is different to time planning experienced in study as it takes place across a different time scale. Whereas during my time as a student I might plan time hour by hour while studying, as a kitchen-hand I was required to manage minutes and seconds to ensure all tasks were completed efficiently.

Conflict resolution:

Working in a customer facing position, there were a few situations where customers had complaints or required some appeasement. My position was such that I could offer only a limited range of solutions for customers. It was therefore important to develop mannerisms and techniques to calm down any customers who were experiencing frustration. Being experienced in situations where there are frustrated or confrontational customers has been a valuable skill that saw use in many situations during my time at university and in further employment. Most notably it was useful when dealing with differing opinions in group projects.

Teamwork:

Work undertaken as a kitchen-hand is almost by definition done as part of a team. This gave me plentiful experience working alongside others. In a hospitality environment it is especially important for everyone to help each other and be quick to respond to the needs of other members of the team. Anything from helping with carrying hot objects to finding anything that the busiest staff member needs are par for the course in hospitality.

Communication:

While working as a kitchen-hand I would be expected to keep track of orders and required ingredients and be able to communicate these requirements to others in the kitchen. It was difficult to consistently communicate all the different information that was required early in my time in the kitchen but I became more comfortable after the years of practice. Communication was also important due to the interconnectivity of tasks. If one team member was behind it could effect everyone else if they did not know the situation. As such it was important to communicate when you were behind and to give others the chance to communicate that a task you were asking of them was too much.

Work Ethic/Punctuality:

As my work at Mordor Café & Bistro was my first employed position, it was the first opportunity that I had to develop a work ethic for an environment that was not related to study. I believe my

habits that I developed were positive and displayed a good approach to work. A notable example was the habit that was instilled in me to look for tasks that needed to be done when I had completed my own responsibilities.

Planning:

Constructing plans was a habit that I had learned from my time studying, both in high-school and university, that proved useful during employment and was strengthened in my years as a kitchen hand. On nights that were different to the usual routine such as an event or a night with full bookings I would establish goals for different times of the night. To have a clear bench by a given time of night I would prioritise cleaning and storing dishes. This would be helped by other staff who would make an effort not to call on my assistance while I tried to keep the dishes under control.

Reporting to Management:

In my role I was expected to report back to the management staff of the business. This is a situation that would be repeated in further employment. Learning how to succinctly deliver information to an individual in a management position has proven valuable in every job since my time in hospitality and also proved applicable when speaking to lecturers during my time at university.

5. Conclusions

Conclusions drawn from my experience at Mordor Café & Bistro Hospitality include:

- Working prior to and during my time at university provided valuable experience to acclimatise to the employed environment.
- Working in a team environment built transferable skills that were valuable in group projects.
- Learning to manage time in a minute by minute manner proves valuable when attempting to deliver important projects with tight deadlines.