



### Michel Roux's Service

I have to admit I loved 'Michel Roux's Service' that was recently showing on BBC2 about the Front of House Service in the Hospitality Industry. Over the last couple of years, our TV has been inundated with programmes about food and chefs, who so obviously deserve recognition, but what about the other side of the pass? Waiting staff work incredibly hard, long hours and yet often receive very low wages for their trouble.

I know this because since I was 12, I have worked in the hospitality trade. I have held a wide range of jobs from washing up, to waitressing to management to housekeeping to bar work. I have worked in small cafes, medium restaurants, large nightclubs, and even a celebrity owned hotel! I worked through my teenage years, my Uni years and my twenties, and now having just hit my thirties, I'm still working in the hospitality trade, this time in PR and Marketing.

Front of House work is hard, long and very rarely respected. It is work that is considered only good enough to those who can't get another job, yet it is a role which requires a lot of skill. You have to pre-empt what every customer will want, within only minutes of meeting them. You have to know menus inside out, what the ingredients are, how it is cooked and any potential allergens! You have to deal with a wide range of customer, old, young, experienced diners and not so experienced. You have to sometimes deal with very rude, or very drunk or very disrespectful, yet at all times you have to appear polite and not tell them what you would like to. And what do you get in return, chefs shouting, customers complaining, 12 hour shifts, rare breaks, and little respect.

So why do I, and every other front of house person want to do it? For nothing more than a love for it! I can think of very few jobs where you get so much pride in serving a table well, helping customers to enjoy their evening, allowing them to relax while you take care of their needs! You get to meet so many different people, most you like, some you don't. But for me, what I love most about working in this trade is the relationships you build up. You become a team, each one as important as the next. And I don't mean just the floor staff, but the chefs, the KP's, the cleaners, the managers, the housekeepers, everyone is in this together! You sometimes live with these people (and if you don't it certainly feels like it), you eat with them, you socialise with them, you celebrate with them, you support them, you laugh with them, you cry with them, you share your darkest secrets with them, and in my case you marry them!

Front of House staff should be applauded, for taking on a job that many wouldn't, and doing it so well. Unfortunately in this country, catering jobs are usually at the bottom of the pile, the jobs no one wants to do along with cleaners and dustbin men. Yet in France they are someone to aspire to, children dream of being a Maitre D' or Sommelier. So why is our opinion so different? Poor representations, negative attitudes, I'm sure the wages don't help!

But what I hope viewers will learn from Roux's programme is that much pleasure can be drawn from this type of work, that it's not for everyone, and you have to have the right skills to be able to do it well. There is a serious shortage of skilled staff in this country right now, I have worked with many

French, Polish, Swedish, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Hungarian, Czech colleagues who are so good at their jobs, and love what they do. Yet their British counterparts let them down! Maybe now more people will want to go into working the Front of House. You never know it might even become trendy!!

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