



ChimDingo Publishing – Motivational

“Surviving – Hospitality in London”

Authors Note: Here's just one example of work I performed to pay the bills and survive. It's not as easy when you are older (I was 40 and 44 at the time) and takes a bit more mental application to ward off the state of your situation, you just have to take an upbeat view of things. I was also a lot poorer the second time; borderline flat broke.

When you have a life plan and a dream you have to be very focused on achieving the end goal despite the problems and barriers you may encounter on the way. Sometimes this can mean taking risks and surviving anyway you can until that break or new job comes. A lot depends on your financial situation as well.

Twice when I have travelled to London (1999 and 2005) to find work in my professional capacity (or when contracts have finished) I have had to live in hostels and survive by working in Hospitality ¹.

For someone who had been a senior executive and had an MBA (the second time I was there) you might think it's beneath me (you) but that isn't an attitude you should take. You should always give 100% to any endeavour or work you do as one it's better for you generally in terms of getting up each morning to motivate yourself and second you never know where it may lead; I know of staff offered good corporate jobs by the way they conducted themselves with senior clients at functions or private boxes.

There is also the added benefit of seeing the perspective of people's work from a different point of view and this is always one of the best ways to learn about management and leadership; be on the front line and experience it as an employee or service provider down the food chain instead of as a customer. I found it a fascinating study of human nature, behaviour and corporate culture. Learning new skills for future ventures was useful as were some good tips (thanks to the many chefs and bar staff who took the time to pass on some of their knowledge) ².

London is a great place to be doing this sort of work. There are so many major international sporting events, awards ceremonies, corporate and government events, conventions, shows, launches and lunches from niche ones to massive scale ones.

As well as the career hospitality staff, I know a lot of people who do it part-time as well for the interesting people they meet and the amazing places that a lot of events are held in (historic guild halls, castles, museums, societies, The Treasury, swanky hotels and restaurants). It's a great way to get into sporting events that you can't get tickets for or are too expensive and you get paid ³.

¹ I also worked in a pub for 3 months until I found an IT job on my first visit in 1988.

² Tip: If doing an important personal private dining function always smell/get the wine tasted before you serve it in bulk, save you the hassle of changing all the glasses if it's "corked"; you only make that mistake once. Try not to drop the wine bottle in the dinner suited punter's lap if you have a tray full! Twist the bottle, not the cork on Champagne.

³ Note: Wages are about £5-7.50 per hour, you get fed (which is important in expensive London especially in the cold winters), and occasionally you get a few beers after work depending on the client. Plus you get tips which can be non-existent, meagre or very good; luck of the draw. So with accommodation, fares and general living in London there isn't a lot left over.

You've got to be a little impervious to things as a lot of the more traditional old fashioned managers / team leaders are your typical drama queens, control freaks and like to shout and big note themselves but not everyone is like that; the industry is changing and I met many wonderful chefs, team leaders and managers who both provided advice, constructive criticism in a nice way with the reason behind it and treated you like a person.

The word gets around quickly who not to work for and those companies struggle for quality staff, hardly a sustainable business model one would think!

I think a lot of people forget about treating people like people (especially where class systems still exist to an extent) or that their staff aren't idiots whether full or part-time (there were many young people and a few older ones from many countries, many with degrees, working in the industry; some to fund their studies or travel, some to gain entry to the UK with the opening up of the European Union, working in their holidays, sending money home to help their families, working a second job on weekends, refugees who had been granted asylum or simply surviving while job hunting). By and large these colleagues were hard working, honest, cheerful, kind and a lot of fun.

Many clients are great fun and generous as well, they want their event to go well and realise that sticking it to the staff is not the way to achieve that. The horse racing fraternity has a tradition of placing a bet for the box staff on the last race; I know two girls who won £330 (good when you are making £5-7 pound an hour) by picking a 33-1 long-shot at Ascot.

I was lucky, I worked a lot of private dining and hospitality boxes with high profile / celebrity people and royalty due to my business background, security clearance and also being an Aussie (they love an Aussie in the cricket boxes at Lord's when the Poms were playing Australia). I also did a lot of the more mundane ones as well and they can wear you down a bit, like twenty Xmas party functions in a row where everyone gets absolutely trashed; you can't wait for Frank Sinatra (not literally) to sing that final song each night. It's a lot better these days with smoking being banned so it's safer and cleaner for employees.

I also drove the van a lot of times, picking up and dropping off the staff as well as working. I only had one drama with this when a drunken New Year's reveller stepped in front of the bus and got his foot run over for his troubles, but not too seriously. I got to drive around London and surrounding districts (North and South East mainly) and had a lot of fun. The deal was if you sat in the front you had to navigate for the driver; more than once we drove around in circles (one time after an hour we arrived back at exactly the same spot!).

I'd like to thank my colleagues and management at Sodexo Prestige, Admiral and Keystone for the opportunity, training, the fun times and the good gigs they got me on sometimes.

Eventually my work break came along in my professional capacity and I'm well on my way to my lifestyle "seachange" dream to Panama now.

So don't be too proud to do what you have to do to survive; it's character building. Don't judge other people harshly either and remember they are people too.