



**IT consultant confronts himself in
restaurant**

The staff of IT consultancy Itility do three days of work experience at Lust, a restaurant in Hilversum, the Netherlands, where they learn to listen to customers and to their boss. As they are thrown in at the deep end, the consultants get to confront themselves. 'Their personalities come to light.'

In the Hilversum restaurant Lust, IT consultant Reiner Bronsgeest is standing between three tables where guests are eating. He looks around. He's the only waiter not dressed in black, but wearing a blue shirt and pants. There's a notebook sticking out of his pants pocket. "It lists which dishes and wines there are," he says.

It's his first day of three days of work experience at Lust. Before driving to Hilversum, he worked during the daytime for IT service provider Itility, which sends its staff to do work experience in the restaurant, working in the kitchen and as waiters. "Just doing a project management workshop doesn't change behavior," says Itility director Peter Schepers. "Our staff have to learn to listen and to deliver what is asked of them. They don't learn that in university lectures." Bronsgeest "worked in catering for a while", but other than getting an explanation of what was on the menu, he had no training. "By throwing staff in at the deep end, their personality comes to light," explains restaurant owner Sharon Steggerda. Bronsgeest has been instructed not to take any orders, although he does all the other jobs.

Pistachio parfait

One table of guests has finished their meal and Bronsgeest goes over to collect the plates. As he does so, a man asks if he can order a dessert. The IT consultant nods. "Then I'd like the pistachio parfait," says the customer. Bronsgeest takes the plates to the kitchen and then goes to Steggerda, who's behind the bar. "Enter it into the computer yourself then," she says with a stern expression. Later she explains, "He was instructed not to take orders. And for a good reason. Everyone has their own role. Ordering the parfait too early will upset things in the kitchen." At ten-thirty, nearly all the tables are still occupied. Bronsgeest battles with the coffee machine and prepares an order. "Making the coffee isn't so hard," he says. "The problem is knowing which coffee is which." He takes a full tray over to the four customers still chatting at a table. Back behind the bar, Bronsgeest continues to polish the glasses. Steggerda has deliberately given him that job. "Then he can take a good look around to see how it works here." The owner sits down with a glass of wine and reflects on how Bronsgeest's first evening has gone. "It's good he's working in the kitchen tomorrow," she muses. "He'll learn to listen there and do exactly what's asked of him." In the kitchen, Bronsgeest will be supervised by co-owner Marcel Puyk. "Puyk and Steggerda have different methods of approach," says Itility director Schepers. "They confront the candidate in a different way. Steggerda looks at who you are and the impression you make, whereas Puyk tells you what to do."

Running around

The restaurant gradually empties. The chefs sit down at the table in front of the open kitchen. The staff help customers into their coats and see them to the door. "Shall we call him over?" asks the owner, when Bronsgeest has been polishing for a while. She

beckons him and he sits down at the table with a beer. Bronsgeest didn't find the work too bad. "I'd expected there to be a lot more running around, although my legs do feel tired." Soon, when the last customer has left, the staff will talk about how the division of work went today, as they do every day. After that, Bronsgeest's first day of work experience will be over.

Looking back on three days of work experience

"I certainly got some useful feedback," says Bronsgeest afterwards. "I was a bit skeptical beforehand, but looking back I really learned a lot – mostly that I shouldn't run before I've learnt to walk. I'm very enthusiastic, but I also need to be patient sometimes. By chance, that's what I was talking to my project manager about today. There are things I want to do, but it's actually better if I watch how he does it first. I would have found that out eventually some day, but it's remarkable that it dawned on me within two days."

Three days of work experience at Lust

The three days of work experience at Lust, in Hilversum, are part of Itility's training program. The choice of this type of work experience and the choice of Lust as a restaurant are deliberate ones. Both Itility and Lust focus on the same qualities: listening to the customer, delivering what the customer wants on time and to the highest quality, working in a team with set roles and direct feedback, and 'doing rather than talking.'

*This white paper is translated from the original item written by Rian van Heur, Computable:
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