Case Study: Theatre Usher - Louise

What do you do?

The main responsibilities of a theatre usher are to welcome people in and check their tickets. We also make sure that the theatre is a safe area for the audience to come into and that they have a pleasant evening. We have a little chat with people as they come in, to make them feel comfortable and happy, and we show them to their seats. We also serve tea and coffee at this particular theatre so we take orders for those.

Once the show has started, we remain in the auditorium and we're there if there are any problems. If anybody feels unwell or needs anything, we're there to help them. Basically, we help people have a happy evening.

What is your background?

When I left school, I worked in a bank for 12 years and what I enjoyed most there was working with people on the customer service side of things. I then left work and had a family. I've now come back to work on a part-time basis. I've always enjoyed going to the theatre so the two kind of came together and the opportunity to work in the theatre and work with people again was just right for me.

What characteristics do you need to be successful in your job?

I think the most important thing is that you need to be a people person. You need to be approachable, helpful, polite, professional and friendly, not get worried or upset by anything anybody says to you, be happy to help in any circumstance and always keep smiling.

What other jobs could you do using the skills from this job?

I think you could do any job where you are dealing with the general public, in any shape or form at all. Anything to do with the leisure industry is a similar sort of job, or you could work anywhere where you're serving people and helping people.

What changes will there be in the future?

I can't actually foresee any changes at the moment. I mean, the job I do isn't the kind of job that can really be done by a computer. So I think it's the sort of thing that, hopefully, you'll always need a member of staff to do.

What are the biggest challenges in your job?

The biggest challenge, as far as I'm concerned, is that every night can be different because you've got different people coming in and you never know quite how they're going to react and what they're going to ask of you. Obviously the biggest challenge is if somebody has a problem and they get cross, because then you need to find a way to help calm them down and sort out the problem; that can be quite a challenge sometimes.

Are there many opportunities to enter this career?

Well, the way I entered the job was, after I'd had my family, I decided I wanted to go back to part-time work. I've always enjoyed going to the theatre and I've always thought that it would be fantastic to work in the theatre. So basically, I put together a letter stating my skills and things I'd done in the past and sent it to the front of house manager. And the next evening I had a phone call asking me to come in and give it a try and just went from there.

What do you like about your job?

I love everything about my job, quite honestly. I love the environment, I love the atmosphere, I love the people I work with, they're fantastic. I love being in the theatre; there's something quite magical about being in the theatre. And I
love the interaction with the audience; I love chatting to people and just meeting different people.

What do you dislike about your job?

Well, to be perfectly honest, I can't really think of an awful lot that I do dislike about the job. The only slight worry is if any member of the audience were to be taken ill that I wouldn't be able to cope with that, but we do have people from St. John Ambulance in, so obviously I would seek their help. The only other thing is the washing up, when there's piles and piles of it!

What are your ambitions?

For the moment, I'm very happy doing what I do, doing the shifts that I do. I have a family, so I like to spend plenty of time with them, but perhaps when my two daughters have grown up and moved on, I'd like to be able to do more shifts and, possibly, if there are any vacancies in the booking office, get into the booking side of things.

What advice would you give to someone interested in your career?

Visit the theatre as often as you can; get to feel what the environment's like and see if you enjoy it. Also, just make sure that you're happy to be with people, that you're an outgoing person who enjoys other people's company and is happy to make conversation with people and feels comfortable around other people.

A day in the life

6:45 pm - 7:00 pm
Attend staff meeting where the ushers are given information about the show, such as how long it is, when the interval is, and if there are any unusual aspects of it that might affect the audience. For example, the play that is currently running contains gunshot sounds, and some shows involve the actors coming into the auditorium.

We are also told if there are any wheelchair users attending and how many people are in the audience.

7:00 pm - 7:15 pm
Each usher is allocated an area of the theatre to check to make sure everything is safe for the customers. This includes checking the seats in the auditorium and checking the toilets.

7:15 pm - 7:45 pm
We open the doors to let the audience in. Duties then include greeting people, checking their tickets, showing them to their seats, and taking tea and coffee orders for the interval.

7:45 pm - interval
Some ushers sit at the back of the auditorium in case any member of the audience has a problem, while others prepare the tea and coffee trays and set them up in the foyer.

During interval
Some ushers stand at the doors to help people if they need anything, while others serve the tea and coffee.

During second part of show
Some ushers clear away the tea and coffee cups and wash up, while others go back into the auditorium.

At end of show (usually between about 9:30 pm and 10:30 pm)
We see people out of the theatre and make sure that people meet up with their taxis. Finally, we check our allocated areas to make sure that no one and nothing has been left behind.