

HAYLEY ROWE speaks to 24-year-old business development manager at The Mystery Dining Company, Lucy Cheverton

Q: Please tell me a bit about your company

A: The Mystery Dining Company (TMDC) is the hospitality industry's leading customer experience analyst and pioneered the term 'mystery dining' as a specialist form of mystery shopping. It was established in 2003 and our office is in Southgate. We have around 2,500 mystery diners around the world who visit our clients, which include more than 100 UK hospitality businesses – including places like Wagamama, Hotel du Vin, Harry Ramsden's, Ask, Ascot Racecourse, Le Pain Quotidien and Carluccio's – and then compile reports so that we can help them to improve their customer service. It's not just meals out that we assess, it's also overnight stays in hotels, trips to leisure attractions and events.

We also provide schemes that enable all of a client's customers to provide feedback directly to them, as well as comprehensive analysis of all the results to aid decision making and learning.

Q: What do you do on an average working day?

A: Most days at TMDC are pretty varied. I deal with enquiries from businesses who are looking for ways to improve their performance and the experience they offer their customers. This can be everything from the food, to the atmosphere and of course the service provided by the staff.

I spend a lot of time visiting owners and managers of restaurants, bars and hotels all over the country to try and understand exactly what it is they want to offer their customers and then we build a programme to help improve specific aspects of their business. I love meeting new people, and looking at different businesses in detail. The only downside is that it's now always hard to go to a restaurant and just relax because I'm always observing details!

Q: What made you choose your current career path?

A: I started working with The Mystery

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Dining Company as a report validator. My university degree involved quite a lot of presenting of information and I've always worked in customer service roles so as soon as I'd learnt the ropes I was asked if I would consider a role in the business development team and I've never looked back.

Q: What has been the key to your success so far?

A: I'm actually a really positive person – it seems to be a common trait among TMDC employees. We're not looking to find faults, only ways to improve operations.

I'm also organised, enthusiastic and I've been told that I'm a good listener – all characteristics that are really crucial for a business development manager. I also think having a genuine passion for helping businesses to improve their customer service is really important – if your heart's not in it then you will be doing your clients a disservice.

Q: What advice could you give to others wanting to get into your industry?

A: I think gaining experience in customer service, and just having a passion for the hospitality industry is key. Also, it is really

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important to learn not to be afraid to give feedback in an objective way – you can't be too critical all the time, and you have to help your clients to find ways to build on the positives of their business and to change the negatives.

Q: What do you like to do to relax? Where do you go?

A: I like surfing so I head down to Devon and Cornwall quite often. I'm not very good at it, but I do enjoy it.

Q: Have you always lived in Bath?

A: I grew up in Bath before I moved away to Brighton to go to university. Although I now live in Bristol I love working in Bath – it's where my heart is and I love coming here every day. **BL**

• www.mysterydining.com