



THINK THEATRE

THINK... FRONT OF HOUSE

Front of House staff are the public face of the company and are responsible for ensuring that the audience is constantly placed at the heart of the organisation by delivering the best possible level of customer service at all times. Front of house staff might work in the Box Office, or selling merchandise in the shop, or they might work in the theatre foyer, welcoming and greeting customers, interpreting exhibitions, working on performances and shows checking tickets, showing people to their seats and dealing with customer enquiries. It's a hugely varied job with every night being different to the last. Front of House is a customer facing role, and therefore Front of House staff need to have excellent interpersonal and communication skills, with the ability to think on their feet and deal with difficult situations or customers.

Working Environment

Front of House staff work in the public areas of the theatre. The hours are mainly based around performance times, so are likely to be in the evening or at weekends. Every shift might be different, from helping a sick patron, to sharing the enthusiasm of a school group's first experience of theatre. Front of House Assistants work as a close team, under the leadership of a Duty Manager. As well as leading the team, the Duty Manager is also responsible for the health, safety and security of patrons whilst they are on the premises. Their other duties might include administering staff rotas, maintaining holiday and sickness records, creating policies and procedures, planning for and dealing with the challenges that different types of events and performances bring along with other management duties.

Qualifications

It is not essential to have been to college or university to get a job working Front of House. It is possible to start off as a Front of House Assistant or usher and work your way up by learning on the job. If it's Management you want to go into, then a degree in a related area could be an advantage. But it's more important to demonstrate excellent customer service skills and work well in a team. Experience of face to face customer service, in any environment, may be required for some positions.

Work Experience



THINK THEATRE

The great advantage with Front of House is that, unlike the majority of careers in theatre, it's possible to get into a paid job straight away. Look out for recruitment advertisements at your local theatre. A job Front of House provides a great opportunity to meet theatre professionals from all departments in the theatre and learn something about their work and therefore can sometimes be used as a stepping stone into other areas, but it can also be an interesting and varied career in its own right.

CASE STUDY

Lisa Baylis, Deputy Front of House Manager, RSC

Q. What was your first job in theatre?

A. My first job in theatre was working as an usher at a local theatre whilst I was studying at University. I wanted to find some part time work to enhance my CV and my local theatre was advertising for volunteer ushers. I took the position and after 6 months was offered a paid position as a Head Steward, with additional responsibility for cashing up sales of ice cream, merchandise and programmes and assisting the Duty Managers with staff briefings and admin. This experience was invaluable when applying for my first theatre management roles.

Q. Why Front of House?

A. Every day is different and front of house is a fast paced, varied and often challenging environment in which to work. Working front of house requires excellent communication skills and customer service skills as dealing with the public face to face is crucial. The work allows you to meet a wide variety of people, including customers and a wide range of staff from other departments and front of house staff can really make the difference between customers having a fantastic experience or not wanting to visit the theatre again.

Q. What is the best thing about your job?

A. The buzz and energy of a sold out performance and looking back at the end of the night knowing all problems have been successfully resolved and that you have influenced customers



THINK THEATRE

experience of the theatre. There are always new things to learn and there is rarely any time to get bored!

Q. And the worst?

A. The majority of hours can often be in the evenings and weekends.

Q. What advice would you give to somebody hoping to embark on a career as a Front of House Manager?

A. Contact your local theatre to see if they have any paid or voluntary opportunities. Get experience in dealing with customers and working in a front of house environment. Customer service experience in any industry is a good starting point. Working as an usher is a great first step into theatre.