



**Service Auditing Project Background Report - The Auburn Plaza Bar and Lounge**

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## Team Service Auditing Project: Background Report of Auburn Plaza Bar and Lounge

In the city of Auburn, Alabama, finding a place to eat is hardly a challenge. For most of us, what can be challenging is not the matter of finding a place to eat. Rather, the challenge is finding a location that supersedes the norm and not only offers high quality food, but also quality service. For Auburn locals and Auburn University students, one restaurant to visit is the Auburn Plaza Bar & Lounge. Auburn Plaza Bar & Lounge, better known as The Plaza, is a casual dining eatery located in Auburn's Midtown. Customers can find anything from burgers, to cocktails, to late-night bites, and more. Many refer to The Plaza as an exciting place to spend time with friends and family, all while enjoying delicious food and drinks. Recently, The Plaza has expanded their performance levels by serving brunch on the weekends to meet the demands of their customers. (Auburn Tourism) While The Plaza is popular for times of enjoyment and fun, they dually strive to stick to their motto of "Enjoy Yourself Responsibly" (Auburn Plaza Bar & Lounge). The Plaza's vision is to enlighten the customers' lives and provide hospitality that makes customers want to return and become regulars to the business (Kenney). In this report, Group Seven, of Professor McLain's HOSP 5530 course, will be discussing and reporting on their in-depth investigation of the Auburn Plaza Bar and Lounge and its commitment to quality service. This report will cover The Plaza's hospitality practices, training processes, and quality perceptions.

The Plaza strives to live up their mission statement and visions of the company by hiring experienced and personable employees. According to Parker Gunn, the BOH Team Leader, the Plaza "strives to employ individuals who desire to grow the business and work hard to make it one of the best restaurants in the area" (Gunn). The Plaza serves their internal customers by giving hospitable service and quality food so customers are able enjoy themselves and have the

best customer experience possible. One way they do this is by providing superior drink service while delivering delicious food at a convenient price. Furthermore, they serve their external customers by providing delivery services, such as GrubHub, to allow external customers to order food. This food is then delivered to their location where they can still enjoy The Plaza experience, even outside of the restaurant. The Plaza's commitment to quality is based on their goal to provide quick and efficient service. This goal was established in hopes that no customer would have to wait on the staff in order to receive their food or drink. The Plaza's ultimate goal is to have quick responses in fulfilling customers' needs. The logic behind the company's quality efforts extends to how they choose their employees profiles. According to Collin McConnell, a former employee, The Plaza hiring college students has enhanced The Plaza's ability to provide a positive light into young childrens' lives by teaching them more about the hospitality industry. Unlike many restaurants in the Auburn area, The Plaza personally provides quality service to their customers (both internal and external) by encouraging their employees to keep a positive attitude and going above and beyond to satisfy customer needs.

Following an interview with the managerial staff working at The Plaza, Group Seven has learned how employees are prepared to serve guests through customized training and teaching scenarios. These situations allow each employee to learn his or her responsibilities for each shift. Additionally, The Plaza has implemented particular policies, practices, and procedures to maintain order and goal achievement levels. Specifically, they have initiated a unique check in and out system for employees. This system allows each employee to make sure they are following the goals and terms of service established by the owners. Additionally, the Plaza has worked to develop a unique training program for their new employees. This program requires each employee to work a shift that is deemed the "Stage Shift." The Stage Shift is essentially an

unpaid shift where the prospective employee will clock in and work in a particular position within the restaurant to determine if they will be a good fit for that team. The other team members will then evaluate the performance of the prospective employee. Through the conduction of this investigation, our group has discovered how The Plaza utilizes training to teach employees lessons on proper hospitality, delivering top tier service, and learning positive life changing lessons.

Another way The Plaza offers hospitality experiences is through their efforts to create a memorable game-day environment with upbeat music, good food, drink specials, and outdoor games. One of the first things a customer will experience when they walk into the Plaza on a game day is the exhilarating sports bar atmosphere. The Plaza also creates this game day atmosphere by bringing in bands to play live music. While the live music fills The Plaza with vibrant energy, a good selection of bar food is available to satisfy customers' appetites. Food is almost always prepared and delivered promptly. Drink specials are also offered to draw in more customers on game days. This method applies to the demographic of college students at a very successful rate. One of the final things the Plaza offers is outdoor games on its patio. They offer games like cornhole and other yard games on their patio. This is very nice, especially on game days, because it helps to add to the game day experience and the overall atmosphere of the restaurant. A quote that is pulled from the Plaza's social media is "enlighten lives through good food and drinks by offering a sports bar type environment offering the best game day experience."(Auburn Plaza Bar & Lounge.). This quote displays what The Plaza's expectations are for game days and exhibits how they try to create an hospitable atmosphere that not only pulls people in but also creates an unique Auburn experience.

On top of having a great game day environment, The Plaza also offers the opportunity to rent out the whole bar and patio for private events. These events can be anywhere from a fraternity social, to a graduation party, or even for a birthday. The Plaza is known for their sports bar environment, but their ultimate goal is to provide an environment that is also suitable for families. When an event is placed at The Plaza, they offer bar tabs that customers are able to place in advance to their event. This allows event attendees to drink on a tab, therefore allowing employees to make service faster for the guest, rather than having to make customers wait for them to ring up each drink. Additionally, these event packages allow customers to bring in live music or even a DJ to provide entertainment for the event. The two most popular events held at The Plaza are graduation parties and fraternity socials. During the fall, they held a graduation party that allowed the guest to rent out the private back bar. Located on the patio, this private back bar allows guests to have premier service since there will be a personal bartender hosting the event. In order to reserve The Plaza for an event, guests are able to call in advance or go in person. Either of these options allows customers an opportunity to speak with management in advance so the scheduled event can be prepared in the way the customer has envisioned.

When a new restaurant pops up in town, most individual's first instinct is to look at the website. Although The Plaza has been open since July 31st of 2020, their website is just one page. It has the fundamentals, such as the logo, slogan, hours of operation, the menu, address, and phone number. Their logo is a smiling burger with a crown and their slogan is "Enjoy Yourself Responsibly." Hours of operation are listed as Monday - Thursday from 4:00 PM - 11:00 PM and then Friday - Sunday from 11:00 AM - 11:00 PM. The menu offers plenty of choices from light appetizers to hearty burgers. They have lunch specials from Tuesday - Friday from 11:00 AM - 2:00 PM and then on the weekend from 11:00 AM - 4:00 PM The Plaza offers

brunch specials. At the very bottom of the page is their phone number, (334)-521-0074, and their address, 1188 Opelika Road Auburn, AL 36830. While there is a lot of helpful information concerning menu items and business hours, there is no section about The Plaza's origin story or who the owners are. There is also no section that links them to their social media, even though they have very active social media accounts.

Since the Plaza's website does not show what their food looks like or what atmosphere The Plaza encourages, customers have to turn to stalking their social media. The Plaza's Facebook and Instagram profiles are copies of one another, which is a good way to keep customers who are biased to one platform or the other informed. Their Instagram has seven hundred posts and over five thousand followers, while on Facebook, their page has 1.8 thousand followers. They post everyday and frequently post stories too. On Instagram, they have specific highlight categories titled "Specials," "Live Music," "Events," and "Plaza People" to categorize stories followers may have missed. Overall, what they lack on their website is compensated by their frequent and regular activity on both Facebook and Instagram.

Finally, when potential customers are deciding on whether to visit a restaurant for the first time, they may turn to Yelp, or similar websites, to look at reviews. On Yelp, The Plaza only has eight reviews and they all range from three to five stars. Although there are less than ten reviews, The Plaza appears to have kept customers (mostly) happy for two and a half years. This in itself is impressive. Most of the reviews are complimenting the wonderful food and great atmosphere. These reviews also describe The Plaza as a "garage-bar" and a "sophisticated and fun" location. The only issues addressed in these reviews are about services being inconsistent and unprofessional (Yelp).

Although the Plaza has worked hard to provide quality service, Declan Kenney, an individual who has worked at The Plaza and The Waverly Local for 5 months where he was a line cook believes The Plaza could improve their approaches to training. Based on his experience, training is mainly based on the employee's personal observations and any questions that may arise. Declan states he "left [The Plaza] due to other employee treatment. Their approach to involving staff and customers in their quality drive is by offering incentives for work such as receiving a tip out from food sales based on performance." He explained there is no set human resource personnel. Declan recalled how "the owners pick and choose how they respond to employee situations and do it on a case by case basis. Success is measured off of ticket times and quality of service." One improvement Declan would have recommended to The Plaza to help it become more efficient would be changing the way the POS system is run. (Kenney).

Before stepping foot into any restaurant, it is best to learn what a restaurant cares about, how the restaurant views themselves, how customers view the restaurant, and what makes them different from their competitors. In the preliminary investigative case of The Auburn Plaza Bar and Lounge, Group Seven has gained insight from interviewing former and current employees. They have learned how The Plaza perceives game days in Auburn and how they work to be hospitable to the Auburn area. Group Seven has also learned how The Plaza's website and social media makes them appear in the public light. Lastly, they have learned from Yelp that most customers who dine at The Plaza are satisfied with the food and the environment, but are not completely satisfied with the service they offer. In the next part of Group Seven's study, more in depth reviews from customers through surveys and the compilation of data will allow them to truly see how The Plaza has impacted both internal and external customers. This further research

opportunity will shed light on problems The Plaza may be facing, impacts they are having, and what the future holds for this restaurant.



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