

# An interesting insight into hospitality work: It's all about giving pleasure

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## Jill Poulston

Associate Professor Jill Poulston has been teaching and researching at the Auckland University of Technology since 1998, prior to which she worked in hospitality management, including two general manager roles. She studies a wide range of ethical issues in hospitality, such as sexual harassment, discrimination and ethical food consumption. She currently teaches leadership to postgraduate students and supervises student research.



Turnover is such a persistent characteristic of the hospitality industry, it has the qualities of a legend. The Lawson Williams Staff Turnover Report [1] recently calculated turnover in the hospitality and fast food industry as 41.7%, the highest of any industry surveyed. Such high turnover set against a constant stream of willing newcomers to the industry warrants investigation. This study therefore examined not so much the nature of the industry, but more the act of hospitality in terms of motives and rewards.

The study interviewed 12 people in Auckland, including some who had never worked in commercial hospitality, to provide an insight into giving hospitality at home. Participants were asked to reflect on their reasons for serving others and their interpretations of hospitality and service, and encouraged to describe the emotions they felt in the moment of giving hospitality.

Rewards for giving hospitality were directly related to the pleasure received by guests:

*It's the best, being able to look after people.*

*I liked the look of happiness on people's faces.*

*I enjoyed spoiling customers.*

*It's a reward, pleasure, out of making people happy. You take people on a journey and make them feel better. You can create amazing moments for people.*

Some participants experienced the frustration of being unable to give pleasure, either because guests were difficult, or for reasons seemingly beyond their control:

*I didn't like serving people who didn't know how to have a good time.*

*When I can't give good service, I don't like it.*

Paid hospitality work was described as “emotionally draining” but was also part of the identity of some participants: “It's what I do – it's who I am.” Results showed that, really, hospitality work is a labour of love and a form of self-expression that can bring happiness through serving others, which of course means the workers are vulnerable to exploitation. This passion to serve and bring pleasure was experienced in an environment that brought both pain and pleasure, expressed with metaphors such as “a love-hate relationship” and “marriage and war”.

The main implications arising from this study largely relate to the pleasure of providing good service. Recommendations therefore include the need for managers to recognise the desire to provide excellent service, so this can be

facilitated, rather than impeded by faulty products, maintenance issues, understaffing, and other irritating problems that frustrate employees. It is also suggested that supervisors and managers reflect on their own desire to serve and take up service opportunities as they arise, rewarding themselves with positive experiences of human contact, rather than getting lost in administration and crisis management. Most are experienced in front-line work and were probably attracted to the industry by the same desire to provide pleasure that this study's participants expressed. It is therefore important to continue to express this, and help others express it, as part of the effort to reduce turnover by improving work satisfaction.

More information about this study is in the original article, which can be obtained from the author (details available after the review process is completed).

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### **Reference**

(1) Lawson Williams Consulting. The New Zealand Staff Turnover Survey – Summary Report, 2016. <http://www.lawsonwilliams.co.nz/cms/files/2016-Lawson-Williams-NZ-Staff-Turnover-Survey-Summary-report-1.pdf> (accessed Jun 7, 2018).