



SERVING OTHERS IS NOBLE AND HONOURABLE

Although commercial housekeeper jobs are varied for different places of work, it generally involves maintaining assigned areas in a clean and sanitary condition. Despite the physically demanding work, housekeepers need to maintain a positive attitude towards residents, guests and visitors. Meet Priskilla Panguleni, employed as a housekeeper by the Gondwana Group at one of its landmark hotels in Swakopmund, in Erongo . This is her story.

CONSCIENTIOUS CHILD

Hailing from Omashekediva village outside Ongwediva in the Oshana region, Priskilla Panguleni lost her mother at a very early age. Raised by her aunt, and supported by her older brother, Priskilla grew up a responsible and conscientious child at the mining town of Tsumeb in Oshikoto, always willing to assist with the daily cleaning and housekeeping chores.

“My elders were stern and from a very young age, we were taught that cleanliness is next to godliness; that cleanliness keeps the body, mind and soul clean and peaceful. I enjoyed cleaning the house. It was never a task to dread. It was fun,” Priskilla reminisces.

“Anyway, I always appreciated the encouragement by my aunt and other family members that I was a good and hardworking girl that one day would be able to manage her own household”, she adds.

EARLY AMBITION

Harbouring ambitions to become a radio presenter, Priskilla's Grade 12 results were not good enough to apply for media courses. And since her extended family, who supported her throughout her school career could not afford her enrolling for further studies - Priskilla started job hunting.

Upon the request of her uncle, she relocated to Swakopmund, where she soon landed her first job at a popular pizza restaurant. “Waitressing at Gabrielle's Pizzeria was an eye-opener and introduced me to the importance of fast and efficient customer service. Waiting on tables is physically taxing and rude customers often spoil your day. But, the tips are good when your service is good”, Priskilla shares.

“I also made good friendships whilst at Gabrielle's Pizzeria. When my uncle had to relocate to the North, I was on my own and my colleagues and some of the restaurant's regular patrons became my family here at the coast”, she adds.

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Priskilla Panguleni
Housekeeper

NEW OPPORTUNITY

Priskilla's friendly demeanour and diligence got her noticed and patrons encouraged her to apply for vacancies at the Gondwana Collection's new and flagship establishment, the Delight Hotel. "It all happened so fast. Soon after handing in my CV - which didn't contain much other than my Grade 12 results and a few testimonials - I was called in for an interview and landed the job", she notes.

Having no formal housekeeping work experience, Priskilla took to the in-service training at the Delight Hotel like a fish to water. "I fitted right in. After all, I started training for this from a very young age. My mom and my aunt taught me well," she jokes.

"Gondwana's in-service training is not only about proficiency in the tasks we need to perform, it is also very much about developing a sound customer-service orientation. We were trained that good housekeepers are trustworthy, caring and attentive; and to appreciate that our work is about creating comfort for our guests," Priskilla explains.

DEMANDING WORK

Hotel housekeeping encompasses a wide range of skills. Vacuuming rugs and carpets, collecting trash, emptying wastebaskets, polishing furniture, changing sheets and making beds are what makes up Priskilla's daily routine. Her positive attitude, diligence with which she takes on and completes tasks, and customer-first approach have made her a favourite amongst colleagues and clientele, alike.

"I agree, it sounds monotonous and routine, but it is about finding the fun in your work. We say when changing the bed linen, we are now shaking out the old dreams from the mattress. When we disinfect the bathrooms, we sing goodbye to the germs. We karate chop the pillows back into shape", Priskilla shares. "As housekeepers, we are a special breed. We don't mind being on our knees cleaning a carpet stain, or lifting a heavy mattress to fit new bedsheets. On the contrary, we embrace the satisfaction that a freshly made bed, a stack of bleached towels and a clean room bring. Yes, it is physically demanding, but I don't need to go to the gym. My job keeps me fit," Priskilla adds.

EMPLOYER ASSET

Today, Priskilla's attention to detail and methodical approach as a housekeeper make her an asset to her employer. Sound judgment and decision-making add to her reputation as a diligent and industrious employee who requires minimum supervision.

"We are trained to clean from the back to the front. This strategy allows us to move through the room without tracking dirt and germs back into the areas we've already cleaned. And while we are trained to be invisible to clients, make no mistake, we are not invisible to our supervisors. They inspect our work and appreciate a well-cleaned room. They appreciate thoroughness, meticulousness and professionalism", Priskilla highlights.

"The Delight Hotel is a newcomer establishment in a very competitive space. Customer satisfaction and exemplary guest comfort are what can set us apart from our competition, and as housekeepers, we play a very important role in building the brand. Everything needs to be top notch: from breakfast to linen, from room service to transport. Poor service in just one aspect can determine whether a customer call on us again, or not. We are all guardians of the Delight Hotel image and reputation", she emphasises.



CAREER PROSPECTS

Although she excels in her work as a housekeeper, Priskilla has big dreams to grow in the hospitality and tourism sector. The fact that her current employer assigns a high premium to staff development and creates opportunities for employees to grow in other aspects of the hospitality and tourism industry, bodes well for Priskilla's future plans.

"Our supervisors expose us to all aspects of the hotel's operations. It's our Gondwana culture. They want us to grow. So, if you want to venture into maintenance, they arrange for in-service training with the maintenance colleagues. If you want to become a chef, they arrange with the restaurant and kitchens. If Gondwana recognises your potential and desire to

grow, they will support you”, she notes. “The hospitality sector offers endless possibilities and my future is secure. I’m well trained and well trained housekeepers are in high demand. However, I wish to improve my grades through distance education, whereafter I want to venture into the reception and hotel administration aspect of the industry. Other colleagues started out as waitresses and with Gondwana’s support, they are now working in reception and in other areas”, Priskilla shares.

DOWN TIME

When away from her demanding shifts, Priskilla enjoys shopping and watching her favourite soaps; or some days, when the weather allows, just a lazy day at the beach. “Swakopmund is good for me. I’ve acclimatised from the hot and often humid weather of the North. Now, I get plenty vitamin sea”, she jests. She also finds sanctuary in the company of close friends who appreciate her friendship and support, and in serving her church community. “Although I don’t have relatives here at the coast, I make it a point to regularly visit my relatives up North. My growth at the Delight Hotel makes them proud and they continue to encourage me to grow and reach for the stars. But, I’m not lonely, at all. I have my Delight Hotel family and when not at work, my friends Desire and Mimi keep my company,” Priskilla notes.

“Going forward, as I plan to enroll at the Namibian College for Open Learning to improve my Grade 12 results, I might not have too much time on my hands anymore. But, I know my friends and family will be there to support me”, she adds.

HOSPITALITY CHAMPION

When asked how she deals with comments that question the passion she displays for her work - commonly perceived as a low-status and low-income option - Priskilla affirms that she always makes it a point to deal with such comments in a tactful and diplomatic manner.

“Yes, I do get asked how cleaning up other people’s mess can be fun? But, I prefer not to look at it that way, because in my book, you get two types of people - those that enjoy being served, and those that enjoy serving. I explain that I’m part of the latter group. I enjoy serving others. Serving others is a noble calling. Even the president is a servant”, Priskilla notes.

“But, I also tell them about my dreams to grow in the fast-growing hospitality industry, and that housekeeping is only one of many rungs on the ladder I need to climb. I tell them that housekeeping teaches me what true hospitality is all about. It is about creating comfort”, she concludes.

Priskilla Panguleni - Humble, but ambitious. A principled and caring young woman, motivated and driven by her desire to create comfort for others. Her story teaches us that we all are to be generous; not just in the results of our work, but also in our work. Her generosity in serving others is her true passion. She is living her passion!

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