

Wow!

My Career: Madeline Wright — Hotel Receptionist



**GREY MATTERS**  
Sue Russell

IT seemed like a great idea at the time — a guided bog walk.

What better way to kick off those January blues than to take a bracing walk through a local bog in the company of someone who could point out all the different flowers and plants to be found there?

I had been on a similar walk through a beech forest a couple of years ago with this woman — who was a botanist — and it was amazing. Where I had blithely walked before, enjoying the ambience of the trees, the fresh air and that self-satisfied feeling of doing some sort of physical activity; seen through the eyes of an expert, it was a totally different experience.

I'm not a very regular walker to be honest. My idea of a walk is somewhere that has a coffee shop at the end of it. Despite that, I have managed to gather together a few bits and pieces of what I call my 'walking kit'.

After episodes with soggy socks, I broke out and bought a pair of waterproof boots, a Godsend. I also have the waterproof leggings and although they are a ferocious shade of orange, they're brilliant for keeping you warm. A back-pack completes the look and helps me blend in with the more experienced walking types.

I picked up my friend Helen and we set off in good time to get to the meeting point by the appointed hour. Let me say at this point that it was raining. Dark, black clouds were assembled behind the mountain where I live but, ever living in hope, we could see a few bright spots into the horizon in the direction we were travelling.

We headed off in the general direction of the bog. We had walked it together not that many months ago, so getting there should not have been a problem. Let me reiterate at this point that Helen is a native and I am the blow-in. This is an important point to note as our navigational difficulties arose.

I followed Helen's instructions and took the road she directed me to. But we'd only gone about a mile down it, when I questioned the route. "I'm sure we should be on the road that runs parallel to this one," I said.

The seed of doubt was planted and we made the diversion I suggested. Big mistake. We drove up and down 'my' road with no sign of the bog and found ourselves back in the town we started from.

"Try the map," I said, trying to be helpful and still hoping to rescue the situation.

My road map was not detailed enough and we headed out once again on the original route. None of it seemed familiar and as we drove through the lashing rain and wind, a walk seemed less and less appealing, but neither of us is the type to give in easily.

"Try my phone," I said. "Yes, but who would we call?" said Helen. I explained that I meant to use the map app thingy. I've used it a lot to find my way around, though I wasn't sure the GPS would work in the middle of nowhere.

But sure enough, there we were, a little blue dot moving along the road with only about a mile to go to our destination. "We cannot ever tell anyone that we had to use a Sat Nav to find this place," said Helen, my local guide. "We would be laughed out of it!"

We were the only two that turned up for the walk. So, our informative bog walk turned into a nice chat over tea and scones in the nearest coffee shop. Now that's my kind of walking!

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# Warm reception from Madeline

**M**ADELINE Wright adores her hotel job so much that she won the inaugural Employee of the Year award from the Cork Branch of the Irish Hotels Federation.

**Describe your job in five words:** Challenging, interesting, dynamic, rewarding and busy.

**Describe yourself in five words:** Perfectionist, effervescent, friendly, welcoming and kind.

**Personality needed for this kind of work?** You need to be a patient, outgoing, people person — who can multi-task and be able to anticipate guests' needs.

**How long are you doing this job?** Seven years.

**How did you get this job?** I completed a diploma in Receptionist/Secretarial studies in a further Education College in my hometown of a Perth, Western Australia. My first job was working for a busy demolition/construction company in Perth as a receptionist.

I then worked for a Construction Report magazine company who produced a weekly publication detailing jobs for tender and future jobs. I had to liaise with government planning departments, local councils, builders, planners and engineers.

During all of these jobs I had two daughters and took some lengthy breaks from work to raise them. I then moved with my partner at the time and our daughters to Ireland to live. We were planning to start a business here but our relationship broke up.

I then met and married a local Kinsale man John Wright, we went to Perth for a short period but then moved back. I was offered a job working in retail for my husband's brother and wife. I really enjoyed my time working in this business and it also gave me a chance to get to know the locals. Unfortunately the business was sold but we were then employed by new owners. This only lasted a short time and we were all made redundant.

I was out of work for two weeks and received a call from my previous employer to say that he had recommended me for a part-time job as a receptionist in the Blue Haven Hotel.

I had my interview with the then-front office manager Maureen Buckley (who has since become General Manager). I was offered a trial and the rest is history. I was only in that part time position a few weeks before I was made full-time.

**Do you need particular qualifications or experience?** Front-of-house really does require experience as you need to be able to know how to correctly deal with customers. Computer knowledge would also be beneficial and having some background on reservations systems would also help greatly.

**Describe a day at work:** Day shift commences with speaking with our night porter to get the run-down of what happened during the night. Then we get on with posting all charges from the bar to rooms in both the main Blue Haven Hotel and our Georgian guesthouse Old Bank Townhouse and performing a night audit, which posts all the accommodation charges.

Then I finish end-of-day charges for reception sales, print all checkout bills and I like to ensure that they are all correct before presenting them to the guests.

I answer all email enquiries that have come in overnight, along with faxes. I check all bookings that have been made by the previous receptionist on duty (bookings must be double checked to see that nothing has been overlooked), while answering a very busy switchboard, dealing with all managers' requests, typing and printing of all lunch specials, then processing dinner and party



**Blue Haven Hotel receptionist Madeline Wright winning the inaugural Employee of the Year award from the Cork branch of the IHF.** Picture: Brian Loughheed

**Name:** Madeline Wright

**Age:** 46

**Lives:** Kinsale

**Job title:** Hotel Receptionist

**Salary bracket:** €20-30,000

**Education background:** Further Education College in Western Australia

**Hobbies:** Reading, minding my two beautiful granddaughters: Emma, aged four and Haylee, aged one.

reservations for our seafood and wine bar Aperitif, Hamlets Cafe Bar, the Fishmarket Restaurant and Blue Haven Bistro and Bar. Then there are guest checkouts, orders for housekeeping, assisting staff in our guesthouse with enquiries, processing of vouchers, ticket sales for special guest artists, contacting debtors, end-of-day financial procedures and handover to the next receptionist on duty.

Then there is the evening shift. If busy, which it normally can be, we assist the receptionist on duty before and allow her to finish her work whilst we do check-ins and answer all incoming calls. We prepare all our reservation arrivals for the following day, all housekeeping lists for the next day, type and process all evening specials, check all bookings taken by previous receptionist, continuously check and answer emails and faxes. Much of what is on the AM shift also happens on the evening shift, as well as preparing all end of day banking, all reports for housekeeping and balancing all sales for the day.

**How many hours do you work a week?** 40+

**What do you wear to work?** Black uniform.

**Is your industry male or female dominated?** Female.

**Does this affect you in any particular way?**

Not at all, as I enjoy working with both sexes.

**Is your job stressful? How? Rate it on a scale of 1-10:** It's usually around a five but can quickly escalate to 10 in pre peak and peak season.

**Do you work with others or on your own?** We only have one receptionist per shift so yes, I work on my own.

**When do you plan to retire or give up working?**

I would like to retire when my mortgage is paid off.

**Best bits:** Winning the inaugural Employee of the Year award from the Cork Branch of the Irish Hotels Federation is the best thing that had happened to me in my working career. I strive to be the best I can be with all of my guests.

Dealing with wonderful guests, working with amazing work colleagues, seeing guests coming back through the front doors time and time again. Even getting hugs from repeat guests!

**Worst bits:** When bookings are flooding in, trying to keep up. The public can expect a lot in these difficult times so this can be challenging.

**Advice to those who want your job?** You must be prepared to go the extra mile with customers and welcome everyone and make them feel as though they are home for the night and that they are very important.

You can only expect to get out of your job what you put into it.