

Experiential Learning Student Success Story: Dallas Kennedy, Hotel Controller, ARC The Hotel Ottawa



Q: Who are you and what do you do?

A: My name is Dallas Kennedy and I'm Hotel Controller ARC the Hotel Ottawa. I oversee finances – paying bills, invoices, and sending out payroll.

Q: Can you tell us about your first co-op experience?

A: My first co-op experience was in grade 11 at Child Youth Friendly in Ottawa (a not-for-profit charity that envisions an Ottawa where youth drive positive change). My second year of co-op was at Les Suites Hotel. Co-op was a much different experience in being able to leave the school and go into a working environment every day. I was lucky that at both of my placements everyone was really nice and open to the idea of the program. You weren't left alone with nothing to do. I helped with whatever tasks were going on at the time.

In the hotel, for instance, I was able to spend a week or so in each department executing their daily tasks. During the following week, I would work in a different department and shadow the supervisor in housekeeping or accounting, for instance.

Q: How did co-operative education help you choose a career in the hospitality industry?

With my placement in the hotel, I was lucky to find out what I wanted to study right after my placement. I was really interested in hospitality industry.

Q: What did you do after graduating high-school to pursue your career?

A: I jumped right into a two-year college diploma program in hotel and restaurant management at Algonquin College. While studying, I was working part-time at a hotel.

Q: Would you recommend co-op to someone who wants to enter the hospitality industry? If so, why?

A: Why wouldn't I? It's such a great idea. You get students out of the classroom and out of the text books. While textbooks are great – until a student does things hands on, they don't really know what they're doing.

I was given the opportunity at my placement to actually do work and be in the thick of it. I really felt like I was contributing. Co-op also gives you the opportunity to try the program and potentially discover that a particular field might not be a good fit. It avoids a lot of trouble and a lot of debt for school if it turns out to be something you don't want to do.

Q: Was there one particular mentor who helped you during your co-op experience? What kind of environment did they help to create?

A: I was so fortunate to have two great mentors, along with all of the great people I worked with during my placements. My mentors had an open door policy. If I needed to chat or just touch base, I was given a lot of feedback.

Q: Did you develop any skills in co-op that still apply in your career today?

A: I don't have one specific skill that I walked away with because I had such a rich experience. Those experiences helped to mold me into the professional I am today. And I still work with a lot of the same people I worked with in co-op, so I continue to learn from them on a daily basis.