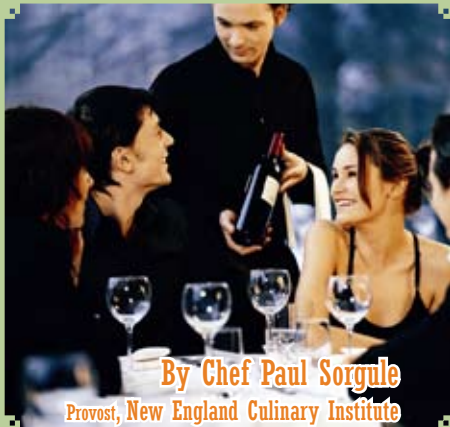


Corner Booth

The Server Business



By Chef Paul Sorgule
Provost, New England Culinary Institute

We have come a long way in elevating the respect that the position of “chef” draws from the public and the press. Service positions, however, seem to continue to lack the prestige that they truly deserve.

From the restaurant’s perspective, service truly differentiates a successful business from a faltering one. It is certainly in the restaurant’s best interest to offer exceptional service. But what is in it for the server? It would be quite easy to simply say that great service is gratifying to the one providing it and helping the business succeed is the goal of every employee. Let’s have a relationship with reality.

Certainly, the best servers do relate well to making customers happy, but service in America is a job - and in most cases, not a career choice. Given this reality, how does the restaurant manager set the stage for excellent service? One real approach is to view the position in a different fashion.

A server’s station is their business. In fact, we pay servers (albeit not very much) for the opportunity to “set up shop.” No up-front capital expenditure, no payroll, no cost of goods, no rent, no marketing expense, just working their station and those surrounding it like it was their business. Think about these ideas and sharing the following concepts with your staff.

Your Station is Your Business

The Better You Are at Selling, the More Money You Make

The Better the Stage, the Better the Show

The Better the Show, the Greater the Rewards

Service is show business

The Server “Entrepreneur” has the opportunity to:

Set the Stage: Clean area, level tables, polished glassware and flatware, balanced lighting, clean windows, proper temperature, etc.

Know Your Lines: Know the product, the methods of cooking, the wine list, what complements what, the history of the restaurant, the bio of the chef, events in town, etc.

Be “in” the Role: A server should be a star in the dining room, a repository of information, an ambassador of good cheer, a highly proficient technician, and impeccably groomed and dressed.

Wow Them: Learn how to do things that will amaze and confuse. Keep profiles on your best customers, show that you remember where they like to sit, what they like to drink, where they live and work (use technology to help) and in the process you will create loyal RETURN guests.

Build a personal brand

Print your own business cards if the restaurant won’t. Pass them out with the check and say: “It was a pleasure to serve you tonight. When you return I would be honored if you would ask for me.”

Take the info from comment cards and send them a personal thank you card (with your business card).

Look like an expert

Build your mental list of “bullet proof” wines that complement dishes on the menu.

Taste them (if the restaurant doesn’t offer tastings, buy a bottle each week from your local retail store and develop an appreciation).

Understand complementary menu items. Ask the chef for help with this and learn those items inside and out.

Great service does have a relationship to great tips. Remember that a gratuity is not a right it is a reward for excellent service. Work towards earning your rewards and everyone will benefit from the “Server Business.”

Guest columnist Paul Sorgule has spent the past 40 years immersed in the culinary field and is a certified culinary educator through the ACF and a member of the American Academy of Chefs.