



Service Standards that Sell

It's one thing to talk about providing great service to guests. It's quite another to deliver it in a dependable, meaningful way. Generalities – “Be nice to guests,” “Meet their needs,” “Go the extra mile,” “Treat them like family” – can stir up warm-and-fuzzy sentiments, but they lack effectiveness as guidelines. To get the results you want, it's important to set specific standards, which define the behavior expected.

Not just any standards, mind you. What you need are non-negotiable standards. In other words, you're outlining what you want and expect your service staff to do, start to finish, with every guest who walks in the door. Period. Here are some examples you could use with your employees:


Greet guests as quickly as possible. It's your job even if they're not in your section but you've noticed they haven't been greeted because their server is caught up elsewhere. Customer service is a team effort.

Provide a warm welcome. Smile, make

eye contact with guests, tell them you're glad they're here. The goal is to create a home away from home, where everyone feels comfortable from the start, never dis-oriented.

Make conversation. Order-takers find out what guests want and give it to them, rarely venturing beyond the menu while conversing at the table. Service-oriented servers, on the other hand, treat guests like real people, talking about whatever topic comes up. Small talk can bring big results.

Compliment selections. When guests order appetizers, entrées, desserts or specialty drinks, say: “Good choice!” or “You're going to love it!” or “That's my favorite!” They want to know they're making wise decisions.

Remember guests' names. You can pick up the names by either asking them outright or getting the information off a credit card. But if you really want to be a hit, remember their names the next time they come in. 

Customer Contests: Wanna Be A Winner?

Summer is the perfect time to host a contest in your operation that's sure to get people talking... and visiting your operation!

▪ **Poetry contest:** Ask kids and other writer wannabes to write a review of your restaurant or a specialty menu item in the format of a poem. “Publish” the winner in your next ad campaign or updated menu. For musically-inclined guests, ask participants to write and perform a jingle for your restaurant and run the winner on air.

▪ **Eating contest:** Instead of encouraging diners to turn themselves into gluttons, ask them to “name that dish” and blindfold contestants. Or ask all guests to name the top three ingredients in a dish they ordered.

▪ **Recipe contest:** Involve at-home chefs to enter their own recipes. The winners have their items


placed on your menu, complete with their name and bragging rights!

When running a contest, remember that the prize has to be as fun as the contest. Here are some ideas:

▪ **Eat free for a year** (or once a month for a year)


▪ **Private party for 20** (in your operation, of course)

▪ **Entertainment package** – Partner with your suppliers as well as local manufacturers or nearby businesses for trade ideas or ways they can join in on the contest. Be open to all ideas, but remember the better the prize, the greater the participation.

For any contest that you run, be sure to keep the entry forms and turn those names and addresses into a valuable e-mail and mailing list for your next promotion. 

Marketing Tip: Compete with Carryout

According to the National Restaurant Association, 38 percent of tableservice-restaurant operators anticipate that takeout will represent a larger proportion of their total sales in 2007. Add that to the fact that 37 percent of consumers have used curbside takeout from these same restaurants and it's easy to see that the carryout business keeps getting bigger. How can you get in on the act?

- **Train the menu to those who answer the phone and turn them into salespeople.** If you have an order-taker at the phone – or a busy, distracted host – you'll lose business.
- **Remind phone people to “greet, complete and repeat.”** Begin with a warm welcome, take orders, suggest items to complete the perfect meal and repeat it back.
- **Double-check the order** before the guest (or your delivery driver) leaves.
- **Be personal.** If it's a special occasion, drop in a card that offers specific congratulations. 

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