

Chapter **10**
Serving Your Guests

Case Study *Wanted: Customer Service*

Uptown Grille has decided to offer gourmet versions of deli standards for a take-out menu. Customers can either purchase takeout items, such as cheeses and cured meats, or can order a snack or casual meal to enjoy in the adjacent seating area. The establishment is known for both its exceptional customer service and for its unusual food offerings.

Uptown Grille has been a popular destination for casual dining. Recently, however, management has seen a change. Business has slowed dramatically, and the word around town is that the customer service is to blame. Linda and Chef Jean are really concerned about the situation, but they're not sure how to handle it. Recently, they had to replace a number of seasoned employees, but it has been difficult to find qualified staff to fill these positions. Most of their new employees are inexperienced, but they all seem friendly and eager to learn.

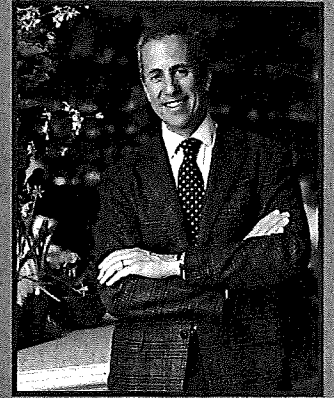
As you read this chapter, think about the following questions:

1. What should Linda and Chef Jean do to ensure their employees provide excellent customer service? What would you do?
2. Complaints often arise when inexperienced staff members serve customers. How can Linda and Chef Jean work with their employees to resolve any problems?
3. How can Linda and Chef Jean win back community support?
4. Once they achieve a high level of quality customer service, how can Linda and Chef Jean maintain this standard?

Danny Meyer, Restaurateur

CEO of Union Square Hospitality Group

This includes Union Square Cafe, Gramercy Tavern, Eleven Madison Park, Tabla, Blue Smoke, Jazz Standard, Shake Shack, The Modern, Cafe 2 and Terrace 5 at the Museum of Modern Art, and El Verano Taqueria and Box Frites (both at Citi Field), as well as Hudson Yards.



Remember:

“You can shear a sheep many times, but you can only skin it once.”

I grew up in a family that relished great food, cooking, get-togethers, travel, and hospitality. Thanks to my father's travel business, I spent much of my childhood eating and traveling to near and far-off places.

So, while I studied political science at Trinity College, I found that I couldn't stop thinking about food and wine. It was then I knew that I had to follow my passion. My first restaurant experience in 1984 was as an assistant manager at Pesca, an Italian seafood restaurant in the Flatiron District of New York City. Then, I returned to Europe to study cooking as a culinary *stagiaire* in both Italy and Bordeaux.

I opened my first restaurant, Union Square Cafe, in 1985, when I was 27 years old. Since then, USC has pioneered a new breed of American eatery, pairing imaginative food and wine with caring hospitality, comfortable surroundings, and outstanding value. Of course, other restaurants have followed, with varied themes—French-American, rustic Italian, Indian, Barbecue and jazz, Indian, burgers. However, as different as these venues may be, they share a common emphasis on hospitality.

By the way, Danny Meyer's bestseller, Setting the Table, examines the power of hospitality in restaurants, business, and life (HarperCollins, October 2006).

You know, long after people forget what you do and say, they will remember how you made them feel. And that's hospitality...you have the wine, the food and the setting. But what people will remember is how you made them feel.

If you are considering this industry, be sure you know yourself. Be emotionally self-aware so that you understand why you're getting into this business. Make sure you're at your happiest when you're making other people feel happy. Know that you're naturally enthusiastic about your subject—food and drink. And, finally, know that you have the stamina, persistence, and competitive skills to stay ahead in a business that will always provide you with lots of competition.

About Serving Your Guests

To truly serve your guests, you must understand the difference between service and hospitality. We always hear about the importance of service, but this only describes the degree to which a business does what it says it will...the degree to which it lives up to promises. It doesn't say anything about how a person *feels*. Hospitality is about the attitude with which we serve people. It's all about how they feel.

10.1 The Importance of Customer Service

- Definition of service and hospitality
- First impressions
- Identifying customer's needs

10.2 Ensuring a Positive Dining Experience

- Reservations and requests
- Greeting and taking orders
- Suggestive selling
- Alcohol service
- Processing payments
- Getting feedback on customer satisfaction
- Resolving customer complaints

10.3 Service Styles, Set-ups, and Staff

- Contemporary service
- Traditional service
- Traditional service set-ups
- Traditional service staff responsibilities
- Service tools and stations

SECTION 10.1 THE IMPORTANCE OF CUSTOMER SERVICE

Make no mistake: every employee in a restaurant or foodservice operation, from the front to the back of the house, is responsible for providing good service. The host's attitude, the server's tableside personality, and the responsiveness of the busers all contribute to the dining experience. And customers notice all of it. Competition for customers has never been greater. They have high expectations, especially about the way they want to be treated. Even if the food is great, guests will be disappointed if the service is poor, and then they probably won't be back. But if an operation gets it right, they could be rewarded with repeat business, again and again.

This section discusses customer service and how it affects an operation's success. This section also discusses identifying and addressing customers' needs, two critical aspects of providing good customer service.

Study Questions

After studying Section 10.1, you should be able to answer the following questions:

- What exactly are *service* and *hospitality*, and how do they affect an operation's success?
 - What is the importance of first impressions?
 - What is the best way to identify the customer's needs, and what types of special needs should staff be aware of?
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Definition of Service and Hospitality

Service is what restaurant and foodservice employees provide. It is measured by how well everyone in the operation is doing their jobs. **Hospitality** is the *feeling* that guests take with them from their experience with the operation. It refers to the interaction between a guest and host: the service, care, and attention. The physical environment—the décor, the lighting, the readability of menu—all add to the hospitality experience. Hospitality and service are critical to high-quality customer service.

Many benefits are gained by providing good customer service, including the following:

- Increased customer satisfaction
- Increased customer loyalty
- Decreased marketing costs (as customers share by “word of mouth” how good an operation is)
- Enhanced business reputation
- Positive work environment (which keeps employees loyal)
- Increased profits

Customer service often makes the difference between positive or excellent dining experiences and negative or ordinary ones. In fact, products served by similar competitive restaurants are usually very much alike. These offerings do not add much of a **competitive advantage**, the thing that attracts a customer to one operation over another. So, when the offerings of competitors are similar, the competitive advantage often comes from the nature and quality of customer service. It is important to provide the best possible level of customer service to stand out from the competition.

Before beginning a career in the restaurant and foodservice industry, it is important to understand what service is all about. Working in a service industry means serving people directly. This is the single most important aspect of the job. Good service comes from a natural desire to serve, but it can be improved through training, effort, and commitment.

First Impressions

First impressions are often the strongest impression we have of a person, place, or event. A positive first impression goes a long way in setting the tone of a guest's experience. It accomplishes a number of different goals, such as the following:

- Makes the customer feel welcome
- Helps the customer feel confident about the decision to come to the operation
- Sets the stage for a good dining experience
- Makes customers more likely to forgive minor errors

A strong first impression is one of the least expensive and most effective forms of advertising. If the impression is followed with a high level of service, as well as good food or a good product, the operation will probably have a return customer.

Making a positive first impression is not hard. Restaurant and foodservice employees have to be conscientious. Figure 10.1 is an example of a positive greeting by a hostess.

The initial **customer interaction** is one of the best ways in which to make a strong first impression. This initial interaction can come in many different



Figure 10.1: The host/hostess greets guests, escorts them to tables, and provides menus.

settings, and a good customer service plan accounts for them all. Following are a few ways to generate positive first, and lasting, impressions:

- Begin customer service from the moment a customer calls. This includes using good telephone skills, such as standard greetings, when answering the phone.
- Greet customers immediately upon their arrival to make them feel comfortable and welcome. This includes thanking them for coming and inviting them inside.
- Display courtesy, respect, and friendliness in every customer interaction—smile, make eye contact, and make friendly conversation.
- Learn guests' names and recognize “regulars.”

The facility's cleanliness and appearance are also very important to first impressions. The outside of the facility is frequently the first thing a guest sees, as shown in Figure 10.2. Maintain exterior facilities, such as the parking areas, sidewalks, and entranceways, so that they look clean and inviting. Maintain interior facilities so that they look and smell clean and fresh; this includes clean floors, tables, utensils, menus, and counters, as well as well-stocked and spotless restrooms.

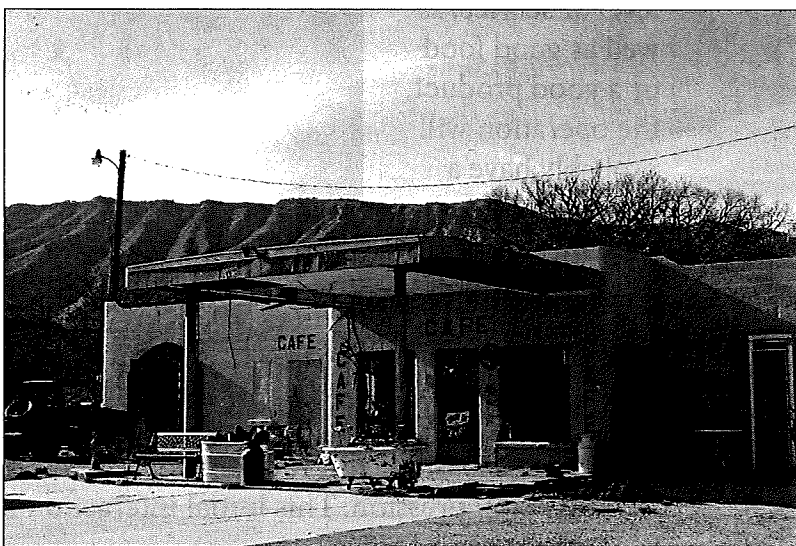
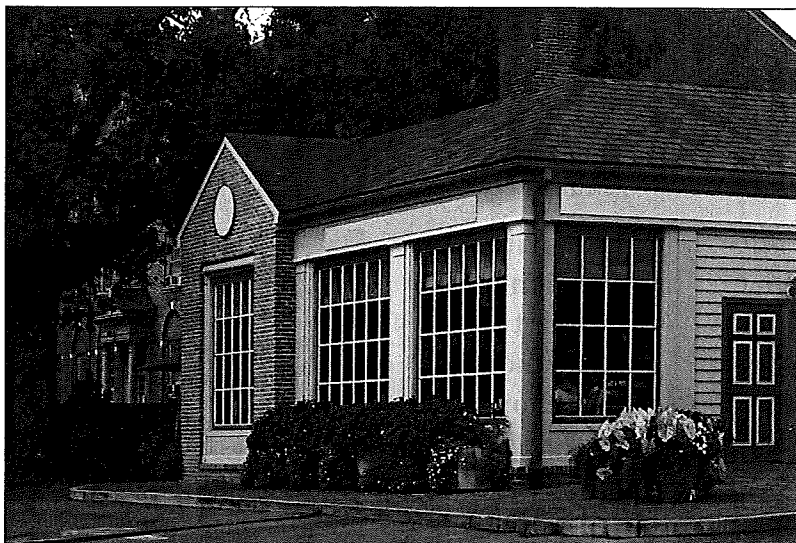


Figure 10.2: The exterior of a restaurant or foodservice operation is as important as the interior. The exterior is the first impression guests see. Compare these two photos. Where would you prefer to eat?

The **appearance** of all restaurant and foodservice employees also impacts the first impression. Employees make a good impression on guests by presenting themselves professionally. They should make sure to do the following:

- **Dress appropriately:** Wear clean, wrinkle-free uniforms or clothing that is in good condition.
- **Practice good hygiene:** This includes clean hands, nails, face, and hair (held back or put up).
- **Wear minimal jewelry:** This will depend on the policy of management.

In addition, employees should not do the following:

- Drink, eat, smoke, or chew gum in front of guests.
- Wear strong fragrances.

Identifying Customers' Needs

It is up to all employees to ensure prompt, friendly, and professional service from a customer's arrival to departure. To start, identify the customer's needs. Although all customers share some basic needs, such as friendly efficient service and a high quality product, some have special needs. The quality of a customer's experience will be affected by how well the service staff identifies these needs:

- **Age:** Older customers may need additional help. Some have difficulty seeing, hearing, walking, carrying food to a table, or counting money. Always be respectful and have patience when serving older customers. This group may have dietary restrictions and concerns to which employees should be attentive.
- **Families with young children:** This group may also have special needs. They may need high chairs or booster seats, entertainment (such as paper and crayons) to keep the children happy, and a children's menu. See Figure 10.3 for examples of what might help families with children. Servers should know how to locate these items quickly. Children often get restless when they are hungry, so providing a quick snack (such as crackers or rolls) or

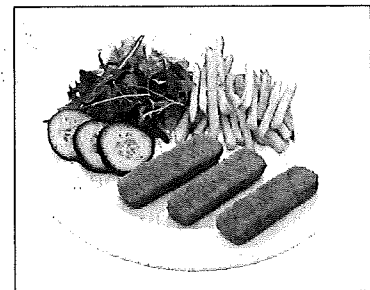
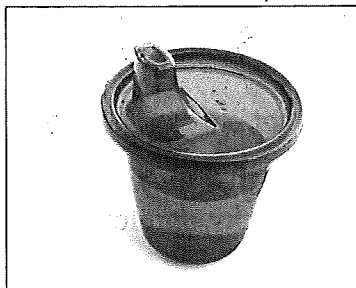
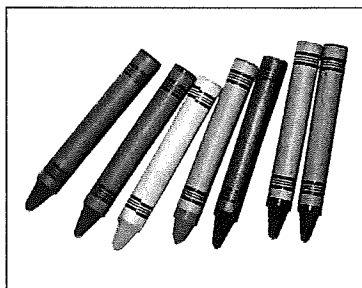


Figure 10.3: Servers need to be aware of the needs of guests with young children.

sending the children's order to the kitchen right away will be greatly appreciated by the customer. Children may also have dietary restrictions, such as allergies, of which servers need to be aware.

- **Dietary needs:** Customers may have special dietary needs, so server knowledge of the menu is critical. Servers must know exactly what is in every menu item. Disclaimers on the menu—for high-risk populations—are not enough. See an example of a disclaimer in Figure 10.4.

Food allergies can be severe and, sometimes, fatal. If the server doesn't know the answer to a customer's specific question about menu ingredients, he or she should ask someone who does know. Don't ever take the chance of serving something that may cause an allergic reaction. Take the time to find out for sure.

Guests on special diets often ask that menu items be changed in some way. Even if the request seems strange or picky, employees should provide customers with exactly what they order.

Menu

Soups

Black Bean Chili (V)	.....	\$2.75
Chicken Noodle	.....	\$3.50
Sweet Potato and Peanut (V, GF)	.....	\$2.75

Wraps

Clubhouse – Turkey, ham, salami, swiss cheese, lettuce and peppercorn ranch \$7.50

Garden Fresh (V) – Seared tempeh, tomato, red onion and tahini-miso sauce.....\$5.95

Southwest – Grilled chicken, pepperjack cheese, lettuce, tomato, and chipotle mayo..... \$6.50

Surf's Up – Tuna salad, red grapes, walnuts, cucumbers, and mayo.....\$6.25

Desserts

Chocolate Dream Cake (V)	.....	\$3.50
Berry Crisp (GF)	.....	\$3.95
Carrot Cake	.....	\$3.95

We process gluten, dairy, soy, peanuts and tree nuts in our facility.
Please use caution if you have a severe allergy.

V=Vegan, VG=Vegetarian, GF=Gluten-free

Figure 10.4: Sample menu with dietary disclaimer.

- **First-time guests:** First-time customers might be unfamiliar with the menu or any special touches that a particular operation offers. These customers might enjoy a brief introduction to the facility and its menu. Servers can easily identify a first-time customer simply by asking. They should plan to spend some extra time with these clients.
- **Special occasions:** Special occasions usually mean that the customer has specific needs. Large groups, for example, might require special menus or a special location within the operation (separated from other guests) and additional dedicated servers.
- **Foreign-language customers:** Language differences present challenges to efficient and responsive service. Depending on where the facility is located, dual-language menus might help make all customers feel more comfortable and welcome. Having a server on staff who speaks another language is also helpful. Finally, including pictures of menu items can help bridge any language gaps.
- **People with disabilities:** Without calling special attention to customers with disabilities, employees need to accommodate them in every way possible, such as seating a guest in a wheelchair in an area with plenty of space. The staff has to address the needs of customers with temporary disabilities as well, such as a broken arm or leg. The physical facility should be equipped to effectively accommodate these needs—for example, having ramps for wheelchairs or hand railings in restrooms.

[fast fact]**Did You Know...?**

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, more than 51 million Americans have some form of disability. That's almost 20 percent of the country's population.

- **People dining alone:** Some people who are dining alone may have work to do or may simply be trying to get away from it all for awhile. Consequently, such guests may want to be seated in a quiet corner or at a brightly lit table. The best policy is to ask these individuals what they prefer. Make sure that single diners receive the same level of service and attention as a larger party. Try to anticipate guests' needs and accommodate them before being asked. This requires watching and listening to guests carefully. Employees should do their best to please guests and think creatively when serving them.