

[fast fact]

Did You Know...?

Not all restaurant customers arrive in couples or groups. Single diners, such as business travelers, students, singles, or people who just want a quiet lunch or evening out, are an important part of your business. Think of them as scouts for future customers. If their experience is positive, they will likely return with family or friends.

Single diners can sometimes be perfectly comfortable dining alone; others might feel self-conscious. It's important to treat these customers with sensitivity and to give them the same level of service that you would to other tables.

To be a single-diner service star, follow these tips:

- ① Don't automatically assume the guest will be dining alone by saying, "Party of one?" or "One for dinner?" Instead, ask, "How many will be in your party?" or "Will anyone else be joining you this evening?"
- ② Ask the customer where he or she wishes to sit, if choices are available. Some single diners prefer bar seating, whereas others enjoy spreading out at a table or banquette. Sometimes the guest will be reading or reviewing paperwork, which requires good lighting. Other times, the guest may simply want to eat, so muted lighting may be more appropriate.
- ③ Be attentive without hovering, just like with any other guests. Since single diners won't be having lengthy conversations, they may finish each course more quickly. On the other hand, if reading or working, they may take more time. It's your responsibility to gauge this and communicate with the kitchen as needed.
- ④ Follow your management's service policies—again, just like with any other guests. Avoid making comments such as, "All alone tonight, huh?" You don't know the other person's circumstances. Be courteous and friendly without becoming overbearing.

Summary

In this section, you learned the following:

- 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 the experience they had in the operation. Together, these elements make up customer service, and good customer service can lead to increased customer satisfaction, increased customer loyalty, decreased marketing costs, enhanced business reputation, positive work environment, and, ultimately, increased profits. Often customer service gives an operation a competitive edge when food quality within the market is the same.

- First impressions are often the strongest impressions we have of a person, place, or event. A positive first impression goes a long way in setting the tone and influencing a guest's experience. The many benefits to making a strong first impression include making the guest feel welcome, helping the guest feel confident about the decision to come to the operation, and making the guest more likely to forgive minor errors.
- All employees should try to anticipate customers' needs and accommodate them before being asked. This requires watching and listening to customers carefully for clues about their needs. Employees should do their best to please customers and think creatively when serving them. They should be mindful of such factors as age, dietary needs, parental needs for children, solo diners, disabilities, foreign-language customers, and the fact that special occasions will often require special service.

Section 10.1 Review Questions

- 1 List three reasons why customer service is important to an operation's success.
- 2 List three reasons why making a good first impression is important to an operation's success.
- 3 What are two things a foodservice employee can do to make a good first impression?
- 4 List three special needs that an employee might notice, and provide an example of each situation.
- 5 Danny Meyer states that "...long after people forget what you do and say, they will remember how you made them feel." What can a host or hostess do to make guests feel welcome?
- 6 Given the need to regain ground, what steps can Linda and Chef Jean take to create a positive first impression? Make a list of five steps, and describe how they should go about each one.
- 7 Think of two restaurant experiences you've had: one in which you came away very happy with your overall experience and one in which you came away disappointed. Walk through each experience, listing your impressions from start to finish. How much did first impressions relate to your overall dining experience?
- 8 Of the groups with potential special needs noted in the chapter, which ones would you be particularly concerned about in your business? Pick two groups, and explain your choices.

Section 10.1 Activities

1. Study Skills/Group Activity: Restaurant Wars!

As a group, come up with two restaurants that compete in a similar market, offer a similar menu, and have similar food quality. Then, examine in detail how each tries to gain a competitive advantage through their customer service. List their similarities and differences, as well as the pros and cons of each. As a group, which one would you be more likely to patronize? Why?

2. Activity: "Hello, and Welcome to..."

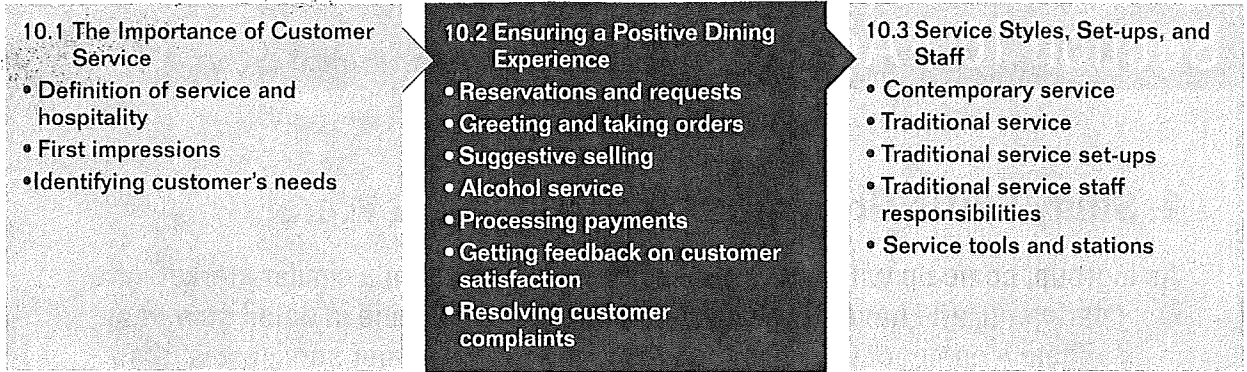
You're in charge of first impressions at your establishment. Write scripts for each of the following service staff:

- a. Greeter
- b. Server
- c. Bartender
- d. Buser

How exactly should each of these staff members greet the guests? What should they say and ask? How should they respond to guests' initial questions and orders? How would you like the initial interaction between guest and staff to play out?

3. Critical Thinking: I Spy...A First Impression!

Visit a local restaurant and observe what you see in the dining room during the first three minutes you spend there. You do not have to dine at the restaurant to complete this assignment. What is your first impression? Based on this impression, what would you expect of the dining experience? Discuss your findings in two paragraphs.



SECTION 10.2 ENSURING A POSITIVE DINING EXPERIENCE

One of the main reasons people go out to eat is so they don't have to do the hard work of cooking and cleaning themselves. In short, they want to be served instead. Therefore, the importance of customer service can't be stressed enough. Any successful restaurant and foodservice operation must be dedicated to quality customer service. And to be successful at serving customers well means understanding all of the factors that go into the process.

Good service starts with the very first customer interaction, sometimes as early as a phone call for a reservation. But it never really ends. Quality customer service isn't something that personnel commit to once. Rather, it's an ongoing process of always making guests feel welcome, treating them with care and respect while they are in an establishment, and continually following up with them in an effort to keep serving them better.

Study Questions

After studying Section 10.2, you should be able to answer the following questions:

- What is the proper way to handle reservations and special requests?
- What is the importance of customer greetings?
- How should a server interact with guests, and what information should be included in an order?
- What is suggestive selling, and why is it important?

- How should alcohol service be handled?
- How are payments processed?
- What is the importance of customer feedback, and what are some methods to collect such feedback?
- What is the best way to resolve customer complaints?

Reservations and Requests

A lost or incorrect reservation or a mishandled special request can be extremely frustrating for customers. If a customer's visit starts with this kind of problem, it can be difficult to turn the visit into a positive experience. That is why it is extremely important to have an accurate system to record reservations and special requests and implement them at the right time.

An effective procedure begins with a specific place to record reservations and special requests. The type, speed, and complexity of the restaurant determines how sophisticated the procedure is and what technology is used. For example, a fine-dining restaurant with table service may record reservations and special orders in a book or computer at the greeter's station. Reservations and requests should be saved in one place and include standard information, including when and by whom the information was recorded. As shown in Figure 10.5, the information recorded should contain the following:

October 2009

Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
27	28	29	30	1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

Reservations for Tuesday, October 20, 2009

Reservation Time	Customer Name	Arrival Time	Number in Party	Special Needs/Requests	Customer Contact
6:30 p.m.	Cunningham, Peter	6:20 p.m.	3	none	555-0987
6:40 p.m.	Rafferty, Marianne	6:25 p.m.	9	large table	555-6543
6:50 p.m.	Stevens, James	6:35 p.m.	2	booth	555-1357
7:00 p.m.	Simmons, Richard	6:45 p.m.	4	none	555-9753
7:10 p.m.	May, Harry	7:05 p.m.	2	window	555-2468

Figure 10.5: Reservation information includes customer name, customer contact information, date and time of arrival, number of people in the party, and any special needs or requests made by the customer.

- Customer name
- Customer contact information
- Date and time of arrival
- Number of people in the party
- Any special needs or requests the customer may have

[what's new]

After Hours

According to Livebookings Network, a source that delivers online bookings to restaurants, 18 percent of bookings made in their system are generated outside normal opening hours (10 p.m. to 10 a.m.) and 44 percent of bookings are made during peak service times (12 p.m. to 3 p.m. and 6 p.m. to 10 p.m.). So, online reservations are highly beneficial to restaurants.

Confirming all reservations and special requests is good customer service. It makes the guests feel important and protects the establishment against no-shows. It also helps management to plan food and labor needs and control the flow of customers and food orders throughout the shift.

Some operations ask for credit card numbers to confirm the reservation when it's placed. This is done frequently for special events. Some places charge customers for "no-shows," when customers do not honor the reservations they've made.

With special requests, it is important to have a way to "flag" or call attention to the special request. This ensures that cooks, servers, and other staff will be more attentive to the request, communicate better with each other to fulfill the request, and avoid errors.

Taking reservations and completing special requests may seem like simple tasks, but they actually take planning and organization. With proper procedures, establishments can avoid making mistakes in these situations and so avoid disappointing guests.

Reservations Online or Off

At one time, there was only one way to get a reservation at a restaurant. Whether the restaurant was hot and new or stately and old, customers had to call the restaurant and were often placed on hold. This process usually took a few minutes. Frequently, after waiting, customers learned that a table would not be available for the date or time requested.

With the advent of online reservation systems, however, things have changed a lot; making a reservation is easier. The diner enters the Web site, selects a restaurant, and types in the number of diners and the date desired. Often, the service will promptly inform the prospective guest of the seating times available for that date, so the guest can either select a time or choose from other options. Some establishments offer discounts for diners reserving tables at off-peak hours or “points” that can be used toward future meals. Consumers pay no fee for any of these services. So, online reservation systems have become very popular. Thousands of restaurants now participate in OpenTable, RestaurantReservations, and similar services, while countless other restaurants have their own reservation Web sites. See Figure 10.6 for an example of what these reservation pages look like.

As helpful as this is for the consumer, it is equally advantageous for the restaurant. Not only are reservations managed with less effort, but thousands of details about frequent users of the reservation systems are available—everything from birthdays to email addresses to drink preferences to frequent dining companions. This provides restaurants with a wealth of useful information about their guests that can be used to enhance customer service. Restaurants can develop a database with customers' email addresses, allowing establishments to email customers directly to inform them of particular events and promotions.

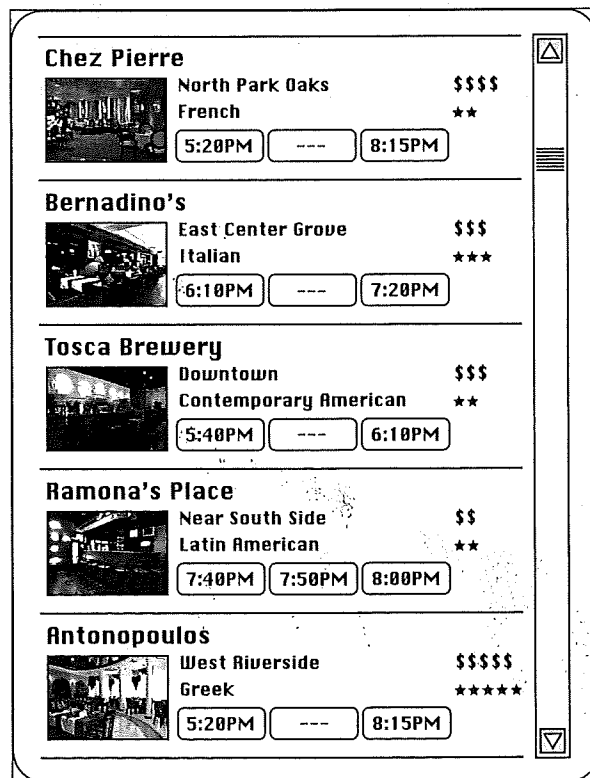


Figure 10.6: Online reservations allow guests to make reservations quickly.

Greeting and Taking Orders

The **greeter** provides the first impression in appearance, friendliness, and attentiveness. To do this, the greeter evaluates and determines the customer's specific needs for the current visit. The greeter is responsible for the following:

- Asking whether the customer has reservations, and, if so, checking the reservation log for all information pertaining to the customer's visit
- Noting any special dietary needs, seating arrangements, celebrations, and so on, and passing the information along to the rest of the staff
- Arranging for the customers to be escorted to their seats

In an operation without a greeter, these tasks fall to the server or dining room manager.

After the guests are seated, the server takes over. As each guest at the table selects their meal, the server notes guest orders on pre-printed guest checks or small note pads. These written orders may be entered into an electronic Point of Sale (POS) machine at the wait station or the guest ticket may be handed directly to the chefs to start the meal preparation.

Some guests will ask the server whether certain ingredients can be removed from dishes due to food allergies or other special needs. Servers need to correctly note any special requirements in the preparation of a guest's food item and ensure that the chef understands the request. Double-checking written receipt of special requests with the chefs is always a good idea.

Essential Skills

Taking a Table-Side Order

Writing down orders needs to be done carefully, using the same method each time. A server should always do the following when writing their table check:

- 1 Include proper seat and table numbers where appropriate. The seat numbers of a table start at the server's left, no matter what the shape of the table. The server approaches each table at the specific place determined by the floor plan. See Figure 10.7 for an example.

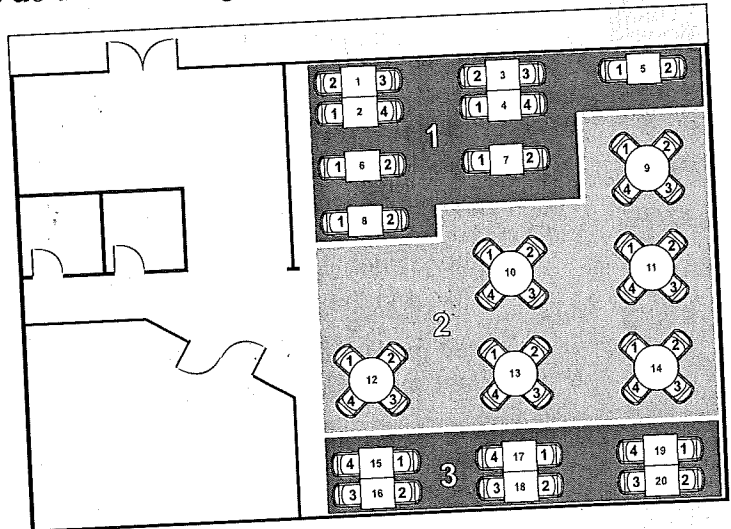


Figure 10.7: Step 1—Sample floor plan.

- 2 Use a grid to write down order in delivery sequence; for example, drink, appetizer, soup, salad, entrée, dessert. Remember, it is critical to keep everything organized and consistent for all checks. See Figure 10.8 for an example of an orderly table check.
- 3 Use abbreviations, sometimes already made up by the servers. Examples can be temps (for temperatures), CB (for cheeseburger), BK (for blackened).
- 4 Take and note temperatures as needed, along with any special requests by the guests.
- 5 Finally, repeat the order back to the guests before leaving the table.

<i>Guest Check</i>			
Table	Guests	Check Number	Server
17	5	074809	Alice
1	Caesar (1)		
2	Asparagus (3) 5		
1	Cuke 2 SOS		
1	Roulade 4		
1	Tartare 2		
1	Soup d.j. (3)		
1	Egg 4		
2	Filet (1) MR 4 M		
1	Salmon 2		
1	Quail 3		
1	Sweetbreads 5		
Total			

Figure 10.8: Step 2—Table check.