

[fast fact]

Did You Know...?

Use a very simple serving strategy to minimize errors in the kitchen, hold down an operation's food costs, and reduce customer wait times and customer complaints: Have all servers repeat orders back to guests after the initial order has been taken. It's simple to do and takes very little time, yet it can help the overall efficiency of the operation in many ways:

- First, repeating orders helps avoid potential miscommunications between guests and servers in the initial ordering:
 - This can help to reduce the food costs incurred by having to correct such mistakes.
 - The kitchen won't have to redo plates; this helps keep the kitchen running efficiently.
 - If the kitchen is running efficiently, food quality and plate presentation will be better, and the speed of service to the rest of the dining room will be faster.
 - When quality of food is high and speed of service to the whole of the dining room is fast, more guests leave happy and satisfied with their dining experience.
 - Happier guests lead to repeat customers.
 - Repeat customers lead to a higher and more regular income for the operation.
- Knowing that all orders are going into the kitchen exactly as they should be provides the server with added confidence. Therefore, he will be freer and more confident when serving other guests.
- Finally, it keeps the staff happier as a whole because mistakes and set-backs will be reduced, so everyone can better do their jobs.

[on the job]

Hot Tips: Gratuities and You

Everybody likes to get tips, and no wonder: many service employees earn far more through gratuities than from actual wages. Always remember that tips are a guest's way of thanking the server, chef, and perhaps even the hostess for providing excellent service, not a way to pad a paycheck. When service staff become too complacent and believe they are entitled to good tips regardless of the quality of service, guests suffer.

Whether serving a table or managing a crew of servers, keep the following in mind:

- ① Never look at the signed credit-card slip in front of a seated guest. It gives the impression of greediness, as if the server can't wait to see the tip.
- ② Sometimes, if a guest says, "Keep the change" or if the guest tips at a register, the server can't avoid knowing the amount of the gratuity. In these cases, it is extremely important that they not show any emotion. Visible happiness at a good tip is almost as bad as visible disappointment at a poor one.
- ③ Never make guests feel uncomfortable because of the amount of their tip (high or low). This won't always be easy. Any experienced server knows that terrible tips sometimes follow great service. But if the servers continue to treat guests with

respect, even when the servers know the amount of the gratuity, the guests will feel more at ease in the restaurant and will, therefore, be more likely to return for future meals. It's just good business.

The bottom line is that the exchange of all money between staff and guests must be professional. The transaction is a payment for services rendered by the operation. In the long run, the more professional the service, the better the tips will be.

Note: The IRS requires that employees report tips if they receive \$20 or more per calendar month. The employee must provide written reports by the tenth of the following month.

[what's new]

POS and Pacing

Many restaurant and foodservice establishments use POS, "point-of-sales" systems, to track guest orders and checks, communicate information to back-of-house employees, maintain reservations and waiting lists, and track labor and sales figures. See Figure 10.9 for an example. In fact, these systems typically have a broad range of features. The POS saves time and money by increasing the efficiency of standard restaurant operations. It also plays an important role in customer service by helping the server to properly pace the meal.

"Pacing" is the speed at which a guest proceeds through a meal. If a single guest is in a hurry to reach another engagement, he will likely complete each course more quickly and may order fewer courses than the typical diner. On the other hand, a group of long-lost friends may spend more time talking than eating, so each course takes longer. The server must communicate with the kitchen about each party's needs. By sending a quick message through the POS system, the server can explain that the next course should be brought out quickly or held back. This can be done without having to leave the dining area and other guests. The POS, therefore, saves time and improves the level of customer service available to all the customers.

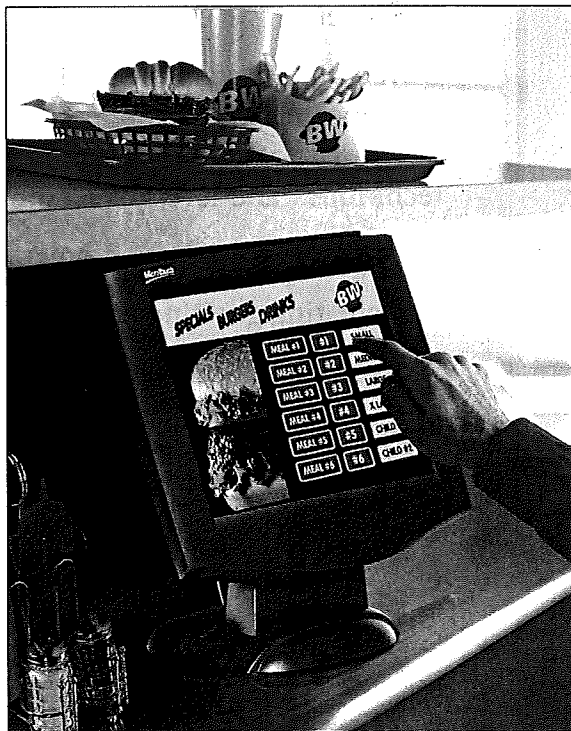


Figure 10.9: POS systems save time and money by increasing efficiency in restaurant and foodservice operations.

Suggestive Selling

Suggestive selling involves recommending additional or different items to a guest. It is one of the keys to the success of any retail business. In a restaurant, suggestive selling maximizes guest satisfaction and increases the average check, resulting in more profits. The success of suggestive selling depends on product knowledge, effective communication skills, and sales training.

Many employees are reluctant to suggestive sell because they are shy or uncomfortable with selling (feeling that they are acting “pushy”). Managers who train servers commonly point out that this will increase the guest’s check and, therefore, the server’s tip. A good suggestive selling program includes the following:

- Enhancing servers’ communication skills, so they can be effective with customers
- Developing servers’ product knowledge, so they can vividly and accurately describe items to customers. Servers need to be able to answer specific questions about the menu items, including ingredients, preparation techniques, and levels of seasoning.
- Learning which items complement one another
- Anticipating guest needs
- Suggesting add-on items such as drinks, appetizers, and desserts
- Identifying specific items based on guest preferences; for example, “If you like chocolate, you’ll love our new molten lava cake”
- Suggesting items that servers themselves enjoy
- Suggesting core products and services that sell well
- Suggesting the establishment’s “best” items, increasing the probability that the customer will be happy
- Using props, such as dessert trays
- Observing guest behavior to determine whether they want service or a product; for example, at the end of the meal, watching the guest to see whether he or she wants the check or dessert
- Recognizing the positive effect of suggestive selling on the financial position of the establishment.

Talking about daily specials is a part of suggestive selling. It is acceptable, and recommended, to mention these “deals” right at the start of the ordering process. Most guests welcome recommendations and are more than willing to try specialties.

Using active and descriptive words to explain foods is a great way to suggestively sell menu items. Words such as *sweet*, *juicy*, *mouth-watering*, *prime*, and *rich* make foods sound appetizing. Other words provide an actual description of the item (*sashimi-grade*, *organic*, *heirloom*). If the server can legally make these claims, he or she should. For example, “Our Belgian waffles are made with fresh eggs, whole wheat flour, and milk, and are served hot from the griddle, topped with fresh strawberries and pure whipped cream or vanilla ice cream.”

After guests place an order, let them know they’ve made a good decision by saying something like, “Excellent choice, sir. The salmon is very fresh today. I think you’ll really enjoy it.” This makes guests feel good about their decision, and they will look forward to the meal. Show enthusiasm for the items that guests suggest. Servers can also recommend menu items that they personally like. Management should establish a policy that staff be honest with guests when they ask for personal recommendations, as guests can often detect and appreciate sincerity.

Suggestive selling training is an ongoing effort. First, a manager or designated trainer can conduct training formally. Second, suggestive selling can be an occasional agenda item for staff meetings. Managers can set aside time at these meetings to discuss the best practices or problem experiences. Third, informal training can occur through observation and feedback. In all cases, practice is the key to successful suggestive selling.

Alcohol Service

The service of alcohol is frequently an integral part of a dining experience. Most customers expect alcohol at least to be available, so it’s essential that alcohol service is conducted professionally and safely. Managers and staff must understand the effects of alcohol and become familiar with any and all laws that apply to their establishments.

Every state has its own liquor laws and oversees the sale and service of alcohol within its borders. Each state’s liquor board or liquor authority develops and enforces its own regulations for alcohol service. These agencies also are responsible for issuing and monitoring liquor licenses, issuing citations for violations, and holding hearings for violators of the liquor code.

Laws vary considerably from state to state. Many states have dram shop laws, which create a special liability for establishments with liquor licenses and for the people employed by them. These laws allow an injured person, who may not even have been in the establishment, to sue the business, its owners, and its employees for injuries caused by a guest who was drinking there. In addition, many counties and towns have their own, often stricter, liquor laws.

Sellers or servers of alcohol may face criminal charges for the following actions:

- Serving alcohol to a minor
- Serving a guest who is, or appears to be, intoxicated
- Possessing, selling, or allowing the sale of drugs on the premises
- Allowing a minor to sell alcohol

In Illinois, for example, selling or serving alcohol to a minor is punishable by a fine of up to \$2,500 and a jail sentence of up to one year.

The amount of alcohol absorbed into a person's bloodstream is called blood alcohol content (BAC). A BAC of .10 means that there is about one drop of alcohol present for every thousand drops of blood. In all 50 states, it is against the law to drive with a BAC of .08 or higher. A BAC of .30 or higher can lead to coma or death.

In all 50 states, you must be 21 years old to purchase alcohol. In some states, it is currently legal for a parent or legal guardian to purchase alcohol and serve it to a minor child. In general, a server must be 21 years old to serve alcohol, but this law varies. In some states, you can be 18 years old to serve alcohol.

For example, some states allow underage servers to bring alcohol to the table, but they cannot pour it. Other states allow underage servers to take the order and payment for the drink, but not to serve it. Some states require the underage server to apply to the liquor authority for permission to serve alcoholic beverages.

In some areas, the law does not allow minors to enter a tavern or restaurant bar area. Some establishments may require guests to be older than the age allowed by law to enter the bar.

If you sell or serve alcohol, you are responsible for ensuring that customers are of legal age to drink. The best way to do that is by checking each customer's identification. The proper procedure for checking IDs is the following:

1. Greet the guest politely
2. Politely ask the guest for ID
3. Verify the ID. Make sure it is valid, has not been issued to a minor, is genuine, and belongs to the guest. If you're unsure, ask for another form of ID, compare the guest's signature to the one on the ID, or ask questions only the ID's owner could answer. (For example, "How tall are you? What is your middle name?") Notify the manager of any suspicious forms of ID.
4. Serve or refuse the guest

To make sure an ID is genuine, look for signs of tampering, including bubbles and creases, improper thickness, and ink signatures. If you spot a fake ID, take several possible steps, depending on company policy and the laws in the area. This may include refusing service, refusing entry to the establishment, and/or confiscating the ID. Always check with the manager regarding suspicious or fake IDs. Follow company policy.

Some establishments use ID readers to check IDs with bar codes or magnetic stripes. Although these tools can help verify the age of a person, use them in conjunction with other checking procedures to make sure the ID is valid.

Acceptable forms of ID include the following:

- Driver's license
- State ID card
- Military ID
- Passport

Figure 10.10 shows sample identifications.

In most states, proper ID does not include a birth certificate, school ID, or voter's registration card. All states add special features on a minor's ID to make an underage guest easy to spot.

Check with the manager for the valid IDs issued by your state, or use an ID checking guide. These guides provide full-size samples of each state's drivers' licenses. They also provide a detailed description of minor IDs, state ID cards, and valid drivers' licenses in current circulation.

Because it is illegal to serve alcohol to a minor, card any guest who appears to be under 21 years of age. To take the guesswork out of carding, many

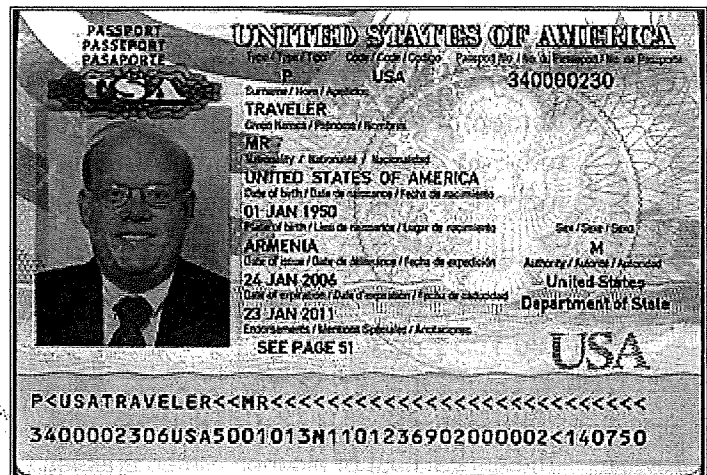
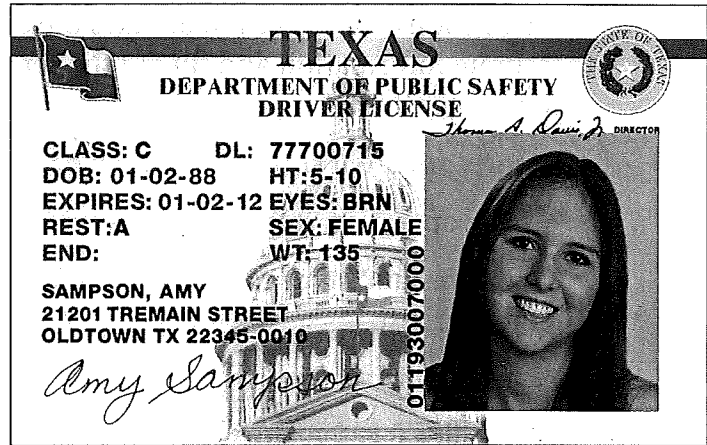


Figure 10.10: Sample driver's license and passport.

establishments require staff to card guests who are clearly older than 21. Always follow house policies on when to card.

Filing Alcohol-Related Reports

When an alcohol-related incident occurs on an operation's premises, the manager often needs to file a report, which is used to document what happened and what actions were taken to address the situation. The manager should provide accurate information and fill out the report immediately so important facts aren't forgotten.

Reports are often completed for all of the following reasons:

- The operation stops alcohol service to a guest.
- The restaurant or foodservice operation arranges alternate transportation for a guest.
- The manager confiscates a guest's ID.
- An illegal activity or violent situation takes place.
- A guest becomes ill (requiring medical treatment).
- A guest becomes injured.

Remember, incidents involving alcohol use can be very serious. It's always best to be on the safe side if something happens in the establishment, which means it's better to have an incident report on file than not to have one.

[fast fact]

Did You Know...?

According to the CDC, 36 people in the United States die every day from motor vehicle crashes that involve an alcohol-impaired driver. Approximately 700 more are injured. The annual cost of alcohol-related crashes totals more than \$51 billion.

Processing Payments

Processing payments is as vital a function as greeting the customers or serving the food. This is the time at which the guest gives back to the establishment in return for the service and food that they have received. Accept and process the payment with thanks and tact. The way in which the payment is processed can be the difference between a one-time and repeat guest.

Most establishments accept cash or credit. For cash transactions completed with a cashier, the cashier accepts the check and cash payment from the guest, restates the total to the guest, and then counts out the change.

Credit cards are used more and more frequently by customers, even for smaller transactions. It's essential to know how the process works. Credit card machines vary, but the procedures are fairly standard. Swipe credit cards through these machines to obtain authorization from a databank. The credit card machine displays an authorization response.

For credit card transactions completed with a cashier, the following steps should be taken:

- After authorization, the customer finalizes the total (noting any tip that they want to add) and signs the slip.
- The cashier keeps the credit card in his or her possession during this process.
- Before returning the credit card to the customer, the cashier compares the signature on the credit card with the signature on the slip to verify the customer's identity. If the signatures are different, the cashier politely asks the customer to provide additional identification, such as a driver's license or other valid government-issued ID.
- After confirming the customer's identity, the cashier returns the credit card to the customer along with a copy of the credit card slip.

Many operations now have credit card systems that do not require guests to sign for charged transactions under a certain dollar amount, or even at all.

The procedure for processing payment as part of table service is very similar to processing at a register. Process a payment when serving customers tableside by following these steps:

1. Present the check at the table.
2. Collect payment from the customers.
3. Process payment.
4. Return the change or credit card receipt and credit card.

When processing a cash payment, do not count out the change to the customer and repeat the totals. Simply make change away from the table and then return it to the customer.

For credit card payments, bring the credit card and receipt to the table together. It is helpful for servers to explain to customers which copy they should take. Collect the signed receipt and secure it immediately after the customer has left.

Finally, remember to *always* thank customers for their patronage.

Getting Feedback on Customer Satisfaction

To determine how well the restaurant or foodservice operation meets guests' expectations, it is useful to measure their satisfaction. This will help to understand the quality of the operation's customer service.

Routinely ask whether the food, drink, service, and accommodations (seating, temperature, lighting, and so on) are satisfactory during a guest's visit. This is the simplest and most obvious way to get critical customer feedback. Additional ways include the following:

- Encouraging guests to complete comment cards at end of visit
- Assessing customer satisfaction through surveys after visit
- Holding focus groups with both customers and employees to get detailed feedback
- Starting a mystery-shopper program

Comment cards are quick surveys that customers complete noting their satisfaction with the food and service. These are short and simple. Place pencils on the tables to encourage guests to fill out the cards.

Take any problems mentioned in comment cards seriously and correct them whenever possible. Circulate the general results, so that every manager and employee is aware of customer concerns. Praise those employees who are complimented by customers. Instruct and train any employees who are mentioned as part of a complaint.

Surveys are similar to comment cards, but sometimes include more open-ended questions. For example, surveys might include questions such as "How can we improve our service?" and "What would make you come back?" rather than "How was your meal?"

In addition to written surveys, managers can call a sampling of guests the day after their visit to get feedback over the telephone. See Figure 10.11 for examples of questions on a customer feedback survey.

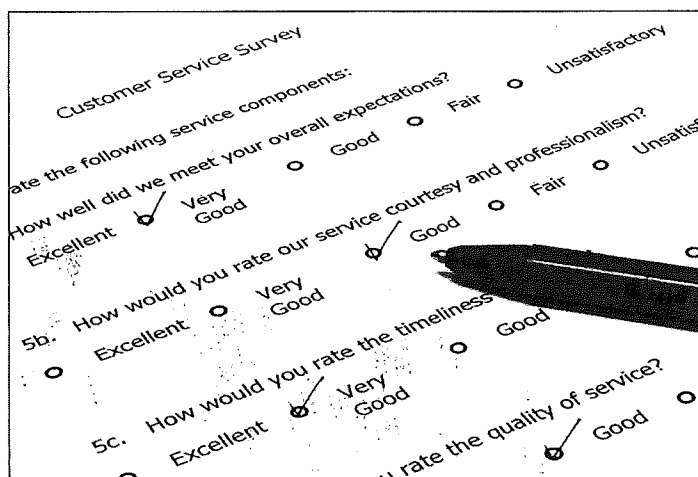


Figure 10.11: Surveys are an inexpensive way to gather customer feedback.

It takes time and effort for guests to provide feedback through the phone or a Web site. To encourage guests to respond, some operations offer a complimentary food item or discount. As with comment cards, a higher proportion of people with complaints are likely to provide feedback. Remember that offering a complimentary meal or discounted entrée may unintentionally discourage negative input.

Focus groups consist of customers that meet as a group to talk with managers about possible improvements in service or other areas. Many successful service managers use weekly or monthly focus groups to stay updated on any potential customer service improvements, as shown in Figure 10.12.



Figure 10.12: Focus groups are a good way to test new ideas such as menu items with a small group of people at the same time.

Focus groups can also be conducted with employees. Employee feedback is an important part of providing great customer service. Managers may want to hold focus groups with employees from each area of the restaurant and food-service operation. At the focus group meeting, employees should feel free to make comments about the operation without fear of angering management and with the assurance that no one will repeat anything said outside the meeting. Varying the employees in the group gives everyone an opportunity to contribute and helps keep employees invested in the overall efficient functioning of the operation.

Mystery shoppers are hired by an operation to visit and report on their experiences and impressions of a particular foodservice operation. These shoppers provide more in-depth feedback than comment cards or surveys, especially if they have been trained on an establishment's systems and procedures.

When beginning a mystery shopper program, managers can present it as an opportunity for all employees to see how they are viewed by customers. Encourage everyone to take criticism constructively and be willing to improve performance based on mystery shopper reports. Some multi-unit companies reward single operations for positive mystery shopper feedback.