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The Principles of Remarkable Service

AT ITS BEST, WHEN EVERYTHING comes together, working in a restaurant's dining room feels like you're giving the best dinner party ever. Trained cooks and a great chef send out delicious food; beautiful surroundings and the right music coax guests into an expansive mood; a professional, highly trained staff brings the guests whatever they need, ideally before they even know they need it. In the dining room we have the opportunity to bring complete strangers into our warm, welcoming space and make them feel like they are a part of our family, so that they will want to return over and over again.

We are in the hospitality business. And making hospitality a business involves identifying what takes service from acceptable to remarkable and then reliably performing those actions whenever necessary.

This book addresses both practical service skills (sometimes referred to as "hard skills"), such as setting the table, serving food, and presenting the check, as well as the less tangible hospitality skills ("soft skills"). Keep in mind that less tangible does not mean "less important." In fact, attention to the intangibles is exactly what separates remarkable service from ordinary service.





What Does the Word *Hospitality* Mean to a Professional Server?

IN ORDER TO SUCCEED in the service industry, you need to first understand the concept of hospitality.

It is not easy to arrive at a succinct definition of what *hospitality* means for the professional server. You can study and master the smallest details of fine table service, but hospitality extends beyond such professional skills. Hospitality in the restaurant can be expressed in a number of ways, such as making eye contact with the guest; anticipating a guest's need based upon body language or facial expression; adapting easily and unobtrusively to the needs of the guest; and similar actions aimed at creating a relaxing, positive experience.

(These skills are often referred to as the “innate skills” that servers should already possess.) Hospitality implies constant concern for the welfare and enjoyment of the guest. To convince the guest that you are really concerned for their happiness, every action you perform needs to come across as genuine. You can say all of the right words, but if you don't convey a certain warmth, your guest will feel the lack of sincerity.

HOSPITALITY (*hospi'tæli*ti).

[*a. OF. hospitalité (12–13th c. in Hatz-Darm.), ad. L. hospitalitas,*

f. hospitalis (see HOSPITAL

a.).] 1. a. The act or practice of being hospitable; the reception and entertainment of guests, visitors, or strangers, with

liberality and goodwill. (Oxford English Dictionary)

What Does the Word *Service* Mean to a Professional Server?

THE QUALITY OF SERVICE plays a very large part in determining the long-term survival of a restaurant and its market share of the available business.

The most common sense of the word *service* refers to the manner of presenting a meal to the guest. There are other meanings of the term *service* when it is used by a professional server. Traditionally, a *service* was the group of dishes composing a given part of a meal, such as a tea service. *Service* can also signify the utensils necessary to serve a particular part of a meal. *Service* in this sense would encompass the whole ensemble of objects used at the table: linens, plates, glasses, silver, and hollowware. Guests will often use the term *service* to refer to the timeliness in which the food was served, as in “Wasn't that amazingly quick service?”

Specific actions on the server's part can lead to desired feelings and emotions on the guest's part. These actions can be singled out, defined, described, and put into simple, trainable terms—for example, anticipating the pace of a meal and bringing successive courses at just the right time; avoiding bare-handed contact with plates or glass rims; suggesting menu items that will complement dishes already ordered; and presenting the check at the appropriate moment when the meal is done. The skills needed to deliver remarkable service, which includes all aspects of restaurant service, from greeting to order taking, service to check presentation, as well as reservations and special challenges in the dining room, are described throughout this book.

Combining Hospitality and Service Skills for Remarkable Service

THE NINE PRINCIPLES OF REMARKABLE SERVICE

Remarkable Service Is Courteous, Friendly, and Welcoming

Remarkable Service Instills Trust

Remarkable Service Comes from Knowledgeable Servers

Remarkable Service Depends on Effective Communication

Remarkable Service Is Performed Efficiently

Remarkable Service Is Well-Timed

Remarkable Service Is Flexible

Remarkable Service Is Consistent

Remarkable Service Exceeds Expectations

Hospitality has to do with attitudes and behaviors, which can be expressed through actions; in other words, through service. When you combine hospitality skills with service skills, you are delivering remarkable service.

A high level of caring for the comfort of guests—remarkable service, in other words—is the distinctive attribute of the best dining establishments. Providing service is at the heart of all businesses, from auto repair shops to hairdressers to restaurants. The more personal the service, the more the guest or client will feel comfortable and confident that they are being treated with respect and care.

Hospitality and service may seem, at first glance, to represent very different kinds of activities. Hospitality depends on feelings and impressions, while the essence of service resides in actions. Service is being able to carry four dinner plates without spilling the sauce, or opening a bottle of Champagne without spewing foam onto the floor. While the service tasks themselves do not involve emotion, they can evoke positive feelings in guests when they are carried out in a professional manner. We have identified nine basic principles of remarkable service that are the foundation of the lessons throughout this book. Since the principles represent various aspects of caring and share the common objective of making the guest feel comfortable, it should not come as a surprise when two or more of the principles overlap. Nor should it come as a surprise that remarkable service draws upon both the hospitality and service skills in the professional server's tool kit.

REMARKABLE SERVICE IS COURTEOUS, FRIENDLY, AND WELCOMING

"You only have one chance to make a first impression." This is the rallying cry for every quality-oriented service business. In the food-service business, guests make decisions within their first minute of contact with the restaurant. Thus, a good server never forgets this oft-quoted but still essential maxim. When guests are met by friendly, welcoming hosts, they are assured that they can relax and enjoy their meal.

Good servers are attentive to the guests' needs, not only with the dishes served, but also with the dining environment. Most guests do not come to a restaurant to chat with the service staff. Reading the table (discussed in chapter 6) can tell the server which guests want to talk and ask questions about the restaurant and which prefer to be left alone. Regular customers may develop a more informal relationship with the staff—and will perhaps think of the restaurant as their second dining room. Courteous servers are attentive, but not intrusive with these guests.

One cannot appreciate a meal in a hostile environment. Proper manners smooth uncertain social interactions, subconsciously informing people that they have nothing to fear. Courteous behavior tells the guests that they are in a caring, comforting environment. The server's fine manners signal a sincere concern for the guests' happiness.

When the meal is over, a thank-you for the guests—as well as a thoughtful farewell—is essential.

REMARKABLE SERVICE INSTILLS TRUST

A state of trust must be maintained between the server and the guest. The guest needs to know that menu items are described accurately and that health and sanitary

codes are being obeyed. As an illustration, when guests order decaffeinated coffee, they have only the server's word that they are, in fact, getting decaffeinated coffee. If a guest notices that the coffee machine has only two carafes and both of them have brown handles (which indicate regular coffee—while orange or green are often used for decaffeinated coffee), doubts arise that can affect the trust in the relationship with the server throughout the rest of their meal.

When a restaurant (the space, equipment, furnishings, and staff) presents a clean and neat appearance, it comforts guests by banishing their worries about the sanitary conditions in the part of the restaurant they can't see: the kitchen. A single grease stain on the carpet, a crumb on a chair, or a spot on the wall can adversely affect the way guests feel about the meal they are about to enjoy.

Just as the guest must have trust in the server, the server must have trust in the guest. The server needs to believe that the guests will be reasonable—that they won't make impossible demands, nor reject food or wine capriciously, nor "stiff the waiter" and leave without paying for the meal.

Dealing with guests in a straightforward and honest manner puts them at ease. When they are relaxed, they are happy. When they are happy, they order more freely—and they tip more generously. Trust enhances the dining experience.

REMARKABLE SERVICE COMES FROM KNOWLEDGEABLE SERVERS

Servers who are knowledgeable about the menu (i.e., the ingredients, preparation, and portion size of menu items; the wine list) assure the guests that they will be able to get the information they need in order to make informed decisions about their meal. Guests cannot order dishes they don't know exist. Servers make the guest feel

What Makes It Extra-Virgin?

This is an example of the kind of question that a server should be prepared for. Although a witty waiter may have several clever retorts for this question, a professional server has the correct answer:

Olives are pressed much like grapes. The best olive oil is extra-virgin olive oil, then the next grade is virgin olive oil. Cold-pressed oil from the

first pressing of the olive (if under 1 percent acid) is considered extra-virgin olive oil. If the oil from the first pressing contains from 1 to 3.3 percent acid, it is labeled "virgin olive oil." The subsequent pressings of the same olives produce "pure olive oil." Usually a good year for grapes is not as good for olives and vice versa.

A Perfect Wine by the Glass

"We were halfway through our main course and my wineglass was empty, though everyone else had plenty. I didn't want to order another bottle

of wine. The waiter came to me and told me about a wine they had by the glass that was just perfect with my steak."

comfortable by becoming trusted guides through what might otherwise be unknown territory for the guest. Guests often need information about menu items or, more generally, about upcoming events at the restaurant, transportation and other services, and points of interest in the vicinity. When servers share their knowledge with the guests, it assures them that they won't miss something special.

A remarkable server not only needs to know about the menu items, but also has to understand what the guests are really asking. For example, if the guests ask the server what is in the spinach and goat cheese quiche, and the server replies, "spinach and goat cheese," this is technically accurate, but it is far from being hospitable, and certainly doesn't make the customer feel appreciated enough to spend their money. What the customer wants to know is: "What else is in the quiche? Does it contain onions? Is the goat cheese local? " They want to know something more than what is written on the menu.

REMARKABLE SERVICE DEPENDS ON EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

It is not enough to be well informed; good servers must be able to communicate effectively with guests as well as with the rest of the restaurant staff. Jargon that eliminates confusion in the kitchen has the opposite effect when spoken to guests and should be avoided. The art of communication consists of transmitting just the right amount of information exactly when it is needed.

Remarkable servers recognize what guests need to know, and provide it in an unobtrusive manner. Rather than an ostentatious "showing off" of knowledge, it is the quiet, confident, sensitive, sincere, and tactful delivery of facts that best serves the guests. Neither more nor less is required, or desired.

While some guests respond well to humor, some prefer more formality. Remarkable servers adapt their communication styles to the situation and the guests to whom they are speaking. The type of establishment very often determines the form and style of conversation between servers and guests. Diners, bistros, family-style places, and white tablecloth restaurants all have different ways of treating guests,

but all are concerned with providing the kind of comfort that guests expect from the type of establishment they have selected.

Remarkable servers are adept at recognizing nonverbal clues in guests' behavior. When guests need something—water, a new napkin, additional wine—their body language is more eloquent than speech, at least to servers who have learned how to read it. Good servers are always reading the table for clues about what the guests might need next, or reading the room to monitor (and be prepared to adjust) the flow of service.

Communication takes other forms as well. For example, the use of appropriate uniforms (i.e., long French aprons, matching polo shirts and khakis, Hawaiian shirts) makes it easy for guests to recognize the service staff and their job responsibilities. Uniforms spare the guests even momentary uncertainty about the location and identity of servers.

REMARKABLE SERVICE IS PERFORMED EFFICIENTLY

Efficiency is obviously important to the servers and the restaurant. More work can be done (and more money made) with less effort when it is done efficiently. The absence of efficiency, while costly in itself, can also seriously affect the comfort level of the guests. Disorganization and unseemly haste are contagious—guests are made to feel just as harried as their servers.

Inefficient technique wastes the guests' time as well as that of the servers. It interrupts the flow of the meal and erodes the environment of trust that is essential to a relaxed dining experience. However, when guests see the server's work being done quickly, smoothly, and easily, they are put at ease. They do not feel that they have put the server to any "trouble."

A general rule for a fast-paced restaurant is "never enter or leave the dining area with empty hands." There is almost always something to be taken to or removed from a table.

Careful attention to mise en place (having everything in its place), an intelligent economy of motion, and a cooperative attitude make the server's job easier to perform, and the resulting ease sends a strong signal to the guests that responsibility for their comfort is in good hands.

REMARKABLE SERVICE IS WELL-TIMED

Remarkable servers anticipate the dining needs of the guests. By providing just the right items or services before the guests realize they need them, servers spare

their guests the anxiety of having to ask for them. Here are a few examples of how remarkable service can be properly timed:

- ▣ Guests never have to ask for refills on water, iced tea, coffee, bread, or butter.
- ▣ Orders are taken promptly.
- ▣ Proper flatware is always in place before the guest needs it.
- ▣ Coffee never sits cooling in front of the guests while they wait for cream and sugar to be brought to their table.
- ▣ The guest's check is processed promptly.

By properly timing the delivery of each course, a server guarantees that guests experience the food while it is fresh and at its ideal temperature. When the meal is over and the guests want their check, a remarkable server already has the check in order, and delivers it smoothly, quietly, and unobtrusively—but only when it is clear that the guests have finished. The guests must never be made to feel rushed. However, when guests are in a hurry, a server should do whatever is needed to pace the meal so that they can enjoy their meal in the allotted time.

REMARKABLE SERVICE IS FLEXIBLE

A good server recognizes that sometimes the rules must be bent a little in the interest of the overall quality of the guests' dining experience. For example, if two guests are deeply involved in conversation, common sense suggests that one should be served from the right and one from the left. Interrupting their conversation would be a more significant violation than deviating from a house rule that states that all guests are to be served from the left. Sound judgment and the willingness to consider what one would prefer if the roles of server and guest were reversed provide the best guides to when and where the server needs to be flexible.

REMARKABLE SERVICE IS CONSISTENT

Guests visit a restaurant the first time for many different reasons. They come back for only one: they like the restaurant, its food, and its service. Making good use of all of the principles of hospitality and service can persuade a guest to come back to the restaurant, and the consistent delivery of high-quality food and service will bring their repeat business.

The key to achieving long-term success is the consistent delivery of the best possible service to every guest—every day, every week, every month, and every year.

REMARKABLE SERVICE EXCEEDS EXPECTATIONS

While repeat customers expect the same level of service each time they visit, they will be less impressed each time. This may seem unfair, but it's a fact of human nature. What is exceptional today will be expected tomorrow, and be barely adequate the day after tomorrow. Remarkable servers are constantly seeking ways to better their performance—finding new ways to delight the guests through the use of the principles already discussed, and incorporating them into this last principle: The best service is constantly improving service.

Personal Qualities of the Professional Server

IF A SINGLE WORD were to describe the sum of personal characteristics that define a professional server, it would be *caring*. Obviously, caring is not, by itself, enough. In addition to possessing the characteristics described, a professional server must master the skills described in the next chapters. In a very real sense, all of the employees of a restaurant are serving their guests. Every task, no matter how small, is carried out for one reason: to make the guest's stay as pleasant as possible. In order to succeed in this pursuit, a professional server must have certain characteristics, both physical (professional appearance and good personal hygiene) and behavioral (appropriate personality traits).

PHYSICAL

We are often told not to judge a book by its cover. However, people base important decisions about any business on their first impressions, especially in the food-service industry. If the servers do not have good aesthetic skills—if they are not neat, clean, and professional-looking—the guests will choose to eat elsewhere. You must always remember that the first (and possibly most lasting) impression one can make is through your appearance. Make it a positive one. The uniform you wear at work—be it a waitress's dress, a tuxedo, or a stylized costume—is a badge of professionalism

and should be worn with pride. Uniforms give each employee a recognizably similar appearance that helps the guests distinguish between servers and other guests. Keeping an extra uniform or shirt on hand for emergencies is also a good idea.

Good grooming is a must for anyone working in the front of the house. Well-groomed people always look clean because they *are* clean. Professional servers apply these principles to their everyday grooming habits:

- ▣ Hair neatly cut and combed
- ▣ Hands and fingernails clean
- ▣ Clothing that fits properly, is clean, and is wrinkle free
- ▣ Shoes shined and in good condition (including the heels)

Beyond being in the appropriate uniform, every server must have impeccable personal hygiene. Since servers are in close proximity with so many people, they should wash their hands about every half hour, when possible. Fingernails should be clean but free of nail polish, since it can peel off and get into the food.

The scent of food encourages food sales. The scent of colognes and perfumes can conflict with the aromas the guests have come to smell, so they should be avoided. Likewise, since servers work in very close proximity to the guests, daily showers and unscented or subtly scented deodorants are essential.

BEHAVIORAL

The most important behavioral characteristic a truly professional server can possess is an ability to deal with people. No amount of polish or knowledge can replace sincere concern for the customers' enjoyment of their dining experience. Maintaining a high level of this personal concern is not always easy. Most servers are familiar with cranky, demanding restaurant customers who aggravate service personnel while expecting them to be pleasant and efficient in return. Everyone has bad days occasionally, but professional servers should never let this be observed by the guests. It is important to remember that if you can see the guests, the guests can see you.

In addition to being adept with the public, a person in the front of the house must have characteristics possessed by any individual of integrity, particularly as they relate to conducting business.

The following discussion lists desirable traits that professionals working in the service of foods and beverages should possess.

ATTENTIVENESS

Professional servers do not daydream at work, nor are they absentminded. They must always be alert to the needs of the guests. No guest should ever have to work to attract a service person's attention. The station must never be left unattended. The ability to recognize the current state of the dining room while keeping track of what is about to occur calls for more skill than most realize. The professional server must have an ongoing knowledge of what is happening at each of the tables. This is accomplished by reading the table. It is necessary to keep a discreet watch on the diners' progress throughout their meals. Anticipating when more wine should be poured, when the table needs to be cleared, and how orders should be coordinated requires that one's attention stay on the job at hand. A server's eyes should constantly be surveying the tabletop with the five areas of table maintenance (covered in chapter 6) in mind and glancing at the guests' eyes, in case they have a request.

POLITENESS

Professional servers must do more than anticipate the food and beverage needs of the guest. They should be happy to assist in any area that relates to the customer's comfort. This includes such tasks as opening doors; helping guests with chairs, packages, coats, and dropped items; correcting glare from lights or the sun; eliminating drafts; and adjusting the sound level of music, if necessary. The magic words, *please*, *thank you*, *you're welcome*, and *pardon me* are essential to the vocabulary of food-service personnel. Polite words and considerate actions indicate a sincere regard for others' well-being—for fellow employees as well as for guests. A polite server avoids the use of crude, but commonly used, expressions such as *Behind!*, *Coming through!* or *Watch your back!*

When a guest asks for directions (i.e., to the bar, coatroom, or rest room) it is both rude and insufficient to point. A professional server should offer to show the guest the way, personally. The guest may prefer simple directions, but one should never assume that to be the case.

PROFICIENCY

In order to advance in one's career, the professional server must be willing to work constantly at the expansion of their technical skills and multitasking abilities. A skill is the development of proficiency in an art or craft and is improved by practice. Examples of serving skills that are acquired with practice are moving through crowds with a tray of beverages; opening sparkling and still wines; properly decanting red wines; and executing elegant tableside preparations.

DEPENDABILITY

Dependability is a sign of maturity and is a desirable trait for individuals in any profession. The dependable person can be relied on to accomplish what they promise, to be at work during agreed-upon hours, and to fulfill commitments. Dependability is a major factor that employers consider in hiring, since guests depend upon the server to provide knowledgeable and smooth-flowing service.

ECONOMY

Professionals in any business are responsible for doing their share to keep costs down. Untold amounts of revenue disappear daily in food-service establishments through waste—the largest and most unnecessary expense in the industry. Common sense is an important key to economy in the food-service industry; a rational person does not deliberately destroy or dispose of someone else's personal or business property. The professional server avoids waste by

- ▣ Carefully handling and stacking china and glassware.
- ▣ Using glass racks of the correct size.
- ▣ Carrying no more than can be handled safely (ask another server to assist you, or make two safe trips, rather than one risky trip).
- ▣ Being careful not to discard silverware with refuse or to put them in the dirty linen baskets.
- ▣ Avoiding unnecessary soiling of linen.
- ▣ Placing linens that were received in a soiled or damaged condition in a separate area so they can be returned to the linen company for credit.
- ▣ Serving standard-size portions (serve appropriate portions of items such as butter, replenishing only if required).
- ▣ Making sure that all items served are included on the bill, especially coffee.
- ▣ Using the recommended amount and type of cleansing chemicals (not only is overuse wasteful, but it can damage the item being cleaned or worse, cause illness).

EFFICIENCY

Economy of motion is essential to a server's success. Acting efficiently means getting the same work done, but with less effort and better results. The ability to catalog orders and plan trips to the kitchen and service area saves steps. The time saved by

being organized can be spent on better serving the customer. There should be very few empty-handed trips between the dining room and the kitchen.

POSITIVITY

A professional server maintains a happy and positive disposition, even amid chaos. A positive attitude makes one see all problems as opportunities to improve quality. Working with positive people is a pleasure—they create an environment that is pleasant for everyone, including the guests.

HONESTY

Honesty is an important trait for anyone, particularly an individual who is dealing with the public. During the course of a regular business day, each member of the dining room staff has innumerable opportunities to deceive both the restaurant and the guest. By being, and appearing to be, totally honest in all aspects of the day-to-day routine, the professional server permits the guests to let down their guard a little, thereby allowing them to fully enjoy the time spent in the establishment.

KNOWLEDGE

The professional server must be prepared to answer any questions asked by guests, and to do so without continually making inquiries of busy fellow employees. A good server is a good salesperson—and good salespeople always know their product line. A good server would never ask a chef to leave something off a plate that was never there in the first place. It is essential for the server to take the time to become familiar with the menu and beverage list, to know their ingredients, their preparation time, their proper service temperature and their garnishes. This information can be helpful in dealing with special requests, such as substitutions for, or allergies to, certain ingredients. Awareness of the physical features of the dining room and kitchen can help the server to speedily solve any problems that arise.

The professional server's knowledge of the establishment's special services, hours of operation, history and background, and special facilities can be a real help to new customers and, consequently, is good for business. Community news, future and current events in the region, and local places of interest are all topics on which the professional server should be informed.

By reading books and periodicals about wines and foods, the professional server becomes more knowledgeable, and thereby reassuring in discussions with guests, and learns to appreciate the complexities of the culinary field. Winning the confidence of guests by being knowledgeable generates goodwill and increases tips. The successful

server takes the time, on and off the job, to work at being well informed by attending wine tastings and cooking demonstrations or by taking service classes.

LOYALTY

Professional servers make an effort to obey regulations and behave positively toward the firm for which they are working. Loyalty is also demonstrated by maintaining high standards of quality. Part of loyalty is a sense of proprietorship—of belonging to, and ownership of, one's job. Professional servers who see themselves as proprietors of their business work together for the common good, helping their fellow employees to consistently achieve the highest standards of service. Loyalty to the guest is also important to the development of repeat business.

Servers must never blame the kitchen for delays. The servers and the kitchen staff are both working to achieve the same goal: pleasing the guests. The server is the most visible representative of a unified effort to provide good service to the guest. Showing loyalty to, and working together with, all of the restaurant's staff presents the restaurant as a competent and confident entity dedicated to providing remarkable service to the guests.

PREPAREDNESS

The food-service hospitality industry is not a business for procrastinators. Always think ahead; it is the only sensible way to work. Have everything ready before service begins. Putting off work that can be done in advance, such as stocking side stands and folding napkins, usually means having to do it later when time should be spent on the customer. Having all required equipment on hand (a corkscrew, matches or a lighter, an extra pencil or pen, or a small flashlight to aid in reading the menu in dim light) helps to make service personnel more useful and more professional in the eyes of the guest.

PRODUCTIVITY

While grace and showmanship contribute to the making of a successful front-of-the-house staff member, the ability to get the job done is no less important. The best combination of these traits is a balanced one. One should enjoy a certain amount of performing, particularly if doing tableside cookery. At the same time, a server must be a real worker—one who always remembers that excellent service is the first goal.

Feelings You Want a Guest to Have and Ways to Evoke those Feelings

WELCOMED Offer a smile and a warm, genuine welcome at the front door, such as “Good evening. How may I help you?” Make sure the host’s desk faces the door, not the back wall.

PAMPERED Provide valet parking and someone to hold the door. Make sure guests’ coats and umbrellas are taken and stored securely. Pull out chairs for guests as you seat a party.

IMPORTANT Remember and use returning guests’ names, and greet them with “Welcome back.” Keep track of regular guests’ preferences and important dates.

COMFORTABLE Make sure the dining room’s heat, lighting levels, and music are appropriate and consistent. Ensure that the dining room is spotlessly clean and that furniture is attractive and in good repair.

ENTERTAINED Offer entertaining tableside preparations or live music, if appropriate. Know about all of the menu and beverage items you offer, especially novel items unique to your restaurant, and describe them in an enticing way.

RELAXED, AT EASE Make sure the reservations process is clear and efficient. Provide waiters with enough knowledge about menu items so that they can answer questions and make suggestions with confidence, and train them in how to read guests’ body language so that they can address needs that the guests may not feel comfortable expressing. Offer diners choosing wine the expert assistance of a sommelier, if possible.

SATIATED Know whether your establishment’s portion sizes are considered too big or too small, and help guests by offering guidance if they seem to be ordering too much or too little food.

APPRECIATED Ask guests for their opinions, and listen carefully to the responses.

The key to all of the elements in the list above is that each specific action can be learned. For example, you can train yourself to say “May I put you on hold?” and then wait for the caller to answer before doing so, so that the potential guest does not feel as if they have been dismissed or treated rudely. This is the essence of service—doing things that will lead to a guest’s satisfaction.

COMPOSURE

The front of the house is not a place for employees to indulge in unrestrained chattiness. Service personnel should only speak concerning business, limiting their conversations with fellow workers to the job at hand. Using a foreign language while speaking with other employees might give the guest the impression you are talking about them. Service staff should always speak in the language normally used in the restaurant’s location, although the ability to converse in the language of the guests

(or one appropriate to the cuisine of the restaurant) is an asset. Unless the customer initiates a conversation, the only subjects of discussion with guests should be the meal and its service. Speak in a clear voice with pleasant intonation, and never be loud. A good server is unobtrusive.

SENSITIVITY

The server must be sensitive to the needs of the guest, and adjust the pace of the meal accordingly. For many guests, a meal is a time to linger, engage in conversation, and eat slowly. For others, particularly at breakfast or lunch, a meal is only an interruption in a series of other events, and not an event in itself. Even the devoted gastronome occasionally has a train to catch or a theater engagement scheduled immediately after mealtime. It is important to be sensitive to the guest's desire for quick, efficient service in these cases. While the customer should never be rushed, the professional server can expedite the meal in pleasant ways, such as suggesting menu items with minimal preparation times that enable speedy service.

Waiters should know how long each dish on the menu takes to cook, and use that information when the guest is ordering. This same knowledge can come in handy when a guest sends back a dish that they didn't like, and the waiter needs to offer a replacement.

TACT

The ability to say or do the right thing at the right time without offense to others is important for anyone dealing with the public. The professional server takes care in correcting a misinformed guest and always steers the conversation into safe, agreeable channels.

PERSUASIVENESS

Even before the actual service of the meal begins, the professional server must "sell" the guest on what to order. Selling increases the check average. This, in turn, increases the restaurant's profits and the gratuities, as well. Subtly, a good server will steer guests away from choosing certain menu items (if the circumstances are appropriate) and induce them to order others. Incremental sales in areas such as drink specials, shared appetizers, or desserts not only enhance the guest's experience.

As the guests enter the dining room, the professional server can begin to determine whether to try selling them expensive items or extras, or whether to suggest items that are more of a bargain. It helps to be able to sense whether the guests are likely to want a simply prepared, standard dish or a more elaborate and unusual one. Guests may not be familiar with all of the menu items or how they may be combined for maximum enjoyment. Therefore the server is uniquely qualified to increase the guests' pleasure throughout their dining experience. If done properly, the guests will actually appreciate this selling.

WILLINGNESS

A willing server routinely does more than is expected—helping coworkers, carrying an umbrella for guests as they walk back to their car, volunteering valuable feedback to management—without being asked. Remarkable service exceeds expectations.

Good servers cultivate these behavioral traits, recognizing them as the essential tools of their trade. Good servers also know that they do not work alone; they are part of a team, which is an integrated staff of restaurant personnel.

Conclusion

HOSPITALITY WITHOUT SERVICE SKILLS to back it up is nothing more than a series of platitudes and pleasantries. Service without hospitality is impersonal and cold. When you use service skills to deliver on the promise of hospitality and hospitality skills to make service personal, you are practicing remarkable service.

While most of the details of this book involve developing the skills you must cultivate in order to provide a great dining experience for your guests, we must not lose sight of the importance of a remarkable server's behavior. Think of it in these terms: A musician studies the notes and chords on the page and develops the skills necessary to play them. But the sounds are not truly music until the musician puts some passion into playing notes. It is the same in table service; the skills of serving do not qualify as hospitality without a sincere desire to provide for the guests. While it is often argued that a musician must play for himself or herself in order to become an artist, a server's passion for remarkable service is developed by keeping the guest's satisfaction with the total dining experience as a goal.