

# F&B

by David Rothschild

## *Being Courteous* **COUNTS**

**W**hen we work with a restaurant staff, we always include a mini etiquette lesson as part of our course on table service. We call it, "Looking at Service from Both Sides of the Table." In this segment of the program, we explain and demonstrate the rules of dining in both buffet and table service situations. Most of our young participants are mesmerized; they never realized that there were really rules for dining. No one ever taught them. In many cases, they've rarely had meals together as a family. As a generation raised on fast food, some aren't even comfortable using utensils. Put a napkin in your lap? Huh?

We show them that there's a relationship between the rules of dining and the rules of proper service. Very often, we can almost see light bulbs go off over their heads because now it all makes sense! They not only understand how to serve properly, they know why things are done that way. We should be teaching our F&B staffs the etiquette — or common courtesies — of dining and service; the rules that govern socially acceptable behavior in every area of our restaurants.

It starts with reservations. Everyone who answers the phone should use a script. Start with an appropriate greeting, "Good afternoon, thank you for calling \_\_\_\_\_. My name is \_\_\_\_\_. How may I assist you?" Practice with your people. Make sure they're speaking with a "smile" in their voice and that they're accommodating and welcoming. Coach them in asking the appropriate questions: "Is this your first visit with us? Are you celebrating a special occasion? Do you need directions?" Be sure they ask the spelling of the guest's name and use it whenever they can during the conversation.

When guests arrive at our property (whether it's the entrance to the casino or the restaurant itself), are the doors being opened by staff? Does he or she concentrate on the guests and greet them cordially and respectfully — or continue a conversation with a fellow worker? Do greeters make eye contact and try to engage the guest in conversation or offer assistance in any way? When the guests reach the hostess stand, someone needs to be there to welcome them to the restaurant with enthusiasm, whether they have a reservation or not. Proper body language and verbiage are essential here as well.

Tables should be properly set. Silverware, glasses and plates need to be positioned on the table according to the rules of dining etiquette: utensils in the order of usage, bread and butter plates and glasses according to this "b&d" tip. Try it: Have service team members extend both hands in front of them, placing the tips of the forefingers and thumbs together and the other fingers of each hand held together and straight up. This forms what looks like a lowercase "b" with the left hand and a lowercase "d" with

the right. Voila! This reminds them that the B&B plate ("b") is set to the left of the place setting; glasses for drinks ("d") are set to the right.

Whenever possible, a member of the service team should be at the table to greet guests and assist in the seating. When we visited a casino buffet a couple of years ago, the hostess pulled out our chairs for us. Boy, were we impressed! It doesn't have to be a "fancy" restaurant for us to utilize our best manners. In fact, guests often take even more notice of these niceties when they're done in less-formal settings.

Guests should be greeted and orders taken using appropriate language. Please, no "you guys." We can do better than that. Teach the servers that there's a difference between "my pleasure" and "no problem." Between, "Is everything okay?" and "Is everything cooked to your satisfaction?" The verbiage doesn't have to be stuffy; it just needs to be language that's comfortable for the server, respectful to the guest and not overly informal. Staff use of inappropriate language is one of the most common complaints we get from F&B direc-



tors and managers and casino GMs. Using common phrases and slang is a hard habit for servers (especially young ones) to break. Do some role-playing. Make it a part of your preshift meeting. Your guests — particularly the seniors — will be pleasantly surprised at the change. And your servers will start monitoring and correcting their own language. We've had them come into class and tell us, "I almost said 'you guys' last night but I caught myself."

Servers also say a lot about themselves and their attitude through their body language. Inappropriate body language and postures at the table include: standing between guests with hands on the back of both chairs, leaning against walls, hands in pockets or arms across chest when taking the guests' orders.

One of the most difficult concepts for a trainer to teach is that of observing a guests' personal space. Mentor the younger servers to take charge of a table, but to also remember the basic rules of tableside behavior. Teach them how to break away politely from a long-winded conversation. Remind them that it's not their place to jump into the conversation being carried on at the table. During the election season a few years ago, a server I knew was fired for joining, with adverse opinions, the political discussion in progress. Complaints were made to management and he was let go.

Servicing the check is another point of the meal that can either be handled with finesse or make a poor final impression of the dining experience. The check needs to be ready for the guest before he's asked for it. We should always attempt to anticipate a guest's needs. If the guest

check is being paid in cash, we always return the change with a receipt. We never ask, "Do you need any change?" When the bill is paid with a credit card, we should use the guest's name (which we obtained from the card) when we return the card and voucher: "Thank you, Mr. \_\_\_\_\_. I hope you enjoyed everything this evening and that you will come see us again soon."

A trainee once told us that his policy was to treat every guest as though he were serving his grandparents. We couldn't say it better. Treat guests with the respect and courtesy you'd like to receive when you go out to dine. **NAC**

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