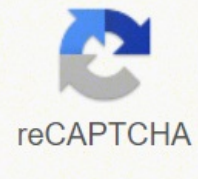




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# 10 steps of service in a restaurant

I know, I know, you're tired of hearing about customer service. It's cliché and you'd rather have your nipples twisted with a pair of pliers than discuss customer service again. However, in business we all know (or should know) that it is much easier and cheaper to retain existing customers than it is to find new ones, and the only way to get them to come back is great service. In other words, customer retention is everything to your success. If you haven't heard of The Rule of Three (straight out of the Jon Taffer playbook) in the bar/restaurant business, I'm going to give it to you right now, and I'd suggest you put your A.D.D in a headlock and pay attention because this rule is more necessary than cheese is to nachos. THE RULE OF THREE The first time someone visits your bar, there is less than a 50% chance they will return. The second time they visit, they now have a 50% chance of coming back. The third time they visit, there's a 70 percent chance they will come back a fourth time. And increasing guest frequency by just one visit per month increases your revenue by up to 12 percent. 12 PERCENT! Those are some serious and exciting stats, folks. Simply knowing this frequency pattern motivates the hell out of me to hustle like a gangster and get people coming back to my bar. That means you can't just leave it up to your servers to decide what it is they can or can't do out on the floor or you're going to have a bunch of stragglers hiding out all over the place, texting and smoking in the parking lot while your guests are swiveling their heads all over the place looking for a refill on their Coke. In other words, you need a system in place that they can easily follow and that you can easily enforce. And most importantly, the system should focus on one main theme: ATTENTIVENESS. How important is it? Consider this before we get to the 10 Steps: Cornell university did a study a few years ago in which they did a survey for people who went out to eat for approximately 90 minutes so they could determine what was most important to them during their experience. I'm not going to waste your day going over all the results. All you need to know is this one: There were three things that made up 40% of the guests OVERALL experience at the restaurant: 1) how quickly they were greeted at the door & when they sat down, 2) whether their drinks were kept refilled, and 3) how quickly they received their check when they were finished. That's it. That takes up like 2 minutes of their 90-minute experience, which means those three factors account for 2.2% of their time at the restaurant but made up 40% of how they viewed their OVERALL experience. Are you kidding me? What does that tell us? Attentiveness and timing is everything. If there is one thing that people hate in this day and age...I mean really HATE, it's to wait. And I get it. I can't stand to wait at a traffic light without going all road rage and tearing the review mirror off the windshield. So keep that in mind when you're creating your customer service system. We go over this extensively in the Restaurant Management Masterclass for those are serious about become an expert in bar and restaurant management and how to run a restaurant. WHAT YOUR GUESTS REALLY WANT Ok, moving on. What do your guests want, besides good food and drinks? They want a great experience. They expect it. And I know with those high expectations comes a few assholes that you'll have to deal with. I get it. I've served billions of them myself. But in their defense, they too have been working hard all day, possibly dealing with their own asshole clients, and they simply want to go out, forget their problems and be treated like royalty for a couple of hours. And so if they choose your place to do that, you should be flattered and take on the challenge of giving them that experience. Instead, what happens? They don't get greeted. They see servers texting or walking by without acknowledging them. They don't get treated well, and when their expectations aren't met, they don't come back, or worse they post an angry review on Yelp that you have to try and manage. The solution, of course, is getting back to the fundamentals of customer service, and the great thing about having a defined system in place is that it's easy for the staff to follow, and it's easy for you to enforce. So here we go. Use this as your Holy Bible to customer service, or customize it to make it your own. Either way, write it down so it's law and then enforce it because for everyone 1 person who will speak will of you via word-of-mouth or a Yelp review, 11 will trash you. People love to bitch and whine. It must bring them joy. 10-STEPS TO GREAT CUSTOMER SERVICE STEP 1: GREET THE GUESTS WITHIN 10 SECONDS OF WALKING THROUGH THE DOOR This is why places have hosts & hostesses and why Walmart has greeters. The point is to get them off on the right foot and make sure they feel welcome from the giddy-up. If you don't have a host, then a server or the bartender needs to acknowledge them, even if it's a wave from the bar and asking them to come on in. STEP 2: GREET THE GUESTS WITHIN 60 SECONDS OF SITTING DOWN Don't make them wonder if they're at Chipotle and are supposed to stand up and go order from a window somewhere. Get to them quickly. STEP 3: GET DRINKS DOWN WITHIN 2 MINUTES AFTER THEY'RE ORDERED Hopefully the bartenders are competent enough to multitask and make the drinks quickly so the guests aren't left waiting. Factors like these should be considered when creating a cocktail menu. Don't make every drink have 9 ingredients and muddled or blended. It puts a heavy burden on the bartenders. STEP 4: CHECK BACK WITH GUESTS WITHIN 2 MINUTES OF FOOD IS DROPPED By that time they will know what's missing from the table, whether they need ketchup or the wrong side for their burger came out. And someone ALWAYS needs ranch. God forbid we don't get our ranch. They should just keep it on the table like they do with salt and pepper. But don't make them sit there while their food is getting cold waiting for something they need. STEP 5: KEEP DRINKS REFILLED AT ALL TIMES We already talked about this one in the Cornell study so we know the importance of it. 40% baby. 40%. STEP 6: WORK AS A TEAM AND HELP OUT YOUR CO-WORKERS Teamwork wins championships and it makes the wheels of your business go round-and-round. Preach teamwork at all time. Hands in, hands out. Pick up dirty plates on the way to the kitchen, even if it's not your table. Run food on the way out. Keep drinks refilled. Garnish drinks at the bar while you're waiting for yours. Etc. etc. If your team will view the entire room as theirs instead of their own individual sections, you will dominate the customer service game. STEP 7: BUS TO THE WOOD This is probably my biggest pet peeve, when I see servers and bussers walk by tables that have napkins on the plates and they pretend it's someone from high school they don't want to talk to. Get it off the table when their done! And not just the big stuff. Grab plates, napkins, silverware, straws, empty bar glasses, crumbs...grab it all. Make it look nice so they can finish up with some class. In addition, when the table is completely cleared, it psychologically makes people feel like it's time to go. We don't want to rush them, but we don't want them chatting for another hour either. We need to turn and burn baby. STEP 8: OFFER COFFEE AND DESSERT Dessert makes everyone happy, so get the table bussed to the wood and then see if they want coffee and dessert. If you don't have coffee and dessert, why are you reading this step? Move on to Step 9. STEP 9: BRING THE CHECK WITHIN 60 OF THE REQUEST We know how important this is based on our earlier conversation, so get on your pony and get them their check. The only reason you might be delayed is if someone is in front of you at the POS. If you're busy, ask for help. Step 6, in case you forgot. STEP 10: SEE THEM OFF You'll notice I didn't say, SAY GOOD-BYE. Time permitting, servers should actually be at the table as the guests are leaving and see them off as if it's they're family boarding a Carnival Cruise and they won't see them for a month. Make them feel like their presence was important and that they are cared for. "Thanks for coming folks, it was great having you here. Get home safe. We hope to see you again. We really appreciate you coming in." And make it heart felt. Don't just yell across the room from the kitchen, "SEE YOU LATER!" Although I will say, that's better than not saying good-bye at all, it's just a bit lazy. That's all, folks. You'll notice I didn't include things like: smile, be friendly, know the menu, upsell. Those things are very important of course, but I want you to have a system that's easy for your staff to follow and then you can lace in those things once your system is in place. Go get it done. Thanks for being here. Cheers, until next time, Dave. The RB While ensuring every guest receives personalized attention is a critical step of fine dining service, delivering this level of hospitality can be difficult to scale. In a traditional fine dining experience, the maitre d' greets guests and takes reservations, recording preferences and requests that guests share during the booking process. While the maitre d' will prioritize honoring these requests, it's up to the servers to provide each guest with a personalized dining experience based on their preferences. However, the busy maitre d' realistically won't be able to brief every server about every party they'll be serving. This means servers may not have access to all the information they need to anticipate each guest's needs. Fortunately, technology is making it easier than ever to make every guest feel like a VIP. With the right tools, guest information isn't stuck with a gatekeeper, but is accessible to everyone on the team. That means you can provide more guests with memorable experiences, even with fewer employees on deck - which is especially important in light of ongoing labor shortages. The 10 Steps of Fine Dining Service & How Technology Can Enhance the Guest Experience Here's how to use technology to reimagine the steps of fine dining service to ensure every diner has a personalized experience that makes them feel special and keeps them coming back. 1. Managing Reservations The first step of fine dining service begins before guests step foot in the door. Technology is changing how restaurants manage bookings. Instead of relying only on phones for reservations, implement an online restaurant reservation platform. Guests can easily provide important details about what they're celebrating or dietary restrictions, so you'll know what kind of dining experience they want as soon as they walk through the door. Online reservations help your restaurant automatically collect better, more actionable guest data. What's more, you can use your reservations platform to automatically send guests an SMS to ask them to confirm the booking. Your staff will be free to focus on creating memorable guest experiences, instead of spending precious time on repetitive, operational tasks. Looking for a reservation management tool? Check out the guide below to understand the importance of owning your guest data through a direct reservation system. 2. Offering upgrades and exclusive experiences Diners tend to opt for fine dining restaurants when they have something to celebrate. Make these occasions even more special by pre-selling beverages, upgrades and experiences through the reservations process. You could let customers pre-order a birthday cake, purchase a bottle of champagne and roses to be waiting at the table for a Valentine's Day meal. 3. Greeting guests One of the most important steps of fine dining service is creating a great first impression, starting with how the host greets the guest. With a tool like SevenRooms' guest experience and retention platform, when a guest checks in at the host stand, the host can instantly know if they are a VIP, a first time visitor, or celebrating something important based on guest tags that the system gathers from reservations and past visits. Pro tip: The host isn't the only person who will know when an important guest arrives. SevenRooms lets you enable alerts on various devices - even an Apple Watch - so that key staff members, like the general manager, know when a VIP walks in. 4. Seating guests Making guests wait for their table at a fine dining restaurant is a no no! With an all-in-one reservation, seating and guest management platform, the host will know exactly which table to assign guests because of preferences noted on their reservation or guest profile. For first time visitors or walk-ins, this tool's seating algorithm tests more than ten thousand combinations per second to help you optimize seating assignments and maximize covers. 5. Presenting menus While digital menus became popular out of necessity because of the pandemic, 89% of restaurateurs plan to continue using them, according to Square's Future of Restaurants 2021 report. Online menus, facilitated by QR codes, continue to be a great option for fine dining restaurants, since many change their menus often. Updating one menu online is more efficient than reprinting dozens of menus every time a dish changes. Give digital menus a fine dining twist by spending time with guests to ensure they know how to use them. You can always offer paper menus to guests who would prefer them or don't have smartphones. And if you want to wow guests while increasing efficiency, introduce a mobile order and pay option that lets diners order meals and pay for them via card directly on their smartphones, at their convenience. 6. Taking orders Armed with customer data from a guest engagement platform, servers can meet every guest expectation and elevate the dining experience from their first interaction with diners. With easily accessible reservation notes and guest profiles, servers can personalize their greetings by wishing guests a happy anniversary or happy birthday. And, when reviewing the food and beverage menu with diners, they can make personalized recommendations. If, for example, a diner has a dairy allergy noted in their guest profile, the server assigned to that table can brush up on which dishes contain dairy before the party is seated. That way, the server can immediately - and knowledgeably - make recommendations, rather than checking with the kitchen after the guest asks about dairy-free options. 7. Conducting satisfaction checks One of the most important steps of fine dining service is asking guests how they're enjoying their meals. If something isn't right, correct it immediately and record the guest's feedback in their profile. Then, use this information to create a better experience when the guest comes back. For example, if a guest complains that your restaurant's béchamel sauce is too salty for their liking, you can make a note in their guest profile to halve the salt whenever that customer orders a dish with béchamel sauce. When your POS integrates with your table management software, your entire team will know where every table is on their journey at any given time. This insight helps with the pacing of service and satisfaction checks. And, when your table management platform tracks table spend in real time, management will know who the biggest spenders are, and can give them the extra attention they deserve. 8. Offering dessert When guests are finished with entrees, it's time to offer the dessert and coffee menu. Personalize this interaction by making recommendations based on reservation notes, guest profile tags, or, for first-time walk-in guests, recommending dessert that complements the entrees they just had. If a cake wasn't ordered in advance but you know the guest is celebrating a special occasion, you can offer a complimentary dessert or unique takeaway, like a printed menu with the date and occasion or a treat from your pastry chef, to enhance the dining experience. 9. Collecting payment Technology is changing the final step of fine dining service: settling the check. While fine dining establishments traditionally opt to present the check in a checkholder and manually process cash or card payments, many are offering pre-payment options and continuing pandemic-era contactless payments. By enabling meal pre-payment for prix fixe meals and other experiences through your reservations platform, your restaurant reduces the risk of no-shows. Plus, guests can focus entirely on enjoying themselves, instead of figuring out who is going to get the bill and how. Contactless payments are also convenient for guests because they don't have to wait for their server to present the check, come back to pick up the payment, run the card through the POS, and bring the card back. With contactless payments, diners pay and leave at their own pace. 10. Gathering guest feedback The fine dining experience isn't over after guests have left your restaurant. One of the most important steps of the fine dining service experience is collecting feedback after the meal. Guests may say they're enjoying themselves during a satisfaction check, but may actually be unhappy with something and find it easier to anonymously air their grievances on Yelp instead of dealing with confrontation in person. Use guest feedback software to automatically send customers surveys after a meal. Email surveys let you collect feedback privately and address it before it gets to a public review site, or before you lose a customer for good. Technology can also automate responses to survey results. For example, you can create a thank you email that gets sent to anyone who leaves a positive rating, and create an automated response for those who had bad experiences to buy you time before you respond personally. Guests will inevitably also write reviews on third-party platforms like Yelp and TripAdvisor. With a review aggregator you can see all guest feedback from review sites on one dashboard to better understand trends and adjust your menu and service to please customers. If, for example, multiple guests complain that they can't hear their friends over the music, you'll know to turn it down a notch. You can even associate third-party reviews with guest profiles. When a guest who's left a gushing review returns, you'll know immediately and can give them special treatment, such as by offering a glass of champagne on the house. Technology is Elevating the Steps of Fine Dining Service While the steps of fine dining service aren't changing, restaurateurs now have access to technology that's making it easier than ever to not only meet guest expectations, but surpass them. With a restaurant guest experience and retention platform like SevenRooms, you can provide personalized fine dining experiences at scale. Request a demo today.





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