

## Service That Sells! E-Newsletter Volume 10, No. 1 • January 5, 2009

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### This Year: Plan to Improve Sales (and Create a System to Make It Happen)

We run our pre-shift meetings and we tack up specials and we talk about high-profit items and in the end, we wonder “Why aren’t our sales increasing?” And—if we continue to “push” our servers—will we become the food-industry equivalent of a used car dealer?

This year, take a new look at the system behind your sales. Have your salespeople adopted a knee-jerk reaction to customers and their orders, a kind of “you want fries with that?” approach? And, if so, what have you done to encourage this? Do you typically make sales contests that focus on the most popular items... or the most profitable? Do you talk about profit margins or making guests happier?

Zig Ziglar, the sales guru, once said, “You can have everything in life that you want if you will just help enough other people get what they want.” Often in sales, the key is finding out what that other person wants. In the hospitality industry, it’s simple: to have a good time... good food, good service, good atmosphere.

The first step to giving people what they want is setting up a system that marries service with sales. Here are some tips to get started:

- **Get everyone on the same page (including you).** Good service happens when customers make good selections. Role-play repeatedly with your team to determine what guests are interested in, what they like, and make sure the chefs clearly communicate ingredients and preparation techniques. Make it mandatory for new employees to sample everything on the menu.
- **Set long-term goals.** Instead of insisting on a sales number per shift make sales goals that span a longer time frame. This shows servers that as they develop their skills of determining what guests want and fulfilling those needs, their sales will increase as well.
- **Award service AND sales.** If you truly want to communicate that the goal of your operation is to make customers happy—and suggestively selling customized items is one way to reach that goal—then you must evaluate service as well as sales. One way to measure this is to tally the percentages of tips a server received in the last month. Your best servers—and sellers—will consistently be at 20 percent. Acknowledging that—and rewarding it—is critical to that success.

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### A System for Success

Think of all the complaints you had about your operation last year. It may be sales were low or turnover high, but for most of us, we could whittle it down to one primary beef: most of our employees don’t do what we want or do it the way we want them to do it.

A knee-jerk reaction is to sigh and say, “You can’t get good help these days,” but the truth of the matter is we—as managers and leaders—may not be the good help. Consultant research shows that the primary reason that employees don’t perform in the ways we’d like is that they have no clear, day-to-day idea of what it is we want from them.

Make it a resolution to find out what’s working and what isn’t in your operation and then create a system that truly works for your operation. Here are some tips to get you started:

- **Determine the efficient order of tasks.** Most of us have a restaurant friend we meet up with at conferences. Invite one to visit your operation and observe how your team works. You'll find that at the end of the shift, your friend will have a lot of questions. Why is the produce on the top shelf? Why does the bartender need to ring up food with a server, instead of directly? Why is the timecard in a high-traffic area? Why can't the host return the check? Often, it takes an outsider for us to consider the reasoning behind the way "we've always done it."
- **Create accountability; avoid blame.** After you've pinpointed areas of improvement, involve your team in brainstorming operational solutions. You'll gather critical information and, by working on the plan together, you'll increase accountability for the changes suggested.
- **Establish communication vehicles.** As you implement operational changes, find ways that employees can provide feedback directly and indirectly. It's the only way you'll determine what's really working and what needs further refinement.

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## Training Tip

Before you commit valuable training dollars, be sure training is what you need. One restaurant operator, for example, wanted servers to suggest and sell a new, profitable addition to the dessert menu. The first instinct was to conduct a training session on suggestive selling, but a closer look at the situation revealed an obstacle.

When servers sold the dessert, they would be required to stop what they were doing and go to the pantry area to garnish the order with a sprig of mint and a dollop of whipped cream, which would cut into the time they needed to take care of other tables. Forced to choose between an increased check average and the probability of getting into the weeds, the servers would probably ignore this particular dessert.

If management hadn't taken a closer look, it might have wasted time and money holding a training session for an issue that didn't warrant training as its solution.

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