

## Whitepaper: 7 Tips for Building Restaurant Guest Loyalty

- 1. *The entrance experience is everything—and the entrance may happen long before you think it does in your restaurant.*** Try entering your restaurant *as your guests would: park where they park, enter where they enter—the experience may startle you.* A client of mine opened an upscale restaurant recently, and in “shopping” it for him I found that a pedestrian guest’s first impression came long before reaching the friendly host inside: It came from the chatter of pubescent valets at their stand outside the restaurant, one sneering profanely to the other on some unknown topic. An entrance like this is catastrophic because psychological studies show that guests remember the first and last minutes of a service encounter much more vividly -- and for much longer -- than all the rest of it. *Make sure that the first and final elements of your customer interactions are particularly well engineered, because they are going to stick in the customer’s memory.*
- 2. *Guests want to be remembered – and acknowledged – in a personal manner.*** If a particular couple hasn’t dined with you in some while, they want to know they were *missed*. As Danny Meyer puts it, a key goal of hospitality is a feeling of acknowledgement, of being remembered. So no matter the size – and pace—of your restaurant, work to achieve the (computer-assisted) effectiveness of a beloved hairstylist or doorman -- the kind who would know Joanne's preferences, the name of Joanne's pet, when Joanne was there last ... *Superb guest tracking systems and an attentive staff can create that same "at home" feeling in your guests.*
- 3. *Anticipate guest wishes rather than just responding to them.*** When a guest's wish is met *before the wish has been expressed*, it sends the message that you care about the guest as an individual This may seem like it would require magic, but it essentially requires it paying attention and knowing your customers. And it’s well worth the effort: *The cared-for feeling that comes to a guest when her wishes are anticipated is where you will generate the fiercest loyalty.*
- 4. *Decide on the language you will use in your restaurant—don’t leave it up to chance.*** Develop and rehearse a list of vocabulary words and expressions that fit your restaurant “brand” perfectly. For example, the expression “no worries” sounds appropriate to Applebees Carside To Go, but would be exceedingly off-brand coming from the Maitre D’ at The Four Seasons. So

decide: What type of language impression fits your brand? *Even more important: Search out and destroy any vocabulary words that could hurt customer feelings. For example, you should never baldly tell a corporate account “you owe us X.” (Try instead: “our records appear to show a balance of X...”)*

- 5. Expectations of speed have increased—be sure you are meeting them:** Modern customers expect speedier service than did any generation before them. (Not only speedier than their parents expected, but even than **they themselves expected this time last year!**) Some fair and well-reasoned articles recently have defended the length of time it takes to prepare good restaurant meals, and we all may be feeling a well-justified defensiveness on this point. Well, it’s time to get over ourselves. *In this age of iPhone and Droid, of Amazon.com and Yelp, you need to make the customer’s expectations your own. Or find another line of work.*
- 6. Filling positions in a service organization should be done with patience – don’t rush to fill a vacancy with someone unsuitable.** In a restaurant aiming for superb service, a single disagreeable or unresponsive team member can erode guest loyalty and team morale. That is why it can be better to leave a position unfilled rather than rushing to hire someone unsuitable. *More generally speaking, service excellence is most fully achieved once you become expert at recruiting, selecting, training, evaluating and reinforcing the efforts of service personnel.*
- 7. The exit experience is everything.** Even the slightest hint that a server is “over” one party and on to the next toward the end of a meal dampens the entire dining experience. As does an extended wait for cars. A surly coat-check retrieval experience. Or a thousand other similar details that can go wrong at the end of a meal. Yet, these moments are often the least thought-out parts of the service experience. *So, think them out. Role-play them. Rehearse them. Build in redundancies. Why is this crucial? See point 1.*