1.0 Introduction

The waiting profession was once the province of semi-skilled part time staff, the escalation of leisure and tourism in Australia has created a demand for a professional approach to training of service industry personnel.

The dictionary defines hospitality as... "providing a friendly reception.... the generous treatment of guests or strangers". Professional hospitality means providing these service ingredients under controlled commercial conditions, and this is where training is so important.

When thinking of a career in the hospitality industry trainees must understand that behind the show business glamour, there is a need for discipline and focus to ensure success.

Pre-requisites for food and beverage service staff in today’s hospitality industry include a:

- positive and generous attitude towards people
- genuine desire to please all customers
- pride in personal presentation and work
- commitment to shiftwork on weekends and evenings

Duties & Responsibilities

As a waiter you have duties and responsibilities that will vary from one establishment to another, depending on trading policies and the consequent standards of service of the establishment.

By this we mean that in a first class restaurant, say at an International hotel, you may be expected to:
• silver serve meals at the customer’s table
• do limited preparation of food at the table (Gueridon Service)
• be aware of how you fit into the staff structure and how to communicate through the proper channels in a larger organisation

Whereas in a small 50 seater unlicensed restaurant you may be expected to:

• answer the phone and take reservations
• greet and seat the customers
• take food orders
• serve both food and wine
• present the bill and collect payment
• farewell the customers
• reset the tables

Whereas in a busy cafe/ coffee shop, located in a shopping centre/ mall, you may be expected to:

• greet customers at the counter, taking their order, prepayment and issuing a table number on a stand for customers to display on the table which they select
• place the coffee order with the barista and the food order with the counter hand or in the kitchen
• prepare any juices or milk shakes
• deliver all items ordered to the correct table number
• clear, clean and re-set tables

Responsibilities

We would like to list the responsibilities of the professional waiter and then expand on them. This could also be used as a checklist to establish your current standard of performance or skills level and consequently highlight the areas you wish to develop.

• Personal grooming/hygiene
• Deportment
• Honesty
• Punctuality
• Loyalty to employer
• Ability to work within a team
• Positive attitude

Personal Grooming

As this is an "up front" industry, your personal appearance and presentation is very important. Particular attention to the following grooming and deportment components is essential to create a positive first impression:

• Hair
• Face
• Uniform

• Hands
• Shoes
• Stance
• Movement

Industry Dress Standards

Uniform - this is a "first impressions" industry and the first thing the customer notices, besides your smile or lack of it, is the state of your clothing/uniform.

Uniforms are used to let your customers identify you as a waiter and to save your own clothing.
The uniform you wear should be neat, in good repair and well pressed with no tell tale sloppiness such as gravy or egg yolk stains. To this end it is best to keep a spare shirt/ top for that unpredictable accident, or if you work for an agency, a spare change of uniform for the next job so that you arrive fresh and ready to "perform".

Don’t neglect your shoes. They are part of your uniform and it is very important that they are well heeled, clean, supportive and comfortable.

**Waiter’s Equipment**

- The sloppy waiter will use one of those cumbersome, butterfly corkscrews/ wine bottle openers and replace it back under the armpit after use. The professional waiter carries a small range of personal equipment including:
  - Professional corkscrew (waiter’s friend) that fits into a pocket.
  - Service spoon and fork (where appropriate for silver service)
  - Two retractable ballpoint pens (blue or black) Pens must be suitable to be presented to a customer (no chewed ends).
  - Service cloths (clean and pressed).
  - An order/docket book or a hand held electronic order pad

**Deportment/Posture**

The way professional waiters move through a restaurant gives the customer an idea how much pride they have in themselves and their job. A running waiter indicates to the customer that they are not coping with the situation in a calm manner or perhaps there is chaos in the kitchen and there may be a delay with food being served. Move quickly but do not run.

Keeping busy and alert to customers needs makes the time go faster, the boss happier and consequently the job more enjoyable. Your walk should be smooth, confident and strong. Waiters must look as though they have somewhere to go or something to do at all times. Perfect posture is useless if you can’t combine it with a **GENUINE smile**.

**Honesty**

- Because you will be dealing with money, and sometimes a lot of it, it is essential that you be completely honest. It may appear easy to pocket cash that belongs to the establishment but eventually you will be caught. This is stealing and you can be prosecuted for theft.
- It would be good to think that you could leave your own personal effects lying around and in some restaurants you can but where there are secure places available (lockers in a staff room etc) use them.

**Punctuality**

- You should always aim to be at least 10 minutes early for work. Employers were not born yesterday. They've heard them all before, that is the excuses. "There was a car accident. Honest!" "There are deadlocks on the door to the flat and last night I locked myself in... I have been screaming for ages for help!" You name it, your boss has heard them all and they get very tired of employees who are regularly late.
- Establish yourself as a reliable team member by always arriving ten minutes early and then when you are late, your reasons will be more readily accepted. Punctuality shows a positive attitude to your job and lets your team know that you are committed to share the workload.

**Loyalty to Your Employer**
Loyalty to your job means you have a sense of duty to your workplace and your customers. You express this by showing respect for your boss and the established enterprise ways to satisfy customers’ needs. The boss has logical reasons for doing things his way and "house rules" must be followed even if you have performed the tasks differently at previous workplaces.

Ability to Work within a Team

- You very quickly learn that you must work as a team. It is a job that does not have room for "prima donnas", that is, the people who will not do certain jobs or are not able to and refuse in a very definite way, eg. "I've been here for over a year so I don't have to fill salt and peppers or polish cutlery; that's for the new waiters."
- When the restaurant 'set up' is being done, you may work in a team or you may have to set up your own section.
- Especially during service, you should keep an eye on how things are going in the next section and give help if required. Always ask your mate if you can help before doing so.
- Do not ignore a customer if they are not in your section. Take their inquiry and pass it on to the waiter whose section they are in. If you carry out the request, tell the waiter so they know what has happened.

2.0 Food Service Styles

- The Boy’s Scouts’ motto - "BE PREPARED" is really also the waiter’s motto. Preparation or mise-en-place is the secret to professional food and beverage service.
- As a waiter in Australia you could work in a local coffee shop or cafe, a five star hotel in the city, on a cruise ship, at a vineyard restaurant in the Hunter Valley or the function rooms of a Perth casino.
- The style of food service and hence the waiting skills required would be different for each establishment. The level of room set-up and general preparation would also change as these establishments target different customer types, snacking, eating or dining out for different purposes.
- When the sideboard or waiter’s work area is prepared, the restaurant or function tables carefully set, the menus adjusted and daily specials understood and remembered, the bread rolls and butter at the ready, the espresso machine turned on, the attitude adjusted and the uniform is clean and correct, you are ready for service.
- Of course there is much more to be done than the duties mentioned. Most importantly, a genuinely warm, helpful disposition and smile, combined with the food and beverage product knowledge in your head, will ensure your customers come back time and time again.

Styles of Food Service

The type of service offered by a restaurant, club, motel or hotel will basically depend upon the type of customer or market that they are trying to attract.

For example

1. A small suburban BYO restaurant may offer plate service from a set menu with limited choice, to cater for a high turnover of covers in the minimum amount of time, with the waiter serving food and wine to about 50 customers (single handed service).
2. A small Coffee Shop/Cafe may have a system where customers order and pre-pay at the counter and take a number which allows the waiter to locate them and deliver the food, drinks and cutlery. Alternately they
could offer a la carte service where the waiter takes the order at the table, delivers food and drinks, completes the customer bill and collects payment.

3. A large club or hotel may offer a range of outlets with a different type of service in each: A snack bar/bistro with self service of entrees and desserts and a flashing number or microphone announcement for the main meal. Waiters will be used mainly for table clearing, resetting and drink service.

Cook your own steak/meat with self service salads. Waiters will again be used mainly for table clearing, resetting and drink service.

- A restaurant with plate service where waiters service both food and wine
- A dining room offering semi or full silver service with separate wine waiters.

4. An International Standard Hotel may offer a range of outlets with a different type of service in each:

- Buffet breakfast in a restaurant or function room with waiters clearing and resetting tables and replenishing the buffet.
- Coffee shop/medium priced restaurant offering plate service and waiters handling both food and wine (single handed service).
- Fine dining a la carte restaurant with waiters working in teams of two or three and a separate wine waiter.
- Function rooms with set menus served by either plate or semi-silver service, depending on how much the customer wants to spend.
- Room Service: The majority of business generated in Australian room service comes from breakfast. Breakfast is usually pre-ordered the night before from a printed order form.

Serve and Clear on the Customers Right Hand Side

- It is industry standard that all meals be served and cleared to the customer's right hand side. Service on the customers' right hand side, with the bulk of the plates held in the left hand allows the waiter to face the customer, look where they are going and move forward in a clock wise direction, around the table.
- Traditionally service may have been "serve to the left and clear from the right", but as the majority of customers are right handed and right side oriented, they expect food and beverage to be served on their right side. Right sided service causes the least disruption to customer conversation as they soon pick up that you are only going to approach them from one side.

However, there is an exception to right sided service:

- The exception is silver service. With silver service, food is served by spoon and fork from a platter onto the customer's plate from the left hand side of the customer, which is easier for the majority of waiters who are right handed.
- It is most important for you to know the style of service that is used in the place you are working, as it will dictate the setting up and preparation procedures

Plate Service

Plate service is the simplest form of service with all the food items being placed on the plate by the kitchen staff and the waiter delivers the meal in its entirety to the customer. The waiter does not have any say in the portion size or presentation of the meal. The waiter's job is simply to place the plate in front of the customer from the customer’s right hand side. The main item on the plate must be placed closest to the
customer for ease of cutting and eating. If you think of items placed on the plate like the face of a clock the main item (chicken, meat or fish) is placed at 6.00 o'clock on the plate by the chef and should be placed by the waiter in the centre of the customers cover, also at 6.00 o'clock.

**Semi Silver Service**

- Semi Silver is an 'individual' service in an a la carte or function situation. The waiter should ask each customer which vegetables they would prefer and/or how much sauce they require.
- The main item (eg meat, poultry or fish) is plated, garnished and decorated by the kitchen staff and delivered to the table with the vegetables in a separate container. The waiter then asks the customer which vegetables they would like, serving the vegetables with a fork and spoon, from the customer's left hand side (wherever possible).
- The waiter must be aware of the amount of vegetables for each customer (portion size) and presentation on the plate. There should be a flow of colours (not a clash) eg. You need to place green beans in the centre to break up yellow, orange or white (e.g. cauliflower and potatoes).
- Any accompaniments (e.g. kitchen prepared sauces, mustard, chutney, black pepper) should be offered as well. Semi-silver service is an excellent way for waiters to develop skills and make the transition from plate service to full silver service. A variation on semi-silver service is where the vegetables and salad are placed on the table for customers to help themselves.

**Buffet/Self Service**

- Buffet/ Self Service is where a range of food is presented on platters or kept hot in chafing dishes for the customer to make their own selection. It may be a serviced buffet, where the expensive items, a whole turkey, a leg of ham or fresh seafood are served/ carved by the waiter or chef, with the customers helping themselves to the less expensive items.
- Buffet breakfast is a feature of many hotels and resorts. Buffet/Self Service is widely used in function situations and is ideal for efficiently serving large numbers of customers very quickly. Some hotel /motel restaurants offer a breakfast buffet, which converts to a lunch /dinner buffet later in the day.

**Preparing for Service**

*Mise-en-place* - simply means all the pre-preparation jobs you have to do in the restaurant/dining and related service areas to allow service to flow smoothly and efficiently. The setting up will be in line with the decor/atmosphere of the operation.

In an intimate 40 seat BYO (Bring You Own Liquor) you may have to:

- Polish the cutlery by dipping it in hot water and then briskly rubbing with a clean dry cloth
- Polish the side plates by rubbing, giving the top a final wipe with a clean cloth as you place them on the table.
- Ensure the glassware is sparkling clean by holding the bowl of the glass over steaming water until the glass is fogged. Remove and dry carefully with a clean glass cloth. Make sure the stem and the base of the glass are clean.
- Position tables according to bookings. Set tables ensuring that cutlery and crockery are placed correctly and that the candles are lit or flowers are in place.
- Adjust the music level/volume.
- Adjust the air conditioning
- Check the toilets for paper, hand towels and soap.

**Tableware**
Before you can "set up" your restaurant/ dining area, you must be familiar with all the items which are used to set the table. The categories of tableware include:

Linen

- Linen is a collective term for tablecloths, overlays, flouncing and napkins. There are different sized tablecloths and you must know how to identify the suitable ones for the table you are setting or resetting. You must ensure that the cloths are clean on the table and know when to change them during service.

- Where table linen is not used, paper products maybe used to cut laundry costs. Some establishments print their menu or special promotions on a paper placemat that customers can take home. Many cafe/bistros use white butcher's paper, some just clean and polish the tabletop with no covering at all.

Tablecloths, Overlays and Waiter's Service Cloth

- Tablecloths these days are generally made from a polyester cotton fabric as they launder well and come in a wide range of colours. Damask and linen are rarely used as they are expensive to buy, maintain, launder and press.

- Overlays, gypsies or slip-cloths are all terms for a smaller tablecloth laid over the main cloth to cover stains or make the setting look more attractive. Overlays also keep laundry costs down as they are about half to one third the size of a standard cloth. They can be a different colour or fabric to the main cloth to add to the overall decor. For example red and white checked overlays on white cloths in an Italian restaurant.

- A waiter's service cloth is a white square cloth (about 40 x 40 cm) used for service. The waiter's service cloth should be carried over the left forearm when not in use to hold hot plates, protect your hands from the heat of a hot platter, used for crumbing down tables or used in the wine opening ritual. Waiters must not use their service cloths for cleaning and they must not use customer's serviettes as service cloths (for cleaning).

- Some restaurants use different colours to distinguish each use Eg. White for customers' serviettes, grey for waiter's service cloths and yellow or blue Chux disposables for cleaning cloths.

Glassware

The style of glassware used in restaurants varies greatly. It is important to know which glass is used for which drinks. Get into the habit of handling all glassware by the stem or base (for serving, clearing and cleaning). Never allow your fingers to touch the rim of the glass where the customer places their lips.

Polishing Glassware

- Ensure that glassware is clean by polishing the wine glasses before they are placed on tables. To polish the glass, hold the bowl over steaming water and when it is fogged, remove and rub dry with a clean, dry cloth or tea towel. Never use a customer's napkin. When the glass is clean, always hold it by the stem to place in the appropriate position on the table. You can also polish glasses directly from the glass washing machine, while they are still hot.

- *Clean polished glasses are placed on to the table either from a tray when customers are in the room or by hand if there are no customers. When carrying glassware on a tray hold the tray in the palm of your hand at slightly above waist height, and in front of your body.*

Cutlery
• Cutlery is a collective term for eating utensils such as knives, forks, spoons etc. This term now includes flatware but originally referred to only items with cutting edges such as knives or grape-scissors.

• Flatware was the term for forks and spoons.

• Hollowware was the term for teapots, milk jugs and plates. As "linen" is used as a collective term for tablecloths, overlays and napkins, "silver" is used by some in the industry as the collective term for cutlery, flatware and hollowware (even when made from stainless steel).

• Most items referred to as silver are really EPNS, which stands for Electro Plated Nickel Silver. Check the stamp on the back of the item, which can indicate EPNS or more expensive silver.

Table Setting

The following guide is a basic set of rules for setting the table. It can be used for setting a formal as well as an informal one.

• An attractive table adds to the enjoyment of a meal. To set the table, you need a “place setting” for each person. A place setting is all the items each person needs for eating. This includes the following appointments (any item used to set a table):
  • Dinnerware (plates, cups, saucers, and bowls);
  • Glassware (glasses of all shapes and sizes);
  • Flatware (forks, spoons, and knives);
  • Napkins;
  • Centrepiece; and
  • Placemats or tablecloths, optional.
• How a table should be set is determined in a large part by the serving style.

The following page demonstrates some generic rules for setting a table

1. The flatware, plate, and napkin should be one inch from the edge of the table.
2. The plate is always in the centre of the place setting.
3. The dinner fork is placed at the left of the plate.
4. If a salad fork is used, it is placed to the left of the dinner fork.
5. The napkin is placed to the left of the fork, with the fold on the left. It can also go under a fork, or on top of the plate.
6. The knife is placed to the right of the plate with the sharp blade facing in towards the plate.
7. The teaspoon is placed to the right of the knife.
8. If a soup spoon is needed, it is placed to the right of the teaspoon.
9. The soup bowl may be placed on the dinner plate.
10. The drinking glass is placed at the tip of the knife.
11. If a salad plate is used, place it just above the tip of the fork.
12. The cup or mug is placed to the top right of the spoons.

Restaurant Set-Up Floor Plan
The advantage of using a standard floor plan in conjunction with the reservations diary is that you know which tables are reserved, which tables are available to walk-ins and where your customers are seated. Staff also know how the room is to be re-set back to the standard floor plan at the end of a meal period.

Restaurants, cafes, coffee shops, function rooms and dining areas are set up to different standard floor plans which have been developed from experience by management to suit:

- The standard of service/type of establishment
- The number of customers who can comfortably/legally fit into the room
- A safe work flow
- A variety of table sizes (2, 4, and 6) to accommodate different customer needs.
- Positioning of tables with regard to location of the entrance, focal points in the room eg. View or dance floor, fire/emergency exits and service doors to the kitchen or pantry.

**Basic Covers a la Carte Cover**

- A la carte literally translates from French as 'from the card. Customers select from a range of items on an a la carte menu which are individually priced and cooked to order. Hence when setting up the dining area for an a la carte menu we don't know in advance what the customer may order.
- Therefore a basic cover is used. This basic cover consists of a main course knife and fork, a side plate, side knife and a suitable glass (a white wine glass is used here because the customer is more likely to order white wine for the first course, however some places use only one size of wine glass for both red and white wine) and a folded napkin completes the setting.

**Cafe Cover**

With the more casual approach to dining in cafes, coffee shops and bistros a simpler cover is generally used. In this example a serviette is placed to the left of the cover; with a main course knife and fork on top. Salt and pepper, sugar bowl and menu are positioned in the centre of the table placemats are another alternative and the knife and forks could be pre-wrapped and brought to the table with the customer's meal or collected by the customer if they order and prepay at the cash register.

**Table d’hôte Cover**

- Table d’hôte translated literally from the French means 'the proprietor's table'.
- This is a set menu with little or no choice at a set price. A table d’hôte cover is used when the menu is known or pre-set. In this case, the menu to be served is a soup, fish entree, a main course (which needs cutting) and a sweet served on a flat plate and which needs to be broken. An example menu to suit this cover could be:
- The four wine glasses shown are in a diamond formation. The first glass above the soup spoon could be used for sherry to complement the soup; the glass above the fish knife is for white wine to go with the fish; to the right of the white wine glass is a larger, similarly shaped glass to be used for red wine to compliment the beef and the last glass is a champagne flute used for sparkling wine or champagne served with the panna cotta.
- As each course is finished and the used plate and cutlery is removed, the empty accompanying wine glass should also be removed.

**3.0 Service Procedures**

"The restaurant you like is the restaurant that likes you the best."
• A very truthful statement. You can hardly like a restaurant where the staff sneer at you, where you get pushed into the bar despite your reservation, (which they have confirmed ten times) and when you finally make it to the table, even the simplest enquiry is met with a sneer.

• Sure, none of us want a waiter telling us their life story or explaining at length which side of the hill the mushrooms came from.

• We do want, however, to be greeted as if our custom is appreciated and then to be looked after by knowledgeable, efficient, friendly staff whose main aim in life appears to be to ensure that our dining experience is a pleasant one.

• Above all, let the front of house team not forget that the restaurant is an important part of the SERVICE industry and that service is certainly the key word. Of course, the customer cannot always be right and it is our job to entice, cajole (but never bully) them into new experiences or tastes. We must remember that our customers are in essence the stars of the show and, unless they enjoy their dining experience, they will simply move on.

Overview of Waiting Skills

• The job of a waiter or waitress has many facets and may vary greatly from one establishment to the next. It not only requires good physical skills and high energy levels but also a positive mental attitude. There is no time to lose focus if you want to be a great waiter; one hundred and ten percent concentration is required.

• When you work as a waiter you will be expected to do many jobs other than just serving food and wine.

• To allow service to flow efficiently and easily, you will need to prepare the coffee shop, bistro, restaurant or dining room and check that the sideboard, waiter’s station or espresso coffee preparation work area is ready for service.

• If you don’t prepare in advance you will be chasing your tail for the entire meal period trying to catch up and not having time to anticipate your customers’ needs to give good customer service.

• In more formal establishments, you may help the headwaiter to greet and seat the customers that are allocated to your section, present and explain the menu, make menu and wine suggestions to help customers decide and eventually take the orders.

• In the local shopping centre cafe, you may have to greet the customer at the counter, take their order and payment and give them a table number so that you can find them when the snacks and coffees are ready.

• In all waiting situations the importance of effective communication and knowing the product (coffee, snacks, milkshakes, food and wine, including the daily specials of soup, fish or vegetables) cannot be overstated. This is "must know" basic information that waiters can’t do their job without, yet when you dine out how many times you have asked a question about a menu item and the waiter replies "I will just have to check with the kitchen."

• Regardless of the type of establishment, a clear, precisely written docket or electronic order must reach the dispensing point (kitchen or bar or barista) if the customer is to receive what they ordered.

Reservations

• Some restaurants don’t take bookings and others do.

• Restaurants with a NO BOOKINGS policy rely on a high turnover of tables in order to provide a market driven standard of food, service and price to maintain profitability.
In larger and more formal establishments, the Maitre d' Hotel, Headwaiter or Restaurant Supervisor generally keeps a reservations diary.

Reservations - How To Take Them!

When you are new to an establishment and the manager asks you to take telephone reservations, you need to make a checklist of answers to questions you could be asked over the phone including:

- **What type of food/menu do you have?**
- **Are you BYO?**
- **Do you take cheques or credit cards?**
- You will get questions about children's meals, hours of opening, function facilities, how to find the restaurant, parking, air conditioning, window tables, wheelchair access and a hundred others.
- If the checklist is kept by the phone it makes it easy for all new staff to answer customer questions and take reservations.

Bookings/Reservations help with:

- **Planning the table layout for ease of service and customer convenience/noise levels of privacy** (e.g. placing large tables of 8 to 10 near the kitchen or tables of two in a quiet corner etc.)
- **Setting staff levels** (e.g. one waiter for 20 people serving both food and wine in a mid price BYO. If you have 60 bookings, the manager may roster 2 waiters.
- **Staggering customer arrival times** (e.g. you don't want the 60 bookings in the above example all arriving at 7:30pm. The kitchen would not cope - let alone the waiting staff. It would be better if they arrived staggered in the following way:
  - 15 at 7:00pm 20 at 7.30pm 15 at 8:00pm 10 at 8.30pm

Identifying busy periods which allows the kitchen to order more economically and not run out of popular menu items (e.g. if Tempura Prawns is your most popular entree and you have 75 people booked over two sittings on Friday night, and Saturday night looks busy as well, the chef will need to ensure enough prawns have been ordered)

There are three key aspects to taking a telephone reservation:

1. **Greeting the customer with a smile in your voice.**
   - Answer the call as promptly as possible; within four rings is ideal. If you take longer, apologise for the delay.
   - Greet the caller with the "house rule" method of address e.g. "Good Afternoon, the River Restaurant, Charles speaking, how may I help you?"
   - Put a smile in your voice and speak clearly and slowly, not like a recorded message.

2. **Write down the important details**
   - Listen carefully and note the important details directly into the reservation diary:
   - Number of covers (number of customers)
   - Name of person making the booking; spell the name back to the customer if unsure.
   - Date and time (remember you must try to stagger the bookings).
• The management may limit the number of covers to 20 at 7:00pm, 30 at 7:30pm and 20 at 8:00pm. Be sure to follow the rules. Always state the day of the week with the date and time because when customers book weeks ahead they could become confused or are looking at the wrong month on their calendar.

• Note any special requirements that the customer may have. These can be many and varied but may include a birthday cake, the need to be in and out quickly to get to the theatre or a bottle of champagne on the table when they arrive etc.

• Contact telephone number; most restaurants require you to take a number so the customer can be contacted to confirm large bookings. The house rule may be that tables of eight or more are telephoned the day before the booking to confirm.

• **You should never miss an opportunity to sell while chatting to the customer.** Tell them about your "special" seafood platter or how you could supply a birthday or anniversary cake with the customer’s name piped on. It is probably best to double check the spelling of a name required on a cake, whilst on the phone or by fax or email. Little extras like this are profitable to the management. Your ability to "soft sell" extras will make you an asset to the employer.

3. **Concluding the call**

• Finish your call by summarising the booking and repeating it back to the customer.

• E.g. "That’s a table for 5 at 7:30pm on Wednesday the 28th of July with wheelchair access. We look forward to seeing you then. Thanks for calling and good afternoon Mr Smith."

• Always let the customer hang up first.

**Greeting the Customer**

• The hospitality industry is an "up front" business. Customers are strongly influenced by FIRST IMPRESSIONS. The condescending, arrogant, abrupt, rude or non-acknowledging waiter puts people offside (immediately) and no amount of excellent food and wine will change that negative first impression. You must put yourself into the customer’s position and treat them the way you would wish to be treated when dining out.

• Greet the customer with a genuine smile and a welcoming tone in your voice using their name if you know it.

• Have you ever been met by a rude waiter or hostess with the abrupt greeting: "Do you have a reservation?" Never assume that everyone who comes into the restaurant wants a meal. They could be enquiring about the menu, party bookings or just looking.

• We feel that the most positive way to greet a customer is with a smile and "May I Help You?" Use the common sense approach and modify this according to the situation or the formality of establishment by preceding that enquiry with "Good evening, may I help you or "Hello, may I help you?" It must be said with a sincere smile.

• If you can’t get to the customer immediately, acknowledge their arrival by saying, "Hello, I’ll be with you just as soon as I can."

• When the prospective customer arrives, their reservation must be confirmed. They should be escorted to their allocated or reserved table by the headwaiter (or in some cases by you the waiter).

• If a restaurant has a bar area, customers may wish to have a pre-meal drink and take some time to look at the menu. (Never miss an opportunity to sell to the customer).
In either case, the waiter needs to be able to anticipate a customer’s needs and wishes – e.g. Are they in a hurry? Do they want to go to the theatre, catch a plane or are they with you for a long leisurely meal? You must enquire and react accordingly to meet and exceed their expectations.

When greeting customers in a coffee shop or cafe, the greeting can be more relaxed but the genuine smile and welcoming tone in your voice must be maintained.

Seating the Customer

- Should chairs be pulled out for all of the customers or just for the ladies? It really depends on the situation. Some customers prefer to seat themselves whilst others will want to be seated.
- A waiter must use common sense and anticipate the customer's needs for assistance with seating.
- As customers are seated it's a good idea to offer a pre-meal drink. If you are working single handed, (serving both food and wine) you will have to suggestively sell pre-meal drinks.
- In large establishments, the drink waiter will take the beverage orders, collect requirements from the dispense bar and serve to customers. The tea and coffee orders are generally taken and delivered by the food waiter.
- Rather than just saying: "What would you like a drink?" entice the customer by saying: "Our special cocktail tonight is based on vanilla flavoured vodka or the barman does a great Martini." "We have Hahn on tap or a range of local and imported bottled beers." Or "Perhaps you would like a glass of house white while you look over the menu and wine list?"

Presenting the Menu

Menu’s come in various formats to suit the style and standard of service of the establishment:

- **Placemat or souvenir style** - for the customer to use in the restaurant and then take with them, which helps with future publicity
- **Blackboard** - handwritten and/or coloured artwork
- **Folded or Simple Card** - handwritten, printed or photocopied and may be laminated.
- **Pages within a cover** - usually printed pages with a laminated, vinyl or leather cover.

Hold on to the menu at the top to leave the base free for the customer to grip.

- The format of the menu will therefore dictate how it can be presented to the customer. With a blackboard menu several copies are usually placed strategically around the room so most customers can see them; where this is not possible, a moveable board should be available. Placemats or souvenir style menus usually become part of the customer’s place setting / cover.
- All other menus should be presented during the seating process, after the napkin is placed on the customers lap.

Pre-meal Drinks: Drinks or water should be offered as soon as possible after the customers have been comfortably seated. Suggestive selling, finding out customer preferences and offering alternatives are all important skills to be mastered around the house rules.

Water Service: In NSW it is now mandatory, under the Responsible Service of Alcohol Regulations, to have free drinking water available for customers at all times that liquor is sold or supplied in licensed venues (hotels, resorts, clubs, function centres and restaurants). Check out the regulations in your State/Territory. Visitors from Japan and America will expect iced water to be served without having to ask for it.

Suggestive Selling/Order Making
• In most establishments the waiters are told by the headwaiter or chef that certain dishes must be sold. It may be that a particular fish or cut of meat is cheap at the market and the chef has bought a large quantity to maximise profit. **Waiters need to sell these "must move" items to help keep the business going and to keep their jobs viable.**

• Your customer may well ask what is good on the menu or what do you recommend. Rather than say, "everything is very good" try to find their preferences by asking "Do you like fish or chicken" and then suggest a dish that is based on their likes. Very subtly, you can suggest one of the "must move" dishes if it falls into the customer's preferences.

• Suggestive selling is the process of attractively describing dishes on the menu (or drinks and wines) to persuade the customer to buy a product or service which they may not have otherwise bought. This type of selling is also called UP SELLING or ORDER MAKING rather than order taking, where the waiter offers alternatives to the customer to increase the average spending (average check).

**The benefits of suggestive selling include:**

• The customer feels pampered when you take time to describe products and offer alternatives. Not just directing them to the highest priced item on the list, but asking about their likes and preferences.

• The boss likes it when you sell extras as it raises the average check (customer spending). By raising the average spending, there is a direct benefit to you in that most customers tip on about 10 % of the total bill.

• You have the satisfaction of knowing that you have given that little bit extra (without being pushy) to keep your customer satisfied and coming back to you as a regular.

• By recommending certain dishes, you may be helping the chef use up ingredients that otherwise might be wasted and this will result in loss of revenue and profits. It is from those profits you get your wages.

**Order Taking**

• Order taking involves accurately communicating the customers order (including cooking instructions and special requirements) to the kitchen and bar. This is achieved either by manually writing down the order (with the correct abbreviations and sequence required by the chef) or entering the order electronically which prints out copies in the kitchen or bar.

• Order MAKING involves all of the above but also can "make the customer's day" by the waiter taking an interest in the customer's individual preferences and encouraging extras such as salads, bread or an entree.

• **When is it appropriate to take the customer's order?** "Body Language" plays a big part in learning to read your customer, so watch for their signals. A raised finger, a closed menu, a wave, an enquiring look, a fidget, a cough, a nod are all indications that your customer is ready to order. Folded arms can mean they are in an apprehensive state because they don't know what's happening (perhaps it's their first time in your restaurant or even their first time eating out) ...they need your guidance. And then again, folded arms can mean "when the hell is the waiter coming?"

• **How to Take an Order:** To gain attention and take control, the waiter should stand at the head of the table. Distribute your weight evenly on both feet, keep your back straight and maintain direct eye contact with the customer. In noisy restaurants it may be necessary to lean down over the customers right hand shoulder to get a clear order.

**Traditional Sequence of Order Taking**
• Where there is a host/hostess (person paying the bill or someone who is organising/ordering the food for their guests) it is traditional to take the host's order last.

• The Headwaiter will usually know from the reservation diary when there is a Host who will pay for the entire meal and expect formal "Host Treatment".

Traditionally, once you have established who the host is, you take the order in the following sequence:

- Woman to the immediate right of the host
- All women in a clockwise direction from the host
- All men in a clockwise direction from the host
- The host

**Informal Sequence:** "When you don't have an obvious host/hostess, you will need to nominate one in your mind to use as a focal point for order taking and service of food/drinks. For example two or three couples going out for a meal are more likely to share the bill equally, so there is no definite host. Nominate the most dominant, noisy, visually memorable person as the host and take your orders by pivoting your service from this person. To save time in the order taking process, abbreviations or shorthand is used.

**Docket Writing - Small, Relaxed, Casual Establishment**

• A traditional docket system the waiter uses a simple duplicate. The docket book should contain the restaurant name, address and telephone number can be stamped on the top of each page.

• With this system, the starting course and main course orders are taken first, with the original copy becoming the customer's bill which is retained in the book or stored in a central position; the duplicate goes to the kitchen as the order.

• The customer's copy/bill is kept in the book so that further items can be added as they are ordered; therefore the docket book/storage area should be close to one of the service areas i.e. either the bar or the kitchen for cashiering purposes.

**Placing the Order in the Kitchen**

• With a manual system, when the waiter’s docket is complete, the kitchen must get a copy to prepare the food. In some places, the original goes to the kitchen with the duplicate going to the cashier, and the waiter keeping the triplicate.

• Whatever system is used, the docket should be placed at a delivery point where the chef can get preparation started and move the docket along to the mains chef after the entrees have been started.

**Changing the Cover to Suit the Customer's Order**

• Now that the kitchen knows what is needed for the table, the customers are served bread rolls, plain bread, herb or garlic bread (follow the house policy) and drinks/wine.

• To change the cover from the basic a la carte to suit what the customers have ordered, place the appropriate polished cutlery on a service plate (usually a main course plate with a service cloth to minimise the clanging cutlery noise) and approach the table.

• When seeing the covers for a number of courses, the customer should know to use the cutlery working from the outside towards the centre. You may find customers who are unaware of this tradition and may inadvertently use the wrong cutlery. When you clear the appropriate plate, ensure that you replace the misused cutlery without fuss. Avoid embarrassing the inexperienced diner. If you need to reach across in front of the customer to place cutlery remember to say "excuse me":
Who gets served first? All service at the table should flow from the host. Before the food is ready to be served, it is important to know who you want to serve first; this is called the sequence of service.

What is a host? There are very few hosts or hostesses in the traditional sense of the word. A host or hostess is that person who pays the bill and who organises and orders all the food for his/her guests. In this situation, all the guests are given menus without prices.

- Traditionally, where there is a host, he is served last with the woman on his right served first and then all women in a clockwise direction from the host; and then all men are served in a clockwise direction from the host.

- Where no host or hostess is obvious, you will have to nominate one, in your mind, so you can pivot your service from that person. For example, two couples going out for dinner are more likely to share the bill equally, so there is no definite host. In more relaxed situations, you do not have to serve the women first, so you can serve from the most convenient starting point, clockwise in an unbroken circle regardless of sex.

Sequence of Service: In a formal situation the sequence of service would be FIRST, SECOND, THIRD AND LAST while an informal situation where YOU have nominated the host 1ST, 2ND, 3RD and HOST. Food service is carried out in a clockwise direction while beverage service is completed anti-clockwise. Food service has precedence over beverage service because hot food goes cold very quickly. In other words where there are designated separate food and wine/drink waiters, the drink waiters need to get out of the way to allow food to be served quickly.

How to Hold Plates

- The type of food items served on the plate will dictate which plate grip to use. For example if you are working at a function serving a cold entree, which is stable and will not move about the plate, you could carry four plates; however in an a la carte situation with customers ordering different entrees you may be restricted to carrying two or three plates.

- If the kitchen has presented a dish in a "stack" on the plate it may be safer to carry only two plates to avoid accidents which could spoil the chef's presentation. If the plates are large and heavy this will also restrict the number you can carry and hence the plate grips used.

Whichever grip is used it is important that the plates are:

- Kept level at a comfortable distance from your body (not resting against your body)
- Kept within your own body space (width) and that you feel secure and comfortable with the grip chosen.
- Stand tall with your shoulders back, look where you want to go and not at the plates.

Three Plate Method

1. The single plate is held by the thumb parallel to the top outside edge of the plate with the index and middle fingers spread either side of the underneath rim The ring and small fingers are curled free of the plate and the wrist twisted slightly toward the body

2. The second plate sits on a platform formed by the two curled fingers, the fleshy part of the thumb/hand and the lower part of the forearm

3. This method provides a very secure way to carry plates with the third plate being carried in the right hand. The three plate method is recommended for most restaurant situations (especially with large plates and where items sit in sauce or have an elaborate garnish) If serving a table of two carry both
plates in your left hand as shown This allows your right hand freedom to open doors or fend off other waiters or customers who could accidentally back into you causing an accident.

**Handling the Food Service Tray:** The food service tray is used to transport plates to and from the kitchen for ease of service. Loaded trays should never be taken to the customer's table. They operate best from the service point in the room (generally a waiter's sideboard).

**Communication between Kitchen and Waiters**

A good relationship between cooks and waiters, based on clear communication and a shared understanding of house rules, is essential for restaurants to deliver a duality product and ensure customer satisfaction. We have said previously that you should avoid idle chatter in the heat of a busy kitchen. Let the manual or computerised docket do the talking and abide by the house rules on placing orders and calling to "take away" entrees and main courses for tables.

**Don’t go to or from the kitchen empty handed, save your legs.**

Customers require polite, well informed, speedy and efficient service. They are not really interested in excuses or whose fault it is when things go wrong or they don’t get what they ordered, they just want the problem fixed, and quickly.

**Strategies to improve cook/waiter communication include:**

- Meetings are a must before service to explain the menu and specials including any set menus for specific groups or expected special/VIP customers
- Induction for new and casual waiting staff to explain ordering system, mise en-place, dispense bar procedures and house rules.
- Handover meetings for the incoming waiting/cockery shift to explain shift/ section needs, expected customer bookings and schedules
- The discussion and acceptance of common goals of cleanliness and tidiness of the service areas, including dealing with disposables, recyclables, legislative enterprise and OH&S procedures.

**Preparation and Presentation of the Customer’s Bill**

- As stated in the order taking section, there are many different cashiering and control systems and you must learn and observe as you progress, but one rule to remember is that for the kitchen to prepare the required food and the cashier to charge the correct amount, the waiter must provide accurate, legible information.
- When the customer asks for the bill you should give it a final check to ensure that everything you have served has been charged. This is where electronic billing proves to be a much more efficient and time saving system for both staff and customers.

**Saying Goodbye to the Customer**

- When the customer has paid DO NOT stand around trying to get rid of them; this is down right rudeness. At the other extreme do not make yourself invisible or hide behind screens in case they may want something else, even though the bill has been paid.
- Farewelling a customer is just as important as the welcome and it will leave a lasting impression, when done professionally. "Good evening and thank you" is a suitable farewell while after lunch it could be "Thanks for coming, see you again".
- You may have to give a customer their umbrella, coat or shopping bags; do this quickly and with a smile: Here’s your coat, thanks for coming, see you again!"
• Hand out any merchandising material as customers depart. It may be about new trading hours, a change of chef or menu or new owners, a special promotion or a deal.

Cleaning Up and Resetting the Room

When the restaurant is busy you should reset the tables as they are vacated. A professional waiter will be able to change a crumbed table cloth without revealing the top of the table.

Accidents Do Happen

• If you or the customer accidentally knocks a glass over what should you do?
• If you as the waiter caused the accident apologise “I am very sorry I will fix it immediately.”
• If the customer has made the mess, they may be embarrassed, so put them at ease by saying "No problem, I will get your table cleaned up in just a moment."
• Sometimes an entire bottle or carafe of red wine may be knocked over.
• Depending on the table covering (bare top, plastic cafe cloth, butchers paper, placemats or linen cloth), the stage of the meal (entree, main or dessert) and the extent of the spillage (the customer may have to go to the washroom to tidy up) the waiter may need to:
  • Relocate customers to another table
  • Take meals back to the kitchen to be kept warm, replaced or replated and reheated
  • Replace butchers paper or paper placemats
  • Replace splashed table item

4.0 Wine & Beverage Service

• For many Australians, wine is a mysterious and complex thing. Wine as we know it today, is a relatively new arrival on the social scene in this country. Our fathers and mothers mostly drank beer, spirits or fortified wine.

• As late as 1960, seventy percent of all wine sales were of fortified wines: in 1970 there was not a single bottle of Chardonnay on the market, and precious little Cabernet Sauvignon.

• Now the choice is immense and bewildering. As you become experienced, you will observe intelligent, affluent men and women pointing to the wine of their choice on the wine list or on the shelf. If you think they are afraid to pronounce the name, you are probably right. You will also find that typically they will choose a wine from the middle of the list, neither too cheap nor too expensive.

So it is all the more essential that you learn everything you can about wine.

No one is going to ask you which beer they should drink, but you will certainly be asked for advice on the choice of wine. Even then, beware. Some of your customers will know a great deal about it, and will resent unsolicited advice - particularly if (rightly or wrongly) they form the view they know more about it than you do.

Wine Service Equipment Glassware Styles

• There are many styles of wine glasses on the market. The finer the glass the more care will need to be taken. Some restaurants have specific glassware for red, white and sparkling wines whilst others will use a multipurpose wine glass for all occasions.

• A good wine glass should be simple in design and uncoloured. Large glasses are recommended so that the glass can hold a sizeable portion of wine whilst still only half full.

Handling and Care
The cleaning, handling and storage of glassware are important aspects of a waiter's duties. The enjoyment of a superb Australian wine can be destroyed by dirty or finger-marked glassware.

**Polishing and Carrying Glassware**

- Serving wine in a chipped glass is an offence under the Food Regulations. It is therefore a waiter's responsibility to check all glassware.
- There is no excuse for dirty glasses. All glassware should be washed in mild detergent and rinsed thoroughly in hot water at a minimum temperature of 77°C, which is another legal stipulation in the Food Regulations (check your local legislation). You need to check that the rinse cycle is maintaining the correct temperature.
- Once rinsed the glasses should be air-dried, and if required, polished with a lint-free cloth to remove watermarks.

**Wine Service**

- Wine is a very popular drink in restaurants and bars these days. It can be served from a bottle, wine cask or a tap (like beer). When working in a cafe, restaurant or bistro, the house wine may be served by the glass or carafe (usually 500 ml or one litre).
- It's your job to follow the house procedures for service of house wines. If the customer orders a glass of house white you would generally fill the glass to about one centimetre from the top (giving the customer value for money), or fill to the line marked on the glass. Whereas if a bottle of wine is ordered you should only fill the glass half to two thirds full to allow the customer to smell (nose) the wine.

**Opening Wine at the Bar**

When you open wine at the bar you may use a Waiter's Friend or a 'Rapid Opener'. Check that the wine is the correct wine and vintage before opening. A bar-mounted 'Rapid Opener' is ideal for function work where you have a large number of bottles to open in a short time. Function wines are not presented, tasted and approved by the guests but by the person who is paying, the host, well before the event. Therefore at the function, wines are simply and quickly opened and served without the ritual involved in table service of wine at a restaurant.

**Serving Red and White Wine at the Table**

- Similar procedures can be used to open and serve red and white wine at the customer's table. The method used will be set by management (house rules) depending on how formal the establishment is and/or how much the customer is paying for the wine. Depending on the house rules you can open wine at the table in the following ways:
  - Free standing style, where the wine is opened 'mid air'. At no stage should the wine bottle be rested against the waiter's body, hip or knee during the opening process (remember your posture)
  - On the waiters station in full view of the customer
  - When pouring wine, the bottle should never touch the rim of the glass but should be about 2 cm above it.
  - Glasses should only be half to two thirds full for the customer to nose the wine
  - When pouring wine, twist and lift the neck of the bottle simultaneously to avoid drips.
  - Always have a service cloth handy behind the bar and carry one for wine service to the table.
  - White wine bottles are placed in an ice bucket or wine cooler. An ice bucket should be two thirds full with a mixture of ice and water ensuring that at least three quarters of the bottle is immersed. Some
customers may not want an ice bucket especially in winter as the wine aroma and flavours are suppressed by chilling.

- Red wine is left on an underliner, especially when tablecloths are used. This may not be necessary for uncovered table tops.
- Where two or more wines are ordered at the beginning of a meal, ask the host in which order they are to be served. Some customers require mature red wines to be opened to let them breathe before service.
- All drinks are served to the customers’ right hand side. Glasses should be handled by the base or stem only. Used and unnecessary glasses should be removed and not left until the end of the meal.

5.0 What are you selling?

- As we have discussed in previous chapters, people eat out for a whole range of reasons apart from satisfying the basic needs of hunger and thirst. People eat out to relax and enjoy a meal outside the home where they don’t have to cook or wash up, is of course, one of the main motives.
- Some customers invariably order their favourite dishes every time they eat out whilst others are more adventurous and will order a different dish or seek out new ingredients or specials when they are well described by the waiter. In this chapter we stress the importance of knowing the product before you attempt to sell it.
- Waiters play a critical role as sales people for the business, as well as catering for customer’s individual needs to ensure repeat business; they can improve restaurant profitability by selling extras to raise the average check/spend. Side salads, a bowl of wedges to share, that extra dessert or cheese plate, garlic bread, the extra bottle of wine or a non alcoholic alternative or coffee with a liqueur are all extras which can help customers enjoy their meal.
- Importantly this will raise the average spend, increase your tip (as most people tip on a percentage basis of the total bill) and improve house profits.
- Product knowledge doesn’t come overnight, you have to work at it. One way is to sit down with an experienced waiter, the headwaiter or chef and go through each menu item, the ingredients, cookery method and how the dish is presented on the plate; which is critical to knowing which cutlery to set for the customer to comfortably eat the dish.
- Make sure you know which dishes have the best profit margin - usually specials have a very good mark-up which allows for good profit. Remember it is from these profits that your wages are paid.
- For confident service you should take notes so that you can describe menu items to the customer in your own words, not sounding like a recorded message. In this way you will be able to make suggestions based on the customer’s preferences, show them you care, soft sell and have them asking for you on their return visit.

Know Your Product

When you start a new job, make sure you sit down with a supervising (experienced) person to find out exactly what food, beverages and other services are available for your customer at this establishment. You need to become familiar and confident with selling from the menu, drink and wine list. The only way to accomplish this is to learn about every item, dish and ingredient on the menu / drink / wine list; including how they are prepared so that you can accurately describe menu items to customers and answer questions. You will feel pretty silly if you have to run to the kitchen each time a customer asks you about a menu item.

The Waiter as a Sales Person
• As a waiter you are the sales person for the business. The business products are the menu, wine list and services /entertainment/ atmosphere offered. To sell the menu, you the waiter/ salesperson must know about:

• The availability of dishes (e.g. there may only be four T-bone steaks left as they were very popular at lunch time and the butcher can’t deliver until tomorrow)

• Any menu additions or specials. Tuna could be cheaper this month and the chef is serving it char grilled or marinated in a salad

• The ingredients, preparation methods and presentation of each dish on the menu. (e.g. a customer may have a dairy food allergy and you need to know the menu items that don’t contain dairy products or the customer may be a Celiac who can’t eat menu items containing wheat, rye or barley eg bread or a sauce thickened with flour)

• Which items cost extra and should be sold to customers e.g. salad, hand cut chips, a bowl of mashed potatoes garlic or herb bread, dessert wine by the glass, special cocktails, coffee and liqueurs or liqueur coffees e.g. when the customer asks what comes with the fish you could reply stir fried vegetables are served, but you may care for a bowl of fresh salad and some hand cut chips to share around the table e.g. when a customer asks for a dessert recommendation you could reply ‘if you enjoy ice cream and coffee, why not try an Affogato, which is a short black poured over two scoops of vanilla ice cream and we can also pour over a glass of your favourite liqueur’.