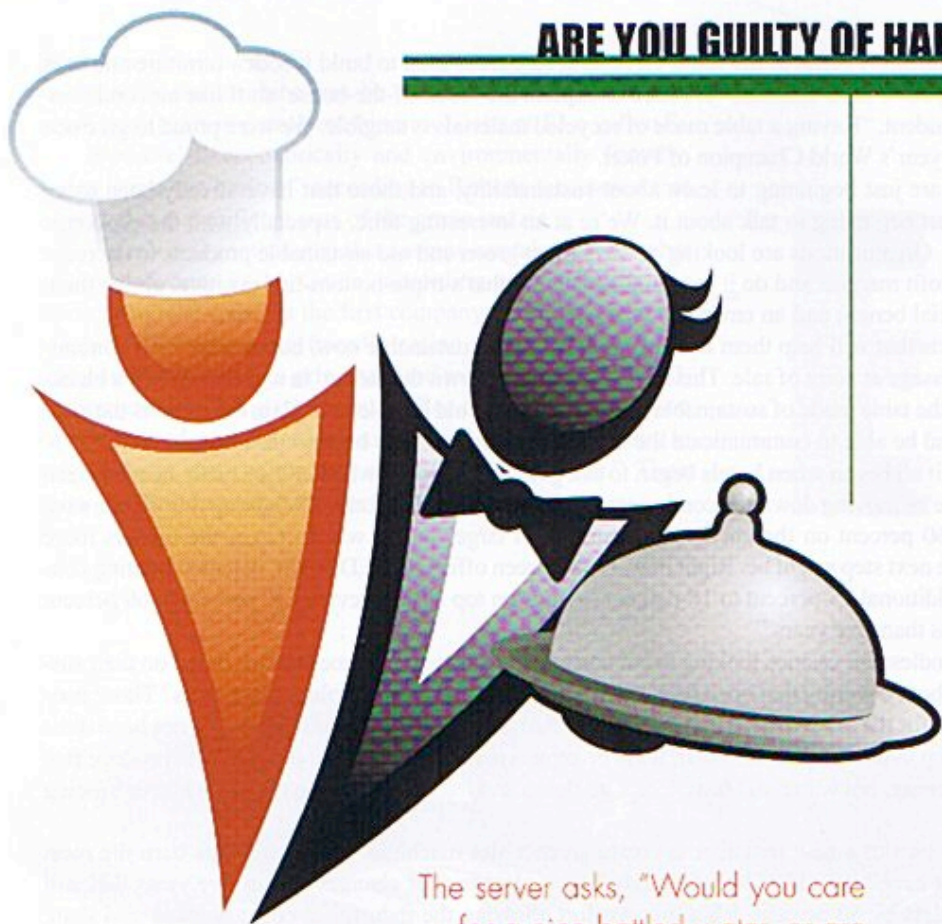


ARE YOU GUILTY OF HALF-HEARTED HOSPITALITY?



The server asks, "Would you care for a nice bottled water, or are you okay with our [facial grimace] unfiltered ['ugh'] city water?"

by David Rothschild

F&B

When our salads arrive, the server asks if he might bring us a bread sampler. He conveniently chooses not to mention that dinner rolls are served with our meal — or the \$8 price tag for that special bread basket.

Just a couple of things that, in my mind, constitute half-hearted hospitality. This isn't up-selling. It isn't offering the guests a choice they didn't know was available. This is an attempt to make the guest look cheap if he doesn't take the server up on his recommendation. It's putting the bottom line of the restaurant and the tips in the servers' pockets above the desire to give the diner a good experience.

We find this most often when we're enticed into trying a restaurant's slow-season promotion. These promotions are, theoretically, intended to introduce guests to a restaurant they haven't tried before or, sometimes, chefs' specialties that aren't on the regular menu. They can provide extra work shifts for your restaurant staff that they might not otherwise have had. They can give guests a new reason to visit or revisit your casino, bringing visitors to your property not only to dine but, hopefully, to spend some time at the gaming tables or slots.

But these promotions only work if the staff buys into them. If they aren't enthusiastically offering the special and describing it, the guests end up reacting negatively to the whole misguided effort. It's happened to us on more than one occasion.

We've chosen to go to a casino restaurant because of the very modestly priced, multi-course dinner being offered for a limited time. The server presents the regular menu, mentions the nightly specials and asks if there are any questions he might answer. My question is, "Why haven't you offered us the prix-fixe special we came here to try? Why do we have to ask for it?" We're off to a bad start all because the server didn't wish to offer a bargain-priced menu to the guests. The thinking being: The less the guest spends, the lower the tip. How's that for all-for-one and one-for-all?

Speaking of poor service practices, one of my least favorite is the specials recitation without accompanying prices. You wouldn't purchase anything in any other type of retail store (yes restaurants are retail operations, as you're selling directly to the consumer) without knowing the price. Why is it okay in a restaurant setting? I've actually known of servers who "float" prices on daily specials, literally charging what they believe the traffic

will bear. They often do this with the tacit approval of management.

Other samples of less-than-hospitable service:

- Reservation phones that ring and ring without anyone answering or lines that are always busy; when someone finally answers, the "you're interrupting me" attitude of the reservationist.
- Hostesses chatting with each other or with servers at the podium. Guests' first impression is often the back of a service team member. No one at the hostess stand to say goodnight when you leave and do a final guest satisfaction check.
- Menus that are dirty, dog-eared or in general disarray. Table tents covered in food or fingerprints.
- When it's obvious that tabletop items are never moved — just swiped around — when the table is cleaned.
- Team service in which the last time you see the senior server is when he's taking your order. Or staffs that congregate in the side station or kitchen instead of monitoring their stations. These "disappearing acts" really irk diners.
- Servers who spend all of their time visiting with their regulars and ignore their other guests; or become unprofessionally chummy with their long-time customers.
- When an apology for a problem or mistake is not empathetic or sincere and an inexpensive comp would have made all of the difference. When a letter of complaint goes unanswered. Remember, on average a dissatisfied guest will tell 11 other people about his bad experience.
- When anyone on staff argues with a guest. In his book "Letters to a Young Chef," renowned restaurateur Daniel Boulud recounts, "I had a maitre d' working for me... This guy had very good references and worked in some terrific New York restaurants. He also had miles of attitude. One day I saw him arguing with a customer. About 45 seconds later he became my former maitre d'."
- When a bottle of wine is rejected and not replaced without a fuss. I've seen managers and even owners come to the table to tell the guests that there is nothing wrong with the wine. The displeased guests would likely have spent more money on desserts and coffee and definitely with their repeat business than the profit on the bottle of wine. The restaurant could easily have gotten credit for an "iffy" bottle from the distributor.
- Refusing to split checks. In the computer age, there's no

excuse for this. Teach your staff to either place a combined order into the kitchen or split the check on the POS after the fact.

- Shutting down the restaurant while guests are still dining. This includes: pulling cloths and setting tables for the next day; sweeping, mopping cleaning ceiling fans; turning off music or raising the level of the lights.
- Not keeping your posted hours. Just because business is slow, you can't close the restaurant. Almost as bad is punishing guests who arrive near closing time. Even if they don't hear the groans, they can sense your displeasure at having to serve them.
- Lack of smiles on your staff's faces. If they don't enjoy being there, why should your guests?

"Hospitality refers to the relationship process between a guest and a host, and it refers to the act or practice of being hospitable, that is, the reception and entertainment of guests, visitors or strangers, with liberality and goodwill."*

Examine the policies of your restaurant and determine if it encourages your staff to be hospitable and welcoming or whether you're just going through the motions. **NAC**

*<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hospitality>

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