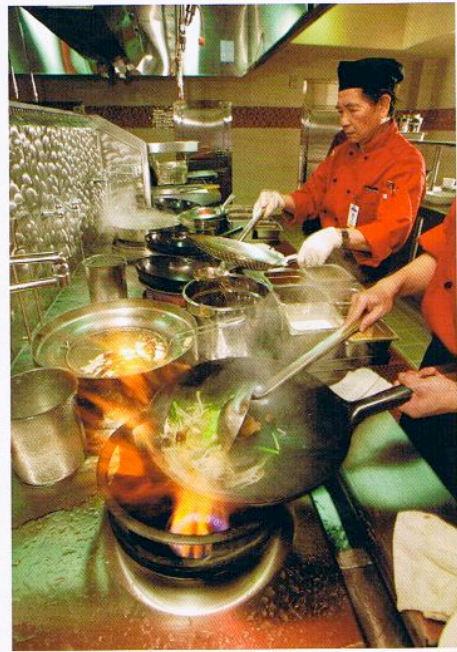


F&B EXP



Picture courtesy of Morongo Casino Resort & Spa.

A SURVIVAL GUIDE FOR SPRING CELEBRATIONS

by David Rothschild

Here you are, ready to begin your shift in the restaurant for a holiday meal. Pick one: Easter Sunday, Mother's Day, even Father's Day can be a biggie at a casino.

You know you're in for a long and stressful day. Management has insisted on bringing in extra tables. The room feels really tight. Reservations are overbooked. Predicted turn times are overly optimistic. Menu prices are higher than usual, and you know guest expectations will be unrealistically high. How do you keep it together? How do you give good service and maintain your good spirits in what seems like an almost impossible situation? Dining room staffs are faced with this scenario a dozen times a year. It seems especially crazy starting with Thanksgiving and continuing through Mother's Day.

A friend mentioned to me that he had dined at a restaurant, with which I'd had a long-time association, on

Valentine's Day. It was his first visit to this establishment. He had heard many good things about the restaurant over the years, but he carried on at length about how disappointed he was with both the food and the service. In summation, he said he would never give the place another try. He'd spent a lot of money and had trusted this venerable trattoria to make this a special treat for his wife. It had failed him miserably, partly because of his pumped-up expectations and partly because the owner and staff had overextended themselves, trying to maximize their holiday business.

Every seasoned waiter has a holiday meal horror story. I'll share mine with you. I was working as a captain at a restaurant in one of the finest resort hotels in Phoenix. The occasion was Easter Sunday brunch. Normally, for brunch, we would do maybe 300 covers. On Easter Sunday, we had reservations for

more than 1,000 guests. The Maitre d' had been summarily fired the night before. When he left, he took two captains with him — along with the reservation sheet for Easter brunch.

You can imagine the bedlam when the front-of-house team arrived Sunday morning and the acting manager realized he had no idea how many reservations there were, what time the reservations were for, or the size of any of the parties. He was also short-staffed, due to the firing.

The manager held the traditional pre-shift meeting, and we were all apprised of the situation. He gave a stirring pep talk about how we would all get through this if we stayed calm and pulled together. The plan was that we'd arbitrarily set up an assortment of large tables throughout the dining room. We had a bunch of six- and eight-tops at the ready. I remembered having seen a party of 18 on the books when I had looked at the reservations earlier in the week, so that was set and ready. We were all in agreement on one important thing: The guests were never to know of our predicament. It wasn't their problem unless we allowed it to be.

When the guests started to arrive, all of the servers assisted in the seating. We all shared in the pretense that we were expecting each and every one of them.

The 11 a.m. seating went well. We reset and readied ourselves for the next wave. Now it started getting scary. We had to determine the size of each party, then make sure we had a table that would accommodate them. This was quite time-consuming. The line starting backing up and guests began asking if there was a problem. The manager had long since abandoned the door to the hostesses and extra greeters/seaters he'd brought in. He was putting out fires wherever he could and doing his best to keep the crew from losing it and abandoning ship. He went from server to server with the same mantra, "Stay focused. Somehow the shift will end and we'll get through this." And of course we did.

Here's some advice for weathering these sorts of trying times:

- Don't start your shift feeling sorry for yourself because you have to work on a holiday. You're a server. It goes with the job. Plan a special holiday celebration for you and your family or friends for later on in the week. You'll have something to look forward to.
- Get to work early.
- Make sure you're well organized.
- Fully stock your side station.
- Work together as a team. Form an alliance with the servers around you. You'll get more done in less time.
- Familiarize yourself with the special holiday menu so you'll be able to answer guests' questions on any of the items that aren't on your regular menu. Practice pitching the menu to diners.
- Use a relaxation technique to stay calm — take a few

deep breaths, meditate, whatever works for you.

- Smile — If necessary, be "Pagliacci," the sad clown with a smile on his face. You may not be happy, but the guest doesn't need to know it!
- Remember that this is a special day for your guests. Do whatever it takes to make it special. Go above and beyond.
- If it's not going well, count down the hours until the end of the shift. It will eventually end!
- And, if all else fails to boost your spirits, think of the extra tips you'll have once your holiday shift is over!

Being a server can be a very stressful job. Working on a holiday can add tension to both your professional and personal life. Take some time before you go to work for a holiday shift to think about what's good about your job and the lifestyle you've chosen.

Most servers enjoy the people they work with and the guests they serve. They work in a clean, comfortable environment and make good money working relatively short hours. Most servers I know really like their jobs — at least most of the time. I think that's more than a lot of people can say. **NAC**

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