



tools of the trade

**A Tool Kit Will Be a Hit
with your Service Team — and your Diners**

by David Rothschild

It's the holiday season, and many casino properties reward their staff with bonuses and/or gifts for their year of service. Restaurateurs: Here's a thought for an additional personal/practical gift for your servers that both they and their guests will appreciate. I had a friend, a fellow dining room captain, whom we all affectionately called "Weeds." If you're not familiar with the term, being "in the weeds" refers to those times when a server is swamped and hopelessly behind.

Weeds always seemed to be playing catch-up in his station. It wasn't that he didn't have skills; he did. He just loved to gab with his guests. The restaurant employed a team-service concept, so the rest of his team ran around and covered for him. They really didn't mind, because he brought in great tips for the team. Weeds had what he called his goody-bag. It was one of those "man-purses" that used to be popular. (A simple zippered cosmetic case, small toiletry bag — even a bank deposit bag — would work just fine.) He had it stuffed with items he believed a waiter should have handy. These items were not only the essentials that all servers should have, but some that might make the guests' dining experience more enjoyable.

My suggestion is that managers give each server a Tools-of-the-Trade Kit with the tools most appropriate to your restaurant:

Pens — Each server should have at least two pens that are distinctive enough so each server can identify them when they end up at the hostess stand or in the side station at the end of the shift. These pens needn't be expensive, just unique. Provide single-action click pens, not stick pens. (Servers have a tendency to take lids off of pens with their teeth!) The pens should be smooth-writing and capable of pressing through duplicate POS charges. I like gel pens. They write well, are inexpensive and guests are comfortable using them. In lieu of providing each server with unique pens, ask the person who orders your casino logo-imprinted pens to be sure they're good quality and write dependably.

Eyeglasses & Magnifiers — Many times, a guest arrives at your restaurant without his glasses. Weeds always had a pair of generic reading glasses in a +1.25 or +1.50 strength. He would offer them to save the guest a trip out to the parking lot or up to his room for his own glasses. What a nice touch! It's important to keep the glasses clean and the lenses smudge-free. You can pick them up at any dollar store. UPS and other shipping stores have clear magnifying strips and credit card-sized magnifiers that a guest can use instead of glasses. If you want to go high-tech, The Wallet Owl is a pocket-sized magnifier with its own small light. (Wal-Mart carries the less-expensive UltraOptix version.)

Penlights — Many guests, especially elderly ones, have a

difficult time reading menus in dimly lit restaurants. They'll sometimes pull the centerpiece candle closer or ask for a second candle. When this happens, a professional server whips out his penlight. It should be the stick kind with a clip. It fits in the server's jacket pocket or apron, right along with his pens. Guests click on the clip to get a beam of light. How thoughtful of you!

Table Crumbers — In a tablecloth restaurant, a crumber is an essential piece of equipment. It resembles a knife with curved edges. It's generally used between the entree and dessert to sweep crumbs from the table onto a small, doily covered plate. The idea is to give the guest a clean place in front of him in preparation for dessert service. Crumbers come in both plastic and metal. Get the metal kind. Buy enough and the manufacturer will put the casino or restaurant logo on them.

Lighters — Every server should have a lighter for table and birthday candles. Again, it needn't be expensive. A single-action, disposable butane works just fine. No Zippos or lighters with liquid fuel — they're just too smelly!

Wine Openers — Nothing says inexperienced or unprofessional more than a server attempting to open a bottle of wine with a home-style, winged wine opener. A server should have a waiter's corkscrew. A waiter's wine opener has four components: body, blade, worm and lever. The body can be anything from plastic or metal to wood or bone. The blade should be straight-edged, not curved, and not serrated. The worm should have five turns and a sharp point. The best corkscrews have two levers, giving the server the choice of which to use depending on the length of the cork. A relatively new and popular wine opener is the Pulltap, with a jointed lever that serves the same purpose as the dual-lever style. The Puigpull is a ratchet-style waiter's cork puller. It works very much like a car jack.

A nice touch is to supply the servers with leather cases for their wine openers. This saves wear-and-tear on uniforms. Keep in mind, too, that your wine purveyors can often provide your staff with waiter's corkscrews compliments of major wineries that love to have their names in front of the diners as servers open the wine. Ask your distributor.

Wobble Wedges — Being seated at an unstable table is a terrible way to start a meal — and every restaurant has wobbly tables. Look around your restaurant and you'll probably notice pieces of cardboard, matchbooks, beverage napkins — you name it — jammed under table legs to level and stabilize the tables. Very tacky! A restaurant manager friend introduced me to Wobble Wedges — clear plastic shims, shaped kind of like door stops, with a series of ridges along the top edge. Stick the Wobble Wedge under the table leg and gently tap it. It clicks through the ridges until the table is leveled. Very clever.

Well, I hope you've gotten the idea. Carpenters have their hammers and screwdrivers; doctors their stethoscopes and thermometers. Servers, too, should have the appropriate tools to make their jobs easier and more efficient. Plus, they should have a few extras that show their concern for their diners.

I'm sure you can think of several other waiter tools and specialty items you could add to the goody-bags. It will cost you as little as \$10 or so to put together a basic kit, and even adding some of the higher-priced items will still come in at less than \$20 per server. Be creative, have fun and make your guests' dining experience more memorable because of the thoughtfulness of your staff. **NAC**

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F&B

Here are a few online sources to put together your Tools-of-the-Trade Kits...

Bags for your "Goodie Bags:"

Cosmetics Bags:
(from \$1.79 each, imprinted)
www.identity-links.com
(search: cosmetic)

Bank Deposit Bags:

(from \$1.49 each)
www.banksupplies.com
(category: zipper wallets)

Disposable Penlights:

(from \$1.46 each) www.amazon.com
(search: Garrity penlight),
www.acehardwareoutlet.com
(search: SKU 30025)

Magnifier Cards:

(from \$.31 each, imprinted, or with light from \$4 each)
www.menu-reader.com,
www.ultraoptix.com (click on: special deals), www.walletowl.com

Table Crumbers:

(from \$.95 each) www.crumber.com,
www.waitstuff.com (search: crumb)

Waiter's Corkscrews:

Pulltap (from \$7.98 each)
www.waitstuff.com (search: corkscrew), Puigpull (from \$13.50 each) www.waitergear.com (category: corkscrews)

Wobble Wedges:

(from \$.17 each)
www.wobblewedge.com
(category: products)

