

by David and Barbara Rothschild

WHERE'S THE TRAINING?

F&B

We never got any training."We often hear this comment from casino restaurant servers. Why is it that most casinos don't provide formalized training for the waitstaff beyond the requisite TIPS or TAM alcohol awareness, ServSafe or food handler classes? For the same reasons that most other restaurants don't:

1. They don't have anyone on staff qualified and experienced as a trainer.
2. Staff turnover is so frequent and at such a high rate, why spend the money?
3. Customer expectations are low, and we can meet them.
4. What we have in place seems to work: "We've always done it this way."
5. They're not aware that there are companies that specialize in on-property casino waitstaff training.

How is service training usually done?

When a property first opens, a human resources specialist includes the restaurant staff in the general orientation and customer relations seminars. The food & beverage director hands out copies of a manual

to all of the restaurant managers. It's then up to them to train the staff for the opening.

After the restaurant is open, how is a new hire brought up to speed? He's given the manual to read and is sometimes quizzed on the contents. He's then assigned to one of the more experienced servers to spend a few days "trailing" or "shadowing." Then he's on his own. We'd argue that this is not the most efficient or effective way to train your F&B staff.

It's important that a casino/resort develop a "culture of service." Every staff member should have the same basic skill sets. This is good for the servers, F&B management — and diners. Staff members can move from restaurant to restaurant. They only need to learn the menu; the basic service techniques will be the same.

We have been to many casinos where service is a high priority only in the property's upscale steakhouse or gourmet restaurant. Our question to the F&B managers of these properties: As a guest, if I've had terrible service in your cafe and in your buffet, why would I want to take a chance on your fine dining restaurant where it's going to cost me a lot of money and I might still have a poor experience? Hmm...good point, don't you think?

Most restaurants hire front-of-house staff based on personality. That's understandable. We all want outgoing, well-spoken, neat and attractive people to represent our restaurant to the public. You can't teach personality. You can, however, help your staff members feel comfortable and competent in their jobs. In our experience, after staff members have been properly trained in the mechanics and techniques, they can relax, not worry about committing mistakes and let their personalities shine through. They start to realize that there is more to service than just delivering food. They begin to take pride in their work, and this becomes evident to the restaurant's core "regular" guests.

"We're really understaffed. We've had so many call outs." Do you find yourself using this reasoning to justify less-than-superior service? Consistent and continuing service training retains staff and keeps them interested in, and excited about, their jobs. It's no news to you: Bringing new servers onboard costs a lot of money and time. For as long as several weeks, this server is not making money for the restaurant. In turn, he's becoming increasingly frustrated following around a server who often has decent skills but little free time or desire to be a mentor or trainer.

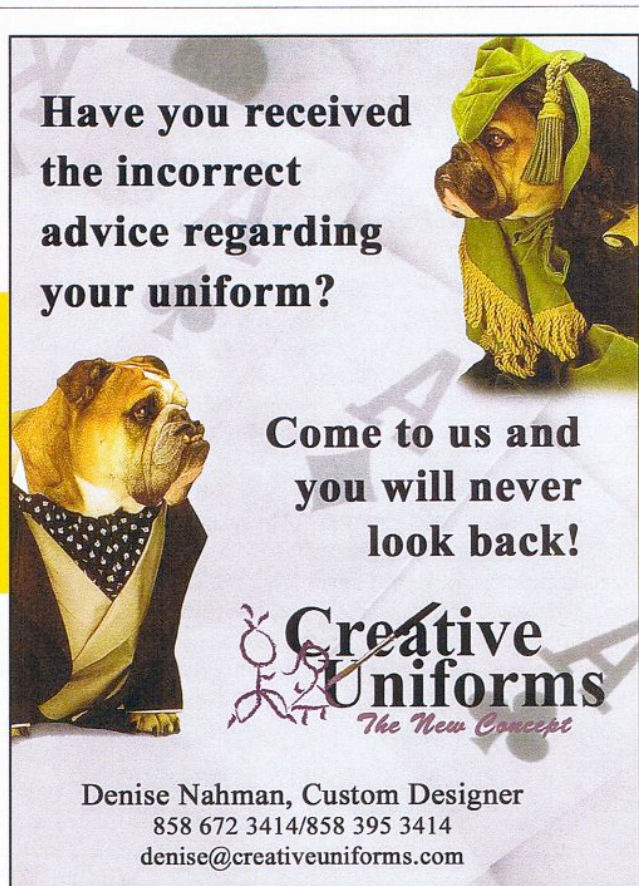
Casino F&B upper-management sometimes think of restaurant managers and supervisors as just "waiters with keys." This shouldn't be the case. A vital part of the job for restaurant managers and supervisors is to continuously monitor and correct service. Special supervisory training can help them learn to really see what's happening in the dining room and make changes and improvements. It's also important that managers and supervisors work with new hires to indoctrinate them into the spirit of service. When there are enough new hires on property, a formal training session should be held to make sure everyone is on the same page.

Refresher courses and professional development workshops for veteran front-of-house staff keep them fresh, alert and productive.

Food and beverage staff members have told us that they feel like the orphans on property. Think about it: Casinos are always doing continuing education for the staff on the casino floor, for security and for administration. Customer service is an ever-increasing focus throughout the industry. Check out almost any revenue analysis and you'll see that food and beverage is consistently one of the fastest-growing segments. Yes, your restaurants can be a reason people come to your property, not just an incidental amenity.

So let's turn more attention to building a consistent, top-quality culture of service throughout our F&B departments. Invest in your staffs. Give them the tools they need to help them to be the best they can be. Let's not hear any more: "Why don't we get any training?" **NAC**

David and Barbara Rothschild are co-owners of EATIQuette, a Phoenix-based casino waitstaff training company providing certificate service basics "bootcamps" and "professional polish" programs. EATIQuette's The Main Course on Table Service, a training manual with accompanying instructor's guide, is used by casinos across the U.S. and abroad. Contact David and Barbara at (602) 569-2051 or info@EATIQuette.com.



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Denise Nahman, Custom Designer
858 672 3414/858 395 3414
denise@creativeuniforms.com