

# CHAPTER 7

## Guest Communication

### INTRODUCTION

Exceptional guest service can be described as exceeding guest expectations in a professional, friendly, competent, and timely manner. To do an effective job, the server must establish emotional connection with guests, use the techniques of a salesperson, and maintain a professional attitude, which should be accompanied by charm and grace. Guests often want to feel pampered and special, which requires the server to be able to effectively meet and exceed the individual expectations of every guest.

All guests bring a personal expectation about service to each restaurant experience. These expectations may change depending on the style of the restaurant. As the dining level, along with the price of the meal increases, a guest's expectations will also increase. Some guests like to eat quickly and expect the server to respond in a prompt, efficient manner, which keeps pace with the speed of their eating habits. They may simply be hungry and want their food as fast as possible: The server must feed the need. Other guests may want to relax over a leisurely meal and savor the dining-out experience. Dining out has become a social event, which many people look forward to as they enjoy a fabulous meal in a special setting accompanied by excellent service. The server must read the need. The server must read all of the guests' cues. The guests who are dining in

a leisurely manner want more than just food. Not only are they hungry, but they also want to enjoy the experience of dining and savor the atmosphere.

Servers become the "personality" of a restaurant. They are the familiar faces to regular guests and new acquaintances to first-time customers. The servers are the providers and the salespeople, selling food and beverages, and providing service. The server's job consists of the following:

1. Represent the restaurant and the management in a positive way.
2. Serve guests to their complete satisfaction by positively managing the guest experience.
3. Perform within the restaurant's established standards of quality and service or protocol.
4. Earn the privilege of receiving maximum tips.

Many people seem to believe that there is a "secret" to being a successful server. There are no hidden secrets, and the required techniques can be easily learned. The learning process begins with the self-discipline and commitment needed to acquire new skills, accompanied by the dedication to providing the best in customer service, which is rewarded with a feeling of personal satisfaction as well as financial remuneration.

### CHAPTER 7 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

**As a result of successfully completing this chapter, readers will be able to:**

1. Identify how to make a personal connection with guests.
2. Explain the procedure to follow when taking a guest's order.
3. Understand how to develop server enthusiasm.
4. Describe several different types of guests.
5. Explain how to serve guests with special needs.
6. Describe how to anticipate the guest's needs.
7. Understand how nonverbal cues and prompts can help the server anticipate the guest's needs.
8. Demonstrate suggestive selling.
9. Explain the basic guidelines for suggestive selling.

10. Give examples of suggestive selling with the use of dining room showmanship.
11. Identify the procedures that can help a server to conserve steps and improve service timing during rush periods.
12. Explain what the server should do in an emergency situation.
13. Recognize that a warm greeting and personalized service can result in loyal guests.

## CHAPTER 7 OUTLINE

### Getting to Know Your Guests

#### Taking the Guest's Order

#### Server Enthusiasm

#### Different Types of Guests

#### Guests with Special Needs

#### Anticipating the Guest's Needs

#### Nonverbal Cues and Prompts

#### Suggestive Selling

##### Upselling

##### Suggesting "Related" Menu Items

##### Suggesting New Menu Items or the "Chef's Specialties"

#### Suggesting Items for Special Occasions

#### Suggesting "Take Home" Items

### Guidelines for Suggestive Selling

#### Beverages

#### Appetizers

#### Entrées

#### Desserts

#### After-Dinner Drinks

### Server Incentives

### Showmanship Sells Suggestively

### Service Timing

### Emergency Situations

## Getting to Know Your Guests

### Learning Objective 1

Identify how to make a personal connection with guests.

A server's task is more than taking an order. If a server is interested only in order taking, they do not live up to their full potential as a professional server. The server must have the desire to become knowledgeable about all of the food and beverage menu offerings, have the ability to recognize and greet repeat customers by their names, and enthusiastically help guests with menu selections. The initial server approach to the table has become more challenging as guests embrace their electronic devices. The server must compete with the technology and learn new ways to engage the guest. The server must approach the table at the precise moment that the guest is finishing on their device so that the server has the guest's full attention and can make a positive first approach and impression making a personal connection.

First and foremost is the server's attitude toward the guest. At times, the server's enthusiasm is more important than the technical aspects of service. Every restaurant has established rules in order to have smooth, consistent operations. However, it is important for the server to put their personality on display in a manner that will have a positive effect on guests, resulting in an enjoyable dining experience.

Promptly acknowledging guests after they are seated displays an important sense of urgency on the server's part. The first impression can set the tone for the remainder of the meal. A positive first encounter can be accomplished with a smile and a nod, a small wave, or brief eye contact, while still serving another table.

Often, a server wears a name tag that is clearly visible to guests. Typically, the server greets guests by introducing themselves. If the server learns the guest's name through a reservation or was introduced to the guest by the host, it is then appropriate to address the guest by name, Mrs. Smith or Mr. Jones.

The server's introductory greeting must be genuine and original to each guest and table. Other guests seated at nearby tables will certainly hear the server's greeting for each arriving guest or group. The greeting should be different for each table;

Good	Better
"Hello"	"Good evening, my name is Maria"
"Welcome to (restaurant's name)"	"Welcome to (the name of the restaurant) My name is Maria, how may I accommodate your needs this evening?"
"Hello, is this your first visit to our restaurant?"	"Good evening, are you new to the area? I will be happy to help you with the menu and bring you a beverage while you are deciding."
"Welcome to (restaurant's name), would you care for some water?"	"Good evening, welcome to (restaurant's name), I will bring some water while you decide on one of our famous specialty drinks."
"Good evening, Mr. Alden"	"Good evening, Mr. Alden, it's good to see you again. Would you like me to bring the usual or would you like to try something new?" I highly recommend our new cocktail and chef's special this evening.

**TABLE 7.1**

Appropriate Greeting

otherwise, the server may appear to be robotic, using the same script over and over. It is important to remember to find a personal greeting you are comfortable with that reflects your unique personality. Table 7.1 offers some appropriate greetings.

Remembering names, what the guests ordered at their last visit, their preferred beverage, and the memorable event of their last dining experience with the server are several factors that enhance the personal connection between server and guests. It is important to show guests that you are able to remember their name and it reflects positively on the restaurant. The guest will have a personal connection to you and will request your service in the future. The food may be equally as good in a competitor's restaurant, but the server's connection to their guest ultimately may be the deciding factor when they make a restaurant choice. Customer service studies have revealed that among the many things that a restaurant can do to make a guest feel welcome is to greet the guest by name.

When guests trust the server, they are inclined to respond favorably to appetizer, entrée, dessert, and beverage suggestions. This will affect sales and tips, and it provides the spark that encourages guests to return again and again.

## Taking the Guest's Order

### Learning Objective 2

Explain the Procedure to follow when taking a guest's order.

Knowing when to approach guests to take their order can be a challenge to the server, because guests vary in their likes and dislikes in terms of service. However, the best practice is to approach the table with a welcoming smile as soon as guests are seated. First impressions are important; the server should be prompt, organized, and professional. Courtesy is essential in every detail, beginning with "please" and followed by "thank you" as part of the conversation while taking guests' orders. The server could ask the guests if they would like to dine leisurely or if they prefer a faster service. Many people want to have a casual dining experience, have one or more cocktails, and enjoy the process. On the other hand, other guests may have a limited amount of time and expect to be served quickly. This could be the situation if the restaurant were located near a theater where guests would be dining before theater time and would need prompt service. Conversely, after the theater they would perhaps enjoy the pleasure of leisurely dining.

When taking a guest's order, the following procedure should be followed:

- Stand straight, at the left of the table if possible, and close enough to hear the guest's voice.
- Listen carefully and lean forward slightly to hear if necessary.



**FIGURE 7.2**

Tablet with Interactive Screen for Servers and Guests is Quickly Replacing Paper Guest Checks. Courtesy of Oracle.

or deliver the paper guest check order to the kitchen. Chapter 5, *Serving Food and Beverages*, discusses a pivot point service system with a designated starting position with all orders served clockwise from that point.

## Server Enthusiasm

### Learning Objective 3

Understand how to develop server enthusiasm.

The server with enthusiasm demonstrates the following attributes:

- Smiles often
- Always well groomed
- Walks quickly and has good posture
- Alert and attentive to guests
- Friendly, tactful, and tolerant
- Poised and composed
- Speaks clearly and distinctly—voice carries conviction with proper inflections
- Knows what they are doing and why

Enthusiasm comes naturally to some people, but for most it takes a concentrated effort to develop the traits that evolve into an enthusiastic personality. It begins with identifying where you are now and where you want to go. You have to visualize what you want to accomplish. This begins with asking, “How will enthusiastic behavior help me in becoming more professional as a server?” The answer of course lies within the fact that servers work for tips. A good server truly is a good salesperson who truly believes in the product they are selling. It is easy to be motivated by an increase in salary each and every night. Most other professions rely on a boss who controls their yearly increase in salary. There is a direct link to the amount of enthusiasm a server has for their job, the products they sell, and an increase in their tips. Guests can see this excitement and undoubtedly they are more generous when the time comes to tip.

The act of smiling is the first step toward developing enthusiasm. What a difference it makes in your appearance! A smile communicates to the guest, “I am glad to see you.” It is essential to start guests off right when they come to dine, so smile and greet them enthusiastically with your own personalized greeting. Many servers may not be aware that they are smiling, because they usually do it as a natural reflex. If necessary, the server should become conscious of when they are smiling and work at enhancing those smiles.

The server who develops vitality fueled by positive energy will be able to generate an enthusiastic atmosphere for guests. When a server is sincerely enthusiastic, the server's face lights up, eyes shine, and the voice is vibrant. The server compels the guests' attention, and every word carries conviction. Enthusiasm is the key that unlocks the minds of your guests, causing them to like you. It is also important to remember that it does not overshadow poor service and/or poor quality food. Remember, to be enthusiastic, you must act enthusiastic!

A server should always approach guests with the feeling that they are nice people who will be enjoyable to serve. To be able to realize this full potential, a server needs to display an ability to generate sincere enthusiasm. If enthusiasm is not sincere, it may be seen as patronizing, which can generate negative feelings from guests. Genuine enthusiasm is contagious and a server who displays it in personal performance will achieve positive results.

## Different Types of Guests

### Learning Objective 4

Describe several different types of guests.

The server needs to be prepared to serve all types of guests. There are certain situations that require a great deal of patience and tact on the part of the server, especially when a guest is difficult. However, the guest is there and the server has to take care of that guest, and not allow them to disturb other guests. The following are some examples and approaches to handling different types of guests.

*The child* may think that they are old enough not to need a booster seat, so always ask the parents whether they want a booster seat or high chair for the child. If the restaurant has bibs for children, special place mats, or games of any type, promptly bring them to the table. If appropriate, ask the parents if they would like you to bring some crackers for a small child or baby. This would help pacify the child until the meal is served. Furthermore, look to the parents for the lead in ordering for the child. If the restaurant has a special child's menu, make sure that it is available. If a child orders an expensive menu item, always check with a parent for final approval, and be prepared to suggest another item or two from which the child can choose. Be patient with children, be alert for spills, and be prepared to provide extra napkins if needed.

*The procrastinator* is a guest who just cannot make up their mind. This is where you have the opportunity to practice suggestive selling skills. The procrastinator would probably appreciate you helping in the decision-making process. You can do this very skillfully by suggesting two or three menu items. If that does not work, allow the guest to have a little more time, mentioning that you will check back in a few minutes. Then check back every few minutes to see if the guest is ready to order.

*The skeptic* may be doubtful about the quality of food or the way it is prepared. The guest is often very fussy and wants it exactly a certain way. In this situation, your knowledge of menu item ingredients, cooking times, preparation, and serving methods will help you to solve the problem. Furthermore, you need to be very positive with a guest like this, speaking with assuredness and in a professional manner.

*The fussy eater* will send items back because they know exactly what they want. Therefore, it is important that you thoroughly understand the guest's complaint. Also, you must give this guest exactly what they want and demonstrate that you genuinely desire to please with every detail. Most restaurants have a policy of allowing the guest to order something else. If something else is ordered, be very specific and ask the necessary questions to ensure that the guest's order is cooked and prepared exactly as desired.

*The older guest* often requires a little extra care. Occasionally, help may be needed in seating the guest, reading the menu, or speaking a little louder. Some restaurants may have an early-bird menu from 3:00 to 5:00 P.M. that offers smaller portions that attract older guests. Your knowledge of menu item ingredients, cooking times, preparation, serving methods, and the nutritional information will be very helpful. The older guest will appreciate patience and not being rushed.



*The rude guest* is a person seeking attention and as a result can be somewhat irritating to you and other guests. The person may pass a degrading remark, tell a crude joke, or ask the server for a date. The server should be polite and not engage with this guest's comments. If the person continues, respond by stating that you will have to inform the manager.

*The talkative guest* wants to visit and impress you with their knowledge, which can be frustrating. This type of guest wants to dominate your time and get all of your attention. Answer their questions, keep a pleasant smile, and engage with your other work.

*The silent guest* is a shy and soft-spoken individual, so listen with care. Smile and do everything you can to make this guest feel as comfortable as possible, as they will appreciate it.

*The diet conscious guest* has diet restrictions and will expect the server to be knowledgeable in answering questions and in making appropriate menu suggestions. The server should be competent in answering specific questions regarding menu item ingredients, cooking times, portion sizes, preparation and serving methods, and sugar or salt substitutes, etc. If it is impossible to fulfill the request, the server should be quick to explain that fact and suggest something else for the guest's consideration.

*The coffee drinker* who only orders coffee, reads a newspaper or from a device, or visits with a friend and sits at a table for an hour or more is using productive space without spending much money. The server can suggest a piece of pie or dessert to accompany the coffee. If the guest declines, after the second refill, the guest could be charged for a second cup of coffee, depending upon the policy of the restaurant. If the dining room is busy and other guests are waiting to be seated, then the manager, host, or server, using good judgment, may need to inform the guest politely that the table is needed for lunch or dinner guests.

*The budget conscious guest* has a serious concern about the price of menu items. An experienced server will quickly recognize when price is a factor, and will suggest medium and lower priced entrées. The important thing is that the guests do not feel ill at ease and that they enjoy dinner and feel that they received a good value for the price of the meal.

*The bad tipper* is a guest who frequents a restaurant and is recognized as someone who does not leave a tip or tips only a small amount; that guest should be served in the same professional manner as any other guest. Not every guest will leave the traditional 15–20 percent or higher tip. A guest may not understand how to tip correctly. Also, there are some guests who do not tip for any reason, even when they receive excellent service. It is important for the server to remember that not receiving a tip should not affect their actions and service to other guests. The best way to react is to double the efforts in providing the best service.

## Guests with Special Needs

### Learning Objective 5

Explain how to serve guests with special needs.

It is very important for a server to understand how to serve a guest with special needs. The ADA (American Disabilities Act) requires reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities. The reasonable accommodations are easily applied when a service establishment is aware of them.

*A guest with a hearing impairment* may require a server to incorporate several techniques into their service. A server must be attentive to the order-taking process to correctly execute the order. The first thing a server should be aware of is that this type of guest may have a service dog to assist them and is legally allowed in the restaurant. In addition, the server should look directly at the guest when speaking; the guest may read lips. If not, extra care can be taken to complete the guest's order. A pen and paper is helpful or a guest can point to the desired items on the menu.

*A guest with a visual impairment* may or may not be accompanied by a sighted person; the server should not hesitate to offer services if needed, such as helping the

person to be seated at a table or booth. This type of guest may also have a service dog to assist them and, as stated earlier, the dog is legally allowed in the restaurant. Service animals generally lay under the table on the guest's left side. A server should refrain from petting or feeding the animal. Many restaurants have a menu available in Braille. When this is the case, it should be offered to the guest. The guest may prefer the server to read several menu items along with the prices. The server should do everything in a normal way, the only difference being that when something is set on a table, the server should say the name of the item, such as, "Your salad, Sir/Ms." If the guest needs assistance in any way, the server should be available to promptly accommodate the guest. When the guest check is brought to the table, the server should offer to read the menu item and price, the sales tax amount (if applicable), and the check total. In addition, the server should inquire if the guest would like to have the check and payment taken to the cashier.

*A guest in a wheelchair or a guest requiring the use of a walker or cane* will appreciate being seated away from the traffic flow, if possible.

*A guest with a hand or arm injury* that would make it difficult to eat will appreciate menu suggestions for easy-to-handle entrées and perhaps one that you could offer to cut up, if this seems appropriate. Be prompt and willing to help the guest in any way needed. Also, the guest may appreciate the server offering to take the guest check and payment to the cashier for them.

## Anticipating the Guest's Needs

### Learning Objective 6

Describe how to anticipate the guest's needs.

A professional server will always anticipate the needs of guests by keeping an alert eye on guests and by promptly attending to their needs before they occur. Anticipating guest needs is a combination of close observation and being able to interpret nonverbal communication from the guest. This is also referred to as "reading the need," which involves determining the guest's priorities. For example, during lunch a guest may have time restraints that necessitate fast service. The nonverbal message from the guest might be frequently looking at their watch. By reading the nonverbal cue, the server may present the check right after delivering the entrée, at the same time suggesting dessert and coffee. Another example is when guests have business papers spread on the table and are engaged in conversation. The server should avoid interrupting the guests and wait for the proper moment (the same as if guests were engaged in social conversation) to become available to serve guests. Bringing glasses of water to the table and presenting menus could accomplish this.

The server must develop an expertise for "reading (observing and listening to) the guest" in order to build a comfortable personal connection. Servers with an anticipatory understanding of guest needs are perceived as providing exceptional service. "Reading the needs of guests" correctly allows the server to be proactive with responses that not only meet but also exceed guest expectations. When service surpasses the guest's expectations, the guest may feel that the server has gone "beyond the call of duty," which is rewarded by a generous tip and the desire to return often. The reality is that often this perception is achieved via the simplest levels of "reading the need" correctly. Some helpful suggestions are as follows:

- Always remove extra place settings as soon as the guests have been seated, to allow extra room on the table.
- If guests are seated in an area that may be drafty, or if the sun is shining in their eyes, the server should offer to seat the guests at another table or adjust the blinds.
- Salt, pepper, and sugar should be moved within easy reach of guests, particularly when guests are seated at counters.
- Never break into a guest's conversation, and time questions so that the guest will not have to try to answer with a mouth full of food.



- Check each food plate from the kitchen to ensure completeness and for the best plate presentation prior to serving.
- Be alert and notice when a napkin or piece of flatware has been dropped on the floor. Pick it up and immediately replace it with a clean item.
- Recognize when guests are not in any special hurry, such as after a movie, date, or ball game, allowing for additional suggestive selling opportunities.

## Nonverbal Cues and Prompts

### Learning Objective 7

Understand how nonverbal cues and prompts can help the server anticipate the guest's needs.

Nonverbal cues and prompts from the guest can assist the server in anticipating the guest's needs. They appear in common body language displays and facial expressions that are used every day in normal communications. There are also some behaviors unique to the dining experience, such as the following:

**Menus:** Guests do things with menus that communicate their level of urgency. They will close the menus, and as the urgency increases they will stack them, move them to the edge of the table, or even push the stack out over the edge of the table to get the server's attention.

**Napkins:** Guests will unfold napkins and place them on their laps when ready to order. As the meal is completed, they may lay the napkin back on the table or place the napkin on top of their empty plate. They may also push the plate to the side or center of the table when they are finished eating.

**Looking Around:** When a guest is looking around, it generally means something may be wrong or the guest may need something else.

## Suggestive Selling

### Learning Objective 8

Demonstrate suggestive selling.

When a server uses suggestive selling, they are helping guests discover what is on the menu, and furthermore preparing the way for the guests' desire to return again, along with increasing sales for the restaurant. Suggestive selling helps the server to engage in conversation with the guest instead of just taking an order. Guests generally appreciate it when a server takes a personal interest in helping them get better acquainted with the menu choices, and to further enjoy their meal by having items suggested that would complement their selection. This is a specific responsibility of the server and the more skillful the server becomes, the greater the opportunity to earn increased tips. The server's skill begins to develop with increased self-confidence, believing that the guest will have a more enjoyable dining experience, and the enthusiasm reflects in the server's voice and facial expressions.

To be successful at suggestive selling, it is absolutely essential to know the menu, as presented in Chapter 4, Service Readiness. The server should be prepared to answer any questions the guest may have about any menu item; for example, the quality and ingredients used, the method of cooking, the portion size, the way it is served, the flavor and taste, and the cooking time. Guest satisfaction should always be the first consideration.

There are several types of suggestive selling, and each is geared toward helping the guest enjoy the meal more and have a better dining experience. The different types of suggestive selling are as follows:

### Upselling

This type of suggestive selling entices the guest to spend more money and is a real service. Many times, the guest is not aware that they can get more value and enjoy the meal more by spending a little more money—for example, by ordering the

complete dinner instead of à la carte, or by ordering an appetizer, Caesar salad, or a bottle of wine with dinner. Also, larger drink sizes are typically a better value than the regular drink size.

### Suggesting “Related” Menu Items

Related menu items refer to items that “naturally” seem to go with other items, such as soup or salad with sandwiches, cheese on a sandwich, French fries along with a hamburger, or a scoop of vanilla ice cream with apple pie.

### Suggesting New Menu Items or the “Chef’s Specialties”

Most guests appreciate it when the server tells them about new menu items or “specialties” for which the restaurant may be famous for.

### Suggesting Items for Special Occasions

On birthdays or anniversaries, and during holidays such as Mother’s Day, Father’s Day, Valentine’s Day, and St. Patrick’s Day, and during the Christmas and New Year’s season, people are interested in enjoying a fine meal and creating a memorable occasion. Most restaurants offer special menu items that should be suggested to the customer for these special occasions.

### Suggesting “Take Home” Items

Many restaurants have items available for “take home,” such as pies, cakes, cinnamon rolls, and salad dressings. These items may be listed on the restaurant’s menu, but still the server should always take the opportunity to mention those items to guests. If the guest does not have a dessert with the meal, the server may suggest taking a dessert home. Also, some restaurants offer curbside pickup for guests ordering “take-out” meals.

## Guidelines for Suggestive Selling

### Learning Objective 9

Explain the basic guidelines for suggestive selling.

Some guests welcome suggestions and others resent them. The experienced server will recognize the signs when suggestions are appreciated. It is also important for the server to recognize the importance of professionalism that supports suggestive selling versus high-pressure selling that annoys guests. Successful suggestive selling depends on the interest and enthusiasm of the server who has a thorough knowledge of the menu, as well as knowledge of the different types of guests.

A server can quickly qualify guests by inquiring if they have eaten in the restaurant previously. If they are return guests, they already have a feel for the menu items and staff and may not require the full menu introduction given to first-time guests. But if it is their first visit, the server should be prepared to provide all the information necessary to make their dining experience complete.

The following example situation is given to demonstrate the importance of “reading the need” prior to any suggestive selling.

After having quickly looked at the menu, the guest asks the server, “What do you recommend?” The server eagerly describes, in delicious detail, “Our house favorite is fresh salmon filet with blackened spices pan seared, then baked and served with a tequila-lime-sour cream sauce.” With furrowed brow and pursed lips the customer replies, “I hate fish!”

The server made a mistake by not asking about the guest’s interests before launching into a recommendation. The server has been placed in an awkward position and possibly annoyed the guest.

The server should have responded with the following inquiry: “Do you have a preference this evening? Are you looking for beef, chicken, seafood, or pasta?”

When narrowing the guest’s interests, the server can then make the appropriate suggestions from the menu. By asking the right question(s), listening to the answers, and being alert to nonverbal cues, the server can guide the guest to the appropriate choices. This illustrates the importance of first “reading the need” and effectively anticipating guest’s needs and expectations.

The effect of suggestive selling is to let the guest know what is available and to suggest items that “go with” the ordered menu item, because they fit into and create the guest’s “needs.” If the guest does not “need” the suggested item, they will reject the suggestion. The server’s experience will help develop an intuitive understanding of what the guest’s needs are, then guide the guest into making decisions through suggestive selling.

The server should know what to suggest and understand the relationships between food items. The server should be specific in naming food and beverage items, not categories. Say, “Would you like a slice of our popular blueberry peach or chocolate pecan pie for dessert?” and not “Do you care for dessert?” Say, “Would you like strawberry lemonade or lemon–ginger iced tea?” and not “Do you want a beverage?” Dessert and beverage are not descriptive words. They do not taste like anything to the guest. When you suggest and describe specific items, a picture develops in the guest’s mind, which may make it difficult for the guest to refuse. Furthermore, while the server is creating this mental picture, if they smile and approvingly nod “yes,” the guest quite often will be inclined to smile and nod “yes” back, agreeing that the server’s suggestion is a good one.

The server should typically suggest two of the possible choices within each food and beverage category, so that the guest’s choice will be made easier, as compared to five or six choices. Following are a number of examples showing how suggestive selling works.

## Beverages

The server should always suggest one alcohol and one nonalcohol beverage choice. Furthermore, the server should note whether the guest’s eyes are scanning the beer or wine list, or looking at table tents. These are nonverbal cues to what may interest a guest. If it is beer, ask the guest if they prefer light or dark beer, imported or domestic. If it is wine, ask the guest if they prefer red or white wine, dry or sweet. These are excellent opportunities to suggest regional wines or local microbrews. When a guest asks, “What do you recommend?” the server should respond with questions like, “What do you drink at home?” or “What is your favorite type of beer or wine?” The answers will indicate the guest’s flavor and taste preferences. Many wine menus have suggested pairings of wine and food. Some restaurants offer samplings of wine as well. This affords the more sophisticated guest the opportunity to have a small taste of various wines so that they can choose which wine matches their entrée best. Once a selection is made, the wine is served immediately. Restaurants that are promoting certain house brands may even offer sample tasting to guests.

For spirits, again inquire what type the guest may like. Then suggest common brand names that are easily recognizable. For example, if the guest likes Scotch, suggest Chivas Regal, JB, or Cutty Sark. These three scotch brands are internationally recognized and offer three levels of quality and price. If the guest says, “I’ll just have water,” ask if they prefer bottled or tap. Refer to Chapter 6, Beverages and Beverage Service, for additional information.

## Appetizers

Appetizers should be suggested in pairs when a menu offers a variety of appetizers and salads; the server could suggest two of them as follows: “We pride ourselves

on our Warm Goat cheese salad, and among our most popular appetizers is the Calamari.” On the salad, there are additional items to be added. The suggestion of an addition of shrimp or chicken is very important. This will increase the total of the check and enhance the guest’s experience. The server must also be prepared to promptly provide additional information, when asked, about any of the menu items. What is an Aioli (a garlic mayonnaise), or the portion size of the additional shrimp? When guests want to split an appetizer, the server should know what the additional charge would be, if there is one.

## Entrées

Suggesting entrée selections should begin with finding out the guest’s preferences. Many dinner menus have a variety of meats, chicken, pasta, seafood, and shellfish selections, along with a vegetarian choice. Ask what the guest enjoys from those categories, and then offer two suggestions, being ready to follow up with additional information in response to questions regarding cooking methods, sauces, portion sizes, accompaniments, etc. For example, if the guest orders a Signature Steak Dinner, which includes the cooking technique of char-broiled, deglazed with Madeira, and served with béarnaise sauce, the following questions could arise: “What is char-broiled?” (quick cooking by open flame and/or direct heat); “What is Madeira?” (a rich brandy-based wine from Spain); and “What is in a béarnaise sauce?” (eggs, butter, shallots, tarragon, and lemon).

When an order has been placed *à la carte*, read back the order and suggest items that will “go with” the item ordered, like “Would you like a bowl of French onion soup or a hearts of romaine salad?” or “May I recommend either creamed spinach or Brussels sprouts?”

## Desserts

Desserts can be suggested with a menu, as discussed in Chapter 4, Service Readiness, or by a presentation tray as discussed in table service section of Chapter 3, Table Service, Table Settings, and Napkin Presentations. In either case, the words used to offer the suggestions are important; for example, say something like, “Our home-made caramel sea-salted chocolate cake with seasonal berries and whipped cream is sensational, can I bring you one?” While presenting a dessert tray, the server could say, “The classic *crème brûlée* is my favorite.” Another approach if a dessert menu is used is to place the menu on the table for the guest to pick up and review followed by some server suggestions. Many desserts can also be sold to take home as a treat for later.

## After-Dinner Drinks

If the guest wants coffee, suggest the choices that may be available, such as espresso, latte, cappuccino, mocha, and decaffeinated, along with any specialty blends that the restaurant may have; also suggest traditional and herbal teas, alcohol beverages, spirited coffees, and house specialty drinks. Again the key is to suggest two items every time, such as, “May I bring you an Irish or Spanish coffee?”

## Server Incentives

Incentives are an excellent way to reward the servers who sell on a regular basis and to motivate servers who need to hone their selling skills. Most often, servers know the relationship between suggestive selling and an increase in their tips. Management, however, could encourage the servers to sell as much as they can to their guests by using incentives. A good incentive should be well defined and easy for management



**FIGURE 7.3**  
Welsh Slate Pig Charcuterie Board. Courtesy of Steelite International.

to track. It is popular to pick one particular item for the server to sell. Define a specific length of time the incentive program will run and offer a desirable prize. A good example of an incentive program could be selling a specific wine by the bottle. The wine would be presented to servers for tasting followed by a discussion about the characteristics of the wine and menu items that could be paired with the wine. The time the incentive program is running should be identified; for example, one month. The server who sells the most bottles of that wine would be awarded a prize that is determined by the manager. It could be a cash prize or even a bottle of the wine that is featured in the incentive. This can create excitement, friendly competition, as well as an increase in the restaurant's wine sales.

## Showmanship Sells Suggestively

### Learning Objective 10

Give examples of suggestive selling with the use of dining room showmanship.

Certain food items can be served with flair, excitement, and showmanship by displaying a special technique or method of presentation. When these items are served, they have a visible presence in the dining room that attracts guests' attention, and creates interest and curiosity. The result is that other guests will be tempted to order the same items. Also, the server has the opportunity to point these items out, as they are being served and/or enjoyed by other guests, while suggestively selling. For example, the server could say, "Our Welsh Slate Pig Charcuterie Board (as shown in Figure 7.3) is being served to the guests seated at the nearby table."

Foods that can be fun and exciting for guests are flamed dishes and sizzling platters. Examples of flaming dishes include flaming salads, shish-kabobs, desserts, and the famous crepes Suzettes. Certain techniques are used to light the different foods, to display them, and to skillfully put them out at serving time. Cognac, fruit liqueurs, and rum are generally used in flaming desserts. Flaming requires time and special equipment and is suitable only for certain dishes. Flaming does not actually cook the food but adds to the flavor. Restaurants that offer flamed dishes typically have one or two people trained to provide the service competently, such as the *maitre d'* or dining room manager.

## Service Timing

During a normal shift, an adequate amount of time can be allotted to serve each guest. However, during a Friday night dinner rush, the server's speed and efficiency are critical to giving proper attention to all the tables without seeming to "rush" the guests. During these rush times, the server may constantly have to change speed and direction. Therefore, reading each table and anticipating its needs is critical in controlling



### Learning Objective 11

Identify the procedures that can help a server to conserve steps and improve service timing during rush periods.

the service timing for all tables in the server's station. The server must observe them carefully and plan steps in advance of guest requests. This will save the server time and stress, and ensure good tips because the guests did not have to wait or ask for service.

The following procedures can help to consolidate steps:

- When two or three tables are seated at the same time, the server should take the orders from each table, one right after the other, using good judgment and considering how many people are seated. Then submit the orders to the kitchen and/or bar at the same time.
- If one person orders a second beverage, invite the other guests at the table to have a second beverage.
- When returning to the station, take several seconds to size up each table. What is each table going to need next? That is, beverage refills, pre-bussing, desserts, entrée orders, guest check, initial greeting, appetizer plates, etc. It is critical to always stay focused.
- When leaving the station follow the same procedure. Look to see what needs to be brought back out to the tables when returning to the station. Never leave or go to the dining room empty-handed.

## Emergency Situations

### Learning Objective 12

Explain what the server should do in an emergency situation.

There has been an increase in the incidences of food allergy reactions within the restaurant industry. A food allergy can be mild or, on the contrast, fatal. Therefore, a server must be attentive to guests who are communicating their food allergies to them. The server must double-check that the allergy issue from the guest is communicated properly to the kitchen. If not, an emergency situation can occur. If a guest becomes ill during the meal, or is choking, notify the manager immediately so that action can be taken. The server should try to remain with the guest as much as possible to attend to any needs such as bringing a drink of water or a cold towel. If a guest has fallen, do not try to move the guest. Also, do not attempt to administer first-aid, except to ensure the guest's comfort. The manager or a designated person on the staff should be certified in first-aid training and qualified to provide immediate care. Ask the guest or those accompanying them if you should call 911 for emergency help. The restaurant should have standard guidelines for all employees to follow during any type of emergency situation.

### CONNECTING TO THE GUEST TO CREATE GUEST LOYALTY

*John L. Avella, Ed.D, has 45 years of human resource development and operations experience in the hospitality industry. He has been vice president of human resources for Marriott Corporation, The Rainbow Room, and Windows on the World. As a consultant, some of his clients included: Marriott Corporation, Restaurant Associates, Hilton Hotels, The Culinary Institute of America, Holiday Inns, American Red Cross, Compass Group, Coca Cola, and Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. In 2001–2002, Dr. Avella was the Human Resource Director at the Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City for the food services facilities, serving 125,000 meals per day. He has also managed several large projects, including the opening of the new Cleveland Brown's stadium (1999) and the US Tennis Open (2002). He is currently Executive Director of the Sustainable Hospitality Management Program at California State University, Monterey Bay, and President of EQ International Perspectives. As a distinguished speaker/trainer/consultant, Dr. Avella offers the following:*

**Connecting emotionally** to the guest is the most critical part of a successful guest interaction. A good definition of guest service is: "creating a unique emotional experience for the



guest.” When you think of it, it is a relatively simple process—connect emotionally to the guest, develop a relationship, and create loyal guests.

**Positive service** is all about the interaction with the guest; as a matter of fact, research tells us that servers who connect emotionally to the guest make 127 percent more in tips than servers who do not connect. When you think about it, the server’s section is their own little business, and they have to treat it like they own it. They benefit from the sales from that section; the higher the sales, the bigger the tips. Their percentage is higher than the restaurant owner. Note: The server makes 10–20 percent of sales, whereas the owner makes 4–6 percent on sales. An important thing to remember is that when building sales, guests buy from people they trust and like—there is that emotional influence again. To piggyback on the emotional influence, the Gallup organization, based on their research (2003), found, “Regardless of how high a company’s satisfaction levels may appear to be, satisfying guests without creating an emotional connection with them has no real value.”

It would seem obvious that we would want loyal guests, but there are economic benefits from creating guest loyalty. Frederick F. Reichheld, author of *The Loyalty Effect*, lists some of these benefits:

- Raising guest retention rates by 5 percent could increase the value of an average guest by 25–100 percent.
- Loyal guests always return and become a dependable lifetime sales stream.
- Loyal guests brag about your organization and create the most effective advertising strategy—word of mouth and it is free of cost.
- It costs five times more to acquire a new guest than to keep an existing one.
- Referred guests tend to be of higher quality—that is, their business is more profitable and they stay with the business longer, creating more revenue and profits.
- Loyal guests are willing to pay more for your product or service.
- Loyal guests are more forgiving when you make a mistake.

Therefore, the “loyalty effect” means more sales and profit for the organization and more business and tips for the server.

Let’s explore a recent experience where you were the customer or guest. What was memorable about it? Was it positive or negative? What made it such? How did you feel about it? What emotions were involved? How important were the emotions in this experience? Are emotions important in the guest experience? Think about the answers to these questions: Would you rather deal with a restaurant you like or dislike? How many purchasing decisions are based on emotion, instead of need? Would you rather deal with a restaurant that was highly recommended by someone you know or a restaurant you saw in an advertisement? The answer seems obvious but do we think in these terms?

**Emotions matter in the guest experience because guests and staff are always emotional.** In the service industry, the emotions of the guest and staff can be more intense. So, let’s look at what emotions tell us about guests. The more concerned a guest is about an experience, the stronger the emotional response. Many times, the intensity of a guest’s emotion has nothing to do with the present situation; those guest emotions can be influenced by memories, life circumstances, and the guests’ and staff’s emotional state at the time.

**So, as a guest service provider how do I know what emotions the guest is feeling?** Well, there are many verbal and nonverbal cues that the guest displays if you are watching for those cues. Properly reading those cues could turn a negative guest experience into a positive one. By reading the cues you can control the interaction. Again, your job is to manage the guest experience and make sure it turns out to be a positive one. Reading the guest starts with observing the guest as they enter the dining room. How fast is the guest walking, head down what is the expression on their face? Based on that observation, you can determine how you will approach that table. For example, if the guest seems to be in a hurry, make sure you take that into account when you recommend drink and food. Do not suggest a five-course tasting menu. If the guests are involved in a conversation, wait for an opportunity to

speak, always leaning forward toward the guest and at the same time trying to make eye contact with one of the guests. Do not interrupt by saying, “excuse me”; you need to work on their agenda, not yours.

If a guest leans toward you as if looking for help or reassurance, lean toward them using a reassuring tone of voice. If the guest’s facial expression seems sad or depressed, be ready to help in a sympathetic way. If the guests seem joyful and celebratory, that is easy. Keep the positive emotions rolling, but do not get too familiar. Remember the occasion is about them, not you. If guests seem embarrassed or reluctant, perhaps with heads slightly bowed and not making eye contact, be positive and reassure them you are there to help and make the experience a great one. If there is anger or tension, guests are likely to have arms crossed, be leaning back, and have a scowl. Be just the opposite with your best “happy to see you” expression and positive body language. Show interest, listen carefully, and pick up on cues that might change the mood. You can have a dramatic influence on each interaction by setting a positive tone. Use your smile and body language to create the right atmosphere for a great guest experience. If their emotions are negative, your positive emotions can change them to positive or neutral. If guests are in a positive mood, you can reinforce and enhance their pleasure. Remember, a healthy way to view emotions is not as a problem to be solved BUT as the basis for forming relationships—this is how you create loyalty. An even bigger opportunity to form a relationship with the guest is if they have a problem that you solve.

**To create a positive relationship with the guest, you need to start with yourself.**

Remember, you cannot change the guest but you can change yourself. Research tells us that if you do not know yourself physically and emotionally, your system reverts to “hostility” in stressful situations. Remember, self-awareness is the emotional foundation of service. So, we start by taking a look at your body language. There is an old expression that states, “I can’t hear you because your body language is drowning out your spoken word.” What nonverbal messages are you sending to the guest? Have a friend look at your body language and give you some feedback. What are your posture, eyes, and expression saying?

- Welcome, I value you.
- Talk fast, I have other guests.
- Do not ask such dumb questions.
- I want to help you have a great dining experience.

With every guest you should be conscious of:

- Your facial expressions and attitudes as you approach the guest; be sure you are focusing on those guests and no one else.
- Make eye contact; avoid slouching or leaning on the table or counter.
- Be welcoming, warm, and engaging.
- Avoid behavior that suggests you are preoccupied or hurried.
- Communicate delight at having the opportunity to serve them.

**The last thing to discuss is developing trust.** Why? Because people naturally gravitate toward those they trust. When you have established trust, the guest will be interested in your suggestions and make a point of seeking to be helped by you. The keys to trust are:

- Be yourself.
- Give the guest your full attention.
- Put the guests’ interests ahead of yours.
- Be knowledgeable and honest about quality and costs.
- How would you serve this person if they were a family member or friend?

Since your job is 80 percent emotional and 20 percent technical, make sure you focus on that 80 percent. The bottom line in a successful guest experience is to connect emotionally to that guest, and create a relationship that will create guest loyalty—the ultimate guest outcome.

**Learning Objective 13**

Recognize that a warm greeting and personalized service can result in loyal guests.

## RESTAURANT REALITY: A WELCOMING GREETING AND PERSONALIZED SERVICE CREATES LOYAL GUESTS

There is a small, privately owned restaurant in an average-sized city, named “The Corner Place.” Jennifer, a mom with a busy schedule, and two small children were out at lunch time when the children needed to use a restroom. She entered “The Corner Place” and was enthusiastically greeted by Barbara, who worked there for many years. Jennifer immediately felt welcome and asked for a table for three, but first took the children to the restroom and then got them settled at the table. Barbara had a big smile when she approached the table with two small covered cups with crayons along with two paper place mats for the children to color. Jennifer happily responded by saying, “Thanks so much.” The children’s initial needs

were kindly taken care of and then Barbara suggested a lemon–ginger herbal iced tea for Jennifer. She returned with the tea and then helped Jennifer navigate the menu.

Jennifer’s youngest child was gluten intolerant, therefore, having special dietary needs. Barbara patiently helped with menu suggestions and then placed their lunch order with the kitchen. After about 5 minutes, Barbara returned to the table to check on her guests and briefly chatted with Jennifer. Shortly after Barbara served the food with extra napkins for the children, she checked back again after a few minutes to make sure that all was well. Jennifer thanked her for the excellent service as they all enjoyed their lunch. When finished, the plates were

quickly cleared. Then Barbara served two small scoops of ice cream to the children and asked if Jennifer would like anything else. The guest check was presented with a big smile and thank you. Jennifer was so impressed with Barbara’s ability to read her family’s needs and felt so good about her lunch experience that afternoon.

The following Saturday Jennifer returned to “The Corner Place” with her husband and children and was warmly greeted by Barbara who remembered her name and gave them the same friendly and efficient service. “The Corner Place” became this family’s special lunch spot for many years to come because Barbara made them feel so welcomed.

### Summary

A server’s task is more than just taking an order; it begins with the server’s ability to gain the guest’s confidence, and provides the best in food and beverage service. A server who generates an enthusiastic atmosphere for guests, coupled with personal enthusiasm, can produce a positive dining experience that will result in repeat business for the restaurant and increased tips for the server.

The server needs to be prepared to serve all types of guests, particularly those who may need special attention, such as the following: The *procrastinator* needs suggestions to help with a decision; the *skeptic* needs reassurance; the *fussy guest* knows what they want and the server must understand those needs; the *older guest* may need some special consideration and help; the *child* may need patience and understanding and a parent’s approval for menu selection; the *rude guest* needs to be handled with tact, but very firmly; the *talkative guest* needs to be given short answers and quick service; the *silent guest* appreciates understanding; the *diet conscious guest* wants knowledgeable answers regarding ingredients and cooking methods; the *coffee drinker* should be handled according to house policy; the *budget conscious guest* will need to know the less expensive items on the menu; and the *bad tipper* should be treated with the same attention and service as everyone else. In addition, the server must apply the necessary skills to accommodate guests with special needs, such as those with hearing or visual impairment, or those using a wheelchair.

A professional server will always anticipate the needs of guests by keeping an alert eye on guests and promptly attending to their needs. The server should also be aware of nonverbal cues and prompts from the guests, such as menu and napkin positioning, body language displays, and physical expressions.

Suggestive selling needs to be done with tact. It requires the server to have self-confidence and a positive attitude. It takes complete knowledge of the menu and of the combinations that go well with the item selected by the guest. Suggestions should be made with enthusiasm and by using the menu descriptions to create an

appetizing image. The server who successfully uses suggestive selling will increase guest check averages and tips. The larger the guest check, the larger the tip. Also, suggestive selling provides a definite service to the guest with the opportunity to have a better meal and a better value. The different types of suggestive selling include “upselling,” suggesting “related” menu items, suggesting new menu items or the “chef’s specialties,” suggesting items for special occasions, and suggesting “take home” items. Also, showmanship in the dining room with specially served food items can effectively enhance sales to other guests.

The proper procedure for taking the guest’s order needs to follow a system, and most restaurants will have a designated system for servers to follow. Finally, all emergency situations should be handled according to the policy set forth by the restaurant.

## Discussion Questions and Exercises

1. What is involved when a server makes a personal connection with a guest?
2. Give three examples of a server introductory greeting to guests.
3. How can a server measure the effects of their service enthusiasm?
4. What is the first step in developing server enthusiasm?
5. List and describe the characteristics of 10 different types of guests.
6. How should a server react if a rude guest looks at the server and loudly says, “Hey shorty, I need more bread”?
7. When anticipating guest needs, what does “reading the need” mean?
8. Give five examples of when a server can be proactive in anticipating guest needs.
9. List and describe two nonverbal cues and prompts from guests that can assist the server in anticipating guests’ needs.
10. What is suggestive selling?
11. Explain the five different types of suggestive selling.
12. Which offers a greater opportunity for suggestive selling, a dinner or an à la carte menu? Explain your answer.
13. Why should the server always include menu descriptions when describing menu items to guests?
14. What is the effect of suggestive selling?
15. When practicing suggestive selling, how many choices within each food and beverage category should the server suggest to the guest?
16. List the basic guidelines to follow for suggestive selling.
17. Give an example of when dining room showmanship suggestively sells.
18. Describe the procedure to follow when taking a guest’s order.
19. Since timing can be critical during rush periods, identify three procedures that could help a server conserve steps.
20. What should a server do in an emergency situation when a guest becomes ill?
21. Describe how servers can emotionally connect with guests in a way that can earn trust and the desire to become loyal to the restaurant.