

100 Things Restaurant Staffers Should Never Do

Herewith is a modest list of dos and don'ts for servers at the seafood restaurant I am building. Veteran waiters, moonlighting actresses, libertarians and baristas will no doubt protest some or most of what follows. They will claim it homogenizes them or stifles their true nature. And yet, if 100 different actors play Hamlet, hitting all the same marks, reciting all the same lines, cannot each one bring something unique to that role?

By Bruce Buschel, from the New York Time blog, *You're the Boss, The Art Of Running A Small Business*.

1. Do not let anyone enter the restaurant without a warm greeting.
2. Do not make a singleton feel bad. Do not say, "Are you waiting for someone?" Ask for a reservation. Ask if he or she would like to sit at the bar.
3. Never refuse to seat three guests because a fourth has not yet arrived.
4. If a table is not ready within a reasonable length of time, offer a free drink and/or amuse-bouche. The guests may be tired and hungry and thirsty, and they did everything right.
5. Tables should be level without anyone asking. Fix it before guests are seated.
6. Do not lead the witness with, "Bottled water or just tap?" Both are fine. Remain neutral.
7. Do not announce your name. No jokes, no flirting, no cuteness.
8. Do not interrupt a conversation. For any reason. Especially not to recite specials. Wait for the right moment.
9. Do not recite the specials too fast or robotically or dramatically. It is not a soliloquy. This is not an audition.
10. Do not inject your personal favourites when explaining the specials.
11. Do not hustle the lobsters. That is, do not say, "We only have two lobsters left." Even if there are only two lobsters left.
12. Do not touch the rim of a water glass. Or any other glass.
13. Handle wine glasses by their stems and silverware by the handles.
14. When you ask, "How's everything?" or "How was the meal?" listen to the answer and fix whatever is not right.
15. Never say "I don't know" to any question without following with, "I'll find out."
16. If someone requests more sauce or gravy or cheese, bring a side dish of same. No pouring. Let them help themselves.
17. Do not take an empty plate from one guest while others are still eating the same course. Wait, wait, wait.
18. Know before approaching a table who has ordered what. Do not ask, "Who's having the shrimp?"
19. Offer guests butter and/or olive oil with their bread.
20. Never refuse to substitute one vegetable for another.
21. Never serve anything that looks creepy or runny or wrong.
22. If someone is unsure about a wine choice, help him. That might mean sending someone else to the table or offering a taste or two.
23. If someone likes a wine, steam the label off the bottle and give it to the guest with the bill. It has the year, the vintner, the importer, etc.
24. Never use the same glass for a second drink.
25. Make sure the glasses are clean. Inspect them before placing them on the table.
26. Never assume people want their white wine in an ice bucket. Inquire.
27. For red wine, ask if the guests want to pour their own or prefer the waiter to pour.
28. Do not put your hands all over the spout of a wine bottle while removing the cork.
29. Do not pop a champagne cork. Remove it quietly, gracefully. The less noise the better.
30. Never let the wine bottle touch the glass into which you are pouring. No one wants to drink the dust or dirt from the bottle.
31. Never remove a plate full of food without asking what went wrong. Obviously, something went wrong.
32. Never touch a customer. No excuses. Do not do it. Do not brush them, move them, wipe them or dust them.
33. Do not bang into chairs or tables when passing by.
34. Do not have a personal conversation with another server within earshot of customers.
35. Do not eat or drink in plain view of guests.
36. Never reek from perfume or cigarettes. People want to smell the food and beverage.
37. Do not drink alcohol on the job, even if invited by the guests. "Not when I'm on duty" will suffice.
38. Do not call a guy a "dude."
39. Do not call a woman "lady."
40. Never say, "Good choice," implying that other choices are bad.
41. Saying, "No problem" is a problem. It has a tone of insincerity or sarcasm. "My pleasure" or "You're welcome" will do.

42. Do not compliment a guest's attire or hairdo or makeup. You are insulting someone else.
43. Never mention what your favorite dessert is. It's irrelevant.
44. Do not discuss your own eating habits, be you vegan or lactose intolerant or diabetic.
45. Do not curse, no matter how young or hip the guests.
46. Never acknowledge any one guest over and above any other. All guests are equal.
47. Do not gossip about co-workers or guests within earshot of guests.
48. Do not ask what someone is eating or drinking when they ask for more; remember or consult the order.
49. Never mention the tip, unless asked.
50. Do not turn on the charm when it's tip time. Be consistent throughout.
51. If there is a service charge, alert your guests when you present the bill. It's not a secret or a trick.
52. Know your menu inside and out. If you serve Balsam Farm candy-striped beets, know something about Balsam Farm and candy-striped beets.
53. Do not let guests double-order unintentionally; remind the guest who orders ratatouille that zucchini comes with the entree.
54. If there is a prix fixe, let guests know about it. Do not force anyone to ask for the "special" menu.
55. Do not serve an amuse-bouche without detailing the ingredients. Allergies are a serious matter; peanut oil can kill. (This would also be a good time to ask if anyone has any allergies.)
56. Do not ignore a table because it is not your table. Stop, look, listen, lend a hand. (Whether tips are pooled or not.)
57. Bring the pepper mill with the appetizer. Do not make people wait or beg for a condiment.
58. Do not bring judgment with the ketchup. Or mustard. Or hot sauce. Or whatever condiment is requested.
59. Do not leave place settings that are not being used.
60. Bring all the appetizers at the same time, or do not bring the appetizers. Same with entrees and desserts.
61. Do not stand behind someone who is ordering. Make eye contact. Thank him or her.
62. Do not fill the water glass every two

minutes, or after each sip. You'll make people nervous.

62. Do not let a glass sit empty for too long.
63. Never blame the chef or the busboy or the hostess or the weather for anything that goes wrong. Just make it right.
64. Specials, spoken and printed, should always have prices.
65. Always remove used silverware and replace it with new.
66. Do not return to the guest anything that falls on the floor — be it napkin, spoon, menu or soy sauce.
67. Never stack the plates on the table. They make a racket. Shhhhhh.
68. Do not reach across one guest to serve another.
69. If a guest is having trouble making a decision, help out. If someone wants to know your life story, keep it short. If someone wants to meet the chef, make an effort.
70. Never deliver a hot plate without warning the guest. And never ask a guest to pass along that hot plate.
71. Do not race around the dining room as if there is a fire in the kitchen or a medical emergency. (Unless there is a fire in the kitchen or a medical emergency.)
72. Do not serve salad on a freezing cold plate; it usually advertises the fact that it has not been freshly prepared.
73. Do not bring soup without a spoon. Few things are more frustrating than a bowl of hot soup with no spoon.
74. Let the guests know the restaurant is out of something before the guests read the menu and order the missing dish.
75. Do not ask if someone is finished when others are still eating that course.
76. Do not ask if a guest is finished the very second the guest is finished. Let guests digest, savor, reflect.
77. Do not disappear.
78. Do not ask, "Are you still working on that?" Dining is not work — until questions like this are asked.
79. When someone orders a drink "straight up," determine if he wants it "neat" — right out of the bottle — or chilled. Up is up, but "straight up" is debatable.
80. Never insist that a guest settle up at the bar before sitting down; transfer the tab.
81. Know what the bar has in stock before each meal.

82. If you drip or spill something, clean it up, replace it, offer to pay for whatever damage you may have caused. Refrain from touching the wet spots on the guest.
83. Ask if your guest wants his coffee with dessert or after. Same with an after-dinner drink.
84. Do not refill a coffee cup compulsively. Ask if the guest desires a refill.
- 84(a). Do not let an empty coffee cup sit too long before asking if a refill is desired.
85. Never bring a check until someone asks for it. Then give it to the person who asked for it.
86. If a few people signal for the check, find a neutral place on the table to leave it.
87. Do not stop your excellent service after the check is presented or paid.
88. Do not ask if a guest needs change. Just bring the change.
89. Never patronize a guest who has a complaint or suggestion; listen, take it seriously, address it.
90. If someone is getting agitated or effusive on a cellphone, politely suggest he keep it down or move away from other guests.
91. If someone complains about the music, do something about it, without upsetting the ambiance. (The music is not for the staff — it's for the customers.)
92. Never play a radio station with commercials or news or talking of any kind.
93. Do not play brass — no brassy Broadway songs, brass bands, marching bands, or big bands that feature brass, except a muted flugelhorn.
94. Do not play an entire CD of any artist. If someone doesn't like Frightened Rabbit or Michael Bublé, you have just ruined a meal.
95. Never hover long enough to make people feel they are being watched or hurried, especially when they are figuring out the tip or signing for the check.
96. Do not say anything after a tip — be it good, bad, indifferent — except, "Thank you very much."
97. If a guest goes gaga over a particular dish, get the recipe for him or her.
98. Do not wear too much makeup or jewelry. You know you have too much jewelry when it jingles and/or draws comments.
99. Do not show frustration. Your only mission is to serve. Be patient. It is not easy.
100. Guests, like servers, come in all packages. Show a "good table" your appreciation with a free glass of port, a plate of biscotti or something else management approves.