

SPEAKEASY

THE RULES OF EFFECTIVE EMPLOYEE/CUSTOMER COMMUNICATION

When dining out, how often have you heard restaurant staff members make abrupt, careless statements such as: “We can’t re-make _____ that you have already eaten part of.” “It’s only been a 30 minute wait so far.” “No, we can’t do that.”

Training your team to adopt effective communication skills will add to your guests’ overall experience. While we train our teams how to sell menu items, set up and maintain equipment, operate the computer system and practice safety and sanitation procedures, we often forget to teach them how to communicate effectively.

Don’t assume that your staff knows how to speak properly to your guests. Most people don’t know and must be trained. Your guests will judge your operation by the degree of “care” that is conveyed in the words and the messages your employees send. Choosing the right words and positively conveying messages can make the difference between repeat business and a one-time stop at your establishment.

WHEN TRAINING YOUR STAFF TO COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY, TEACH THEM THESE TIPS:

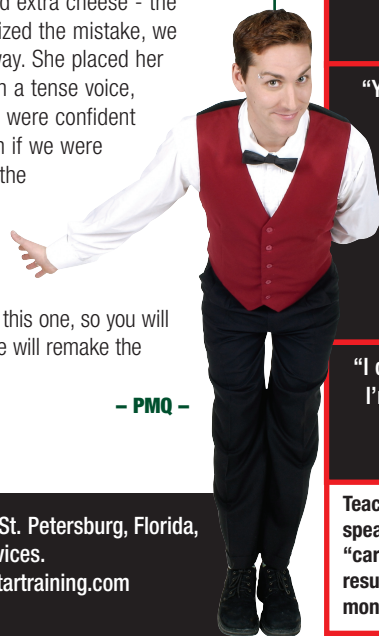
- Speak with an upbeat, well-modulated voice that conveys energy.
- Use positive, flowing gestures and open body language.
- Maintain effective eye contact.
- Use animated facial expressions.
- Use team words that build partnerships such as everyone, we, together, our, let’s/let us. Avoid using the word “you” in a scolding or blaming fashion, which places the receiver in a defensive position (see examples below).

To illustrate this point, recently, my sister and I visited a nearby Italian restaurant that my neighbor recommended. We were seated promptly by a friendly, upbeat hostess - a pleasant beginning. When the server arrived, we ordered a pizza with extra sauce and light cheese.

When the pizza arrived, it had light sauce and extra cheese - the complete opposite of our request. When we realized the mistake, we mentioned it to the server in a very diplomatic way. She placed her hands on her hips, rolled her eyes, and replied in a tense voice, “You didn’t tell me you wanted extra sauce.” We were confident that we had ordered the pizza correctly, but even if we were mistaken, we certainly could have done without the scolding. We held our composure and just ate it since we were on a tight time schedule.

The entire situation could have been handled better if the server had said, “I’m sorry for our mistake. Why don’t you go ahead and start eating this one, so you will have something to munch on. In the meantime, we will remake the pizza for you.”

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Rephrasing sentences and rewording thoughts to convey a positive message may take seconds longer, but the outcome is well worth it. Here are some re-worded phrases you can teach your team:

Don’t Say:	Say:
“We ran out of ____.”	“We sold out of _____” (Ran out conveys lack of preparation, while sold out suggests your item was popular)
“I don’t know.”	“That is a great question, I will ask my owner/manager/co-worker and let you know.” (The majority of the time, someone will know the answer)
“Your credit card isn’t any good.”	“I am sorry Mr./Mrs. Carrera, we are having some trouble getting authorization on your credit card. Do you have another form of payment?”
“No.”	“I’m sorry we are unable to ____, but here is what we can do.” (Always say “I’m sorry” when you are unable to accommodate a guest)
“You forgot to sign.”	“Mr./Mrs. Hsu, would you please provide me with your signature?”
“You need to show me your I.D.”	“I’m sorry for the inconvenience, would you mind showing me your identification?”
“We can’t do that.”	“I’m sorry we are unable to accommodate you, but here is what we can do.”
“I don’t know, I’m new.”	“I want to help you. I’m quite new here, but I will be happy to get you an answer.”

Teach your team to take the time to think before they speak. A little more effort on their part will create a “caring” culture that encourages guest loyalty. As a result, you will stimulate repeat business and add more money to your bottom line.

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