

Raising the Bar

FOODSERVICE *news*
The Industry's National Newspaper



Proudly Presents:



THE SEMI-ANNUAL BEVERAGE MENU MAKE-OVER CONTEST

One lucky restaurant will win 2 days of hands-on staff and management training by master mixologist and renowned flair bartender Gavin MacMillan, focusing on:

- accuracy • speed • flair • cocktail synergy
- time management behind the bar • review of current menu and full menu makeover

Here's what to do: Complete the ballot below (one entry per establishment). Mail or fax your ballot to the coordinates listed below. We'll take care of the rest. Gavin will visit your restaurant to help your staff 'Raise the Bar.'

Name: _____

Establishment: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

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Irregular Service Ethics

Remember every time Norm walked into the bar on Cheers, the entire bar would call out in unison "NORM!" It didn't matter who was behind the bar, they knew what he drank, and it was ready and waiting for him as he assumed his position at the end of the bar.

Norm embodied the "regular," the men and women who frequent your establishment regularly. They are the ones who more often than not, tip well, and don't ask for any special kind of service. In many cases they are the types who spend thousands a year in your establishment. They are the cornerstones of your business, you certainly can't afford to lose them, so the question clearly is how do you keep them and how do you get more of them?

I've seen lower volume establishments where regulars are praised and glorified, and high volume bars also where they are overlooked with the attitude that "it doesn't really matter what kind of service they receive, they'll come back anyway." In an industry where service is paramount to the success of your business and your frontline service, staff are often on a career stopover on the way to something better. Operators need to actively empower their staff to make sure that they you are cultivating long-term relationships with as many clients as possible, and creating experiences that they'll remember, and come back for.

Rob Montgomery, Bar Chef and Manager of Toronto's Vertical Restaurant insists that details are the key. "I have operational systems covered so my staff can focus on guest experience details. Our philosophy is that we treat customers like they were a guest in our own home, I empower my staff with the same ethos and give them the tools to accomplish it."

A good rule of thumb is that management should always be where the money is. If the restaurant is operating, management needs to be making regular rounds checking on guest experiences, not just server problems. Quite often guests will deal with sub-standard service by leaving little or no tip, and leave feeling dissatisfied. Management can circumvent this experience with a quick chat with each table. Guests are quite often more apt to give negative feedback to someone who is empowered to change the situation. "Mistakes and mishaps are inevitable in any restaurant; if they are handled correctly the guest will take notice. Fixing mistakes promptly and properly can impact guests greatly. Some of our longest running guests started off on the wrong foot, problems were solved and the guests were impressed enough to return again and again," says Montgomery.

Everyone wants to feel special. Cristina Maria Morelli service ambassador of the Irish Embassy says that many servers overlook the simple things like a smile and a genuine interest in a guest's well being. Anticipating the needs of her clientele is the surest way to make people feel



special. "Having a drink or menu ready for them before they have to ask shows them that I've got their needs in mind. I try to treat everyone who walks through the door like they were the owner's best friend!" People respond to that kind of service, and with this philosophy every guest is a potential regular. "My regulars have afforded me a lifestyle that others only dream of," says Morielli.

It is important that the servers are focussed on providing service tailored to the guest's needs. Obviously a birthday party and a solo businessperson require different styles of service. Montgomery echoes Morelli's sentiments, "We see our regular guests in many situations. A business lunch one day, then out with friends for drinks the next day. It is important to handle their needs appropriately in each situation, and regardless, we never take regulars for granted. We ALWAYS make time to say hello and check the quality of their experience."

I recently ate at La table du Chef in Sherbrooke, QC. The meal was terrific, but to complete the experience, chef Alain Labrie visited our table at the end of the meal for a 30 second chat and quality check. The added touch of a personal visit from the chef went above and beyond my expectations, and made our whole table feel special. It may not always be possible to chat and check with every table in your establishment, so creating an atmosphere where your service staff feel comfortable approaching management to resolve guest issues in a timely manner is crucial to your ability to turn any negative experiences into positive ones. The bottom line is that when the service and food are good, I'll probably come back for seconds, maybe even become your regular. If things go wrong and the problem isn't addressed, you'll never see me again. If there's a problem and you address it you guarantee that I'll come back with my friends. Maybe they can be your regulars too.

Until next time keep Raising the Bar in your business, because if you don't someone else will!



Gavin MacMillan is a master mixologist and bar chef, and owns BartenderOne Corp., Canada's fastest growing group of bartender training facilities. He is an award-winning flair bartender and published author and is considered one of Canada's leading authorities on cocktails and mixology. You can reach him at gavin@bartenderone.com.