

MIDWEST FOODSERVICE NEWS

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Serving Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, West Virginia and Kentucky

Service and Selling Training Adds Sales

By Robert Welcher

Since its humble beginnings in the 70's and 80's, mystery shopping has evolved into a sophisticated management tool that is gaining popularity among restaurant operators. More and more operators are using mystery shopping to provide ongoing evaluations of their restaurant operation to fine tune service and to build ticket averages, sales and profits. A professional mystery shopping service can put more dollars in to the operator's pocket, as well as the pockets of the restaurant's commissioned sales persons – the servers and bartenders.

How do you choose a mystery shopping service? Price is always a consideration, but the old adage "you get what you pay for" certainly holds true for mystery shopping. There are plenty of low-level shopping services available that are relatively cheap, but they only provide a simple snapshot of your operation and more often than not, they do more harm than good. If an operator wants to improve customer service and increase your check average and sales, a more sophisticated mystery shopping system is required.

Order Takers vs. Order Makers

The goal of a successful mystery shopping program should be to turn their "order takers" into "order makers". Anyone can take orders and deliver food and beverage to the table. Transforming these "order takers" into "order makers" will not only improve customer service, but dramatically ticket average, sales and profits.

The best sales pitch I ever heard was when our server came to our table after we finished our entrée, knelt on the floor, looked over both

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of her shoulders and whispered to us, "You know what I just saw in the kitchen?" We all looked all looked at each other and over her shoulders and responded, "No. What?" She said, "I just saw our chef take a steaming, hot apple pie out of the oven. The aroma of the apples, cinnamon and brown sugar was incredible! Can I cut a big slice, put a scoop of vanilla ice cream on top and bring it to you?" We happily accepted her offer.

Most probably, she went back to the kitchen, micro waved a refrigerated slice of apple pie and put the ice cream. A great performance to be sure and effective

Setting the Standards

Before installing a mystery shopping service, operators must set the standards of service and selling for their restaurant and then train their service staff to those standards. Developing service procedure manuals that define your standards of customer service and salesmanship is the first step in improving service and increasing sales.

"You Can't Expect What You Don't Inspect"

Once you have set the standards and trained your service staff, they performance must be continually monitored to maintain a high standard of compliance with your restaurant standards of service and selling. Since managers can't be at every table, mystery shopping is the only tool that will provide a true measure of performance.

To modify service associates behavior and maintain, the mystery shopping reports must produce individual scored reports for each service associate (host, bartenders, servers etc.). These indi-

vidual reports are used by management as a training tool to obligate the service staff to adhere to the performance standards of service and salesmanship. The individual server's report must include questions regarding their salesmanship performance that will obligate the servers to sell high margin appetizers, soups, salads, desserts and coffee.

Internal Marketing

Bringing new customers in the door is expensive, but maximizing sales of your existing customers is relatively inexpensive and can reap huge rewards. Internal marketing is marketing that takes place inside the four walls of your restaurant. Product knowledge and salesmanship training are the cornerstones of a successful salesmanship program, which centers on your service staff selling high-profit menu items.

“What’s In It For Me?”

Besides inaccurate and subjective reporting, many shopping services create an atmosphere of mistrust among the associates. Associates believe that management is trying to catch them “doing something wrong.” A professional service should tie performance excellence to an incentive/reward program to reward associates for “doing the right thing.” It should emphasize the positive, not reinforce the negative.

There should be no “mystery” about the shopping except who the shoppers are. The goal of a mystery shopping service that should be communicated to the service associates, that mystery shopping is designed to provide feedback to the service associates, so they may improve their performance, fine-tuning their service and increasing their sales, as well as their tips.

\$156,000 Additional Sales Per Year

Considering the present economic times, operators are realizing that it is more important than ever to create sales – to maximize sales within the four walls of their restaurant.

**A \$1.00 check average increase
X's 3,000 customer per week =
\$156,000 additional sales per year!**

Enjoying a great appetizer or signature dessert could be the “defining moment” of the customer's visit to a restaurant and may encourage them to return more often.

A cup of coffee typically cost 14¢ to 18¢ and sells for \$1.25 to \$1.50 or more which is only an 11% to 12% cost factor and more importantly a profit margin of over \$1.00.

A recent study found that servers sell coffee only about 30% of the time, leaving a lot of room for improvement. Increasing coffee sales can add \$50,000 to \$65,000 a year to sales.

The “Soft Sell”

Nobody likes “pushy” salespeople – like a telemarketers calling when you are sitting down for dinner and certainly not servers, when you are at a restaurant to relax and enjoy a meal. Successful salesmanship is based on a strong foundation of food product knowledge and the ability to zero in on the customer's preferences. Instead of “suggestive selling” servers should be trained how to sell by “recommendation” which will increase sales of appetizers, soups, salads, desserts and coffee. These high margin add-ons will dramatically impact the bottom line.

Implementing an appetizer-of-the-day program, like a soup-of-the-day, not only provides more variety for your customers, but also obligates the servers to inform their

customers of the appetizer, which in turn will increase appetizer sales. A appetizer that is not on the menu, also helps servers overcome self-consciousness and their fear of coming across as a phony when they recommend menu appetizers.

The Bottom Line

If you just want a snapshot of your restaurant' performance, a simple mystery shopping report will do. But if you want to improve service and increase sales, invest in a more sophisticated mystery shopping that will provide feedback that will improve service, sales and the bottom line.

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