

# Restaurant Service Standards, Skills, and Slipups

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Diners who believe that their servers are nothing but “food taxis,” carrying food and empty plates back and forth from the kitchen don’t understand how crucial servers are to good food service and the overall dining experience. To help us explore what it takes to achieve truly high restaurant service standards, Ai InSite asked for the help of Roger Levine, [Culinary](#) and [Hotel & Restaurant Management](#) instructor at The Art Institute of Pittsburgh.

## **What is the most important part of good food service?**

To ensure that the customer perception level is achieved... the customer is often treated as an inconvenience. This approach needs to be eradicated and establishments need to regain the trust of the customer.

## **What would you say is an appropriate tipping scale in a perfect world?**

To begin with, this question is being asked of someone in the hospitality industry. I honestly feel that 20% is the standard for tipping as opposed to the traditional 15%. However, if the service is not to the standard you had hoped for, then a lower tip should be given. However, this comes with added responsibilities to the customer. A manager should be approached and the rationale of a lower tip needs to be explained to the manager. Otherwise the “message” is not received by the staff. The server will merely view you as cheap and complain about you. I appreciated when customers would discuss with me concerns that the diner experienced and their observations that could actually improve the overall operation’s success.

## **What things should a server do at every table regardless of how busy they are?**

Make sure the customer's experience does not become cheapened due to being busy... this is management's responsibility to be properly staffed. People are understanding and appreciate when the restaurant is busy; however, one cannot be forgotten. Monitoring beverages is essential. If the food is taking too long, often a small gesture of offering a complimentary cup of soup can be so cost effective. It appeases the hunger of the customer, lets them realize that they are not forgotten, and is an easy way of working with the customer at a low cost for the restaurant. The worst thing to do is to have the customer sit there and feel that no one is concerned about their decision to spend money at this operation.

## **What are some common things that servers do that they should not regardless of how busy they are?**

Servers should never discuss customers nor tips on the floor. Also it is important as the commercial states "never let them see you sweat." Organization is essential for the entire restaurant to ensure a strong service. The front of the house (FOH) and the back of the house (BOH) have to be synched and work together. When opposing forces prevail, the negative attitude then goes out onto the floor, affecting the customers' dining experience.

## **Why is it so common to get bad service?**

I honestly don't feel that it is so common to get bad service. I do however feel that too often minimal service is presented. This falls directly on management as they are responsible for ensuring the quality of the food, service, appearance, and attitude of the establishment. This is achieved through proper training and hiring procedures of the establishment. The decline in service is not necessarily merely a hospitality industry concern. Our society has become more self service... examples of this: stores such as TJ Maxx replacing full-service department stores; self check out at the grocery store; automated phone service options. All these experiences diminish the need for people to directly interact. We look for the bad or what is wrong. What happened to a compliment? This is an approach that I try to relay to my students. The policy in the industry is this... "the louder one yells, the more they are rewarded." I never felt this was solid and positive reinforcement for the staff.

## **How big a role does knowing the food play in giving good service?**

Knowing the food is essential for good service. How can anyone sell a product and not know information about it? How successful is an auto salesperson if the reply is "isn't it a pretty car?" The more knowledgeable the server, the stronger the selling tool, and ultimately the more positive of a dining experience. [Food] allergies are a growing concern and the server needs to

know what ingredients are used in the dishes. In this concern, the BOH also needs to follow standardized recipes to ensure the consistency of the dish and that the ingredient list is not altered. If wine service is included, this information needs to be trained. Being a server is a professional occupation and the stronger the individual is with their knowledge, the better the opportunities for the person.

### **Can good restaurant food service make up for bad food?**

Absolutely, good service can make up for bad food. In the industry there are direct interactions between the restaurant and the customer. These are referred to as “moments of truth.” A good server can have a positive impact if the food is not up to standard. This might bring them back for a second visit; however, the customers’ level of quality food and service will be heightened.

### **Can good food make up for bad service?**

Yes, food can make up for bad service. The problem with this aspect of service is that the server is still the last moment of truth the customer experiences. This will definitely taint the overall perception of the dining experience.

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