

Service That Sells! E-Newsletter Volume 10, No. 11 • March 16, 2009



Full Service, Self Service... or Somewhere in Between By Michael Attias

One of my consulting clients sent in a question that I felt needed to be shared with everyone. He asked me if drop-off catering customers ever wanted us to come back and clean up after an event.

Clients that pay for more expensive menus often want that service. When they're investing \$15 in a hot lunch, they want more service and extras. I recommend offering four levels of catering to meet a variety of customers' needs. (These prices are for illustrative purposes only.)

- **Level 1:** \$14.95/guest for full service. We set it up, serve, replenish buffet and clean up. Includes tables, chaffers, etc.
- **Level 2:** \$9.95/guest for semi-full service. We drop it off and set up with chaffers, tableclothes and stainless steel utensils. We also come back after the event and clean up.
- **Level 3:** \$7.95/guest for drop-off only.
- **Level 4:** \$6.95/guest for pick-up only.

A side note that's equally important: just about every catering menu I receive for critique tries to sell "full pans" and "half pans" of food specialties, as opposed to a per person package. Please allow me to rant for a minute. Your customers don't have time to calculate quantities. They don't want to buy food for ten more people than they have just because a half pan doesn't get it done and a full pan is overkill.

You need to do the thinking for them and create packages in the low, middle and high price ranges. This type of bundling complete with entrée, salad, sides, desserts, drinks, etc. is a no-brainer and drives up check averages.

Is Bigger Better? The Half-Meal Deal

Last year, the *New York Times* reported that the "entrée was dead." With the trend of smaller plates—and the options for smaller or even half-sized portions—it may be that less is more. But are customers taking the bite?

According to the National Restaurant Association, more than three-quarters of American adults say they are trying to eat more healthfully in restaurants than they did two years ago. But studies show—and your own operation may be able to attest to this as well—that most diners are looking to indulge when eating out. And marketing groups have found that menu items labeled "light" or "low fat" are more likely to be viewed as less satisfying or "tasty" than other items... even when they've been made the same way.

If you chose to add half-portions to your menu, consider implementing the following ideas:

- **Use a slightly smaller plate.** Don't bring out the salad plates, but remember... perception is everything. If your entrée is surrounded by a sea of white china, your customer won't be satisfied.
- **Keep the presentation similar to the larger item.** If your guest chooses to order a smaller-portion size, be sure that the only surprise is the quantity. Keep side items, garnishes, etc. similar so customers don't feel as if they've received something of less value.
- **Offer bite-size "extra" items.** Bakeries have hugely profited from the two-bite brownie. Why shouldn't your operation? Bite-size desserts—as well as appetizers and other extras—often change a "No thanks" response to a dessert offer to a

“Sure? Why not?”

Help Wanted: Hire the Smile

You see the signs everywhere: “Help Wanted,” “Now Hiring,” “Inquire Within.” Turnover in the hospitality industry has forced many operations into a perpetual state of advertising. They just sit back and wait for ideal employees to waltz through the front door.

The best prospects, however, don’t always show up when they should. In fact, they may be working in some other service-related industry, never having even considered a job in the restaurant business. In that case, you’ll have to go looking for them.

Have you ever come across a smiling, industrious employee at a photocopy center? How about a friendly attendant at the dry cleaner or Laundromat? Did the salesperson at the clothing store “wow” you with exceptional service?

These are the kind of people you want working for you, whether they have restaurant experience or not. As is often said, “Hire the smile.” When you find an ideal candidate, discreetly hand out a business card and say, “I appreciate your smile and excellent service. If you’re ever looking for work, please give me a call.”

Who knows? One day that perfect person might become interested in a part-time income or a whole new line of work. If not, you’ve at least made his or her day with the compliment. You’ve also planted a seed. That person may know someone who’s looking for work, someone with equal customer-service skills, someone who turns out to be the best hiring decision you’ve ever made. All for the price of a business card.

Get everyone involved. Encourage all the managers and assistant managers in your restaurant to keep their eyes peeled for people in the business of providing quality customer service. While you’re at it, get the whole staff involved.

Consider offering cash bounties to anyone who brings aboard an employee as a result of handing out a business card. Split the bounty—say, \$50—between the new employee and the person who made the discovery, provided that the new employee sticks around for at least 60–90 days.

Role-Play: Full Service for Half-Size Portions

Above, we talked about the benefits of smaller portions. Brainstorm ways to sell this concept. Here’s one strategy to get you started.

- **Guest 1:** I think we’ll just split the pasta. Is it very big?
 - **Server:** Yes, it is and if you’re not very hungry, it’s plenty for two with a couple of small salads.
 - **Guest 2:** I’m not sure I wanted the pasta. I was thinking of the fish tacos.
 - **Server:** You know, we offer the pasta in a half-portion size. It comes with the same ingredients and garnishes and it’s slightly larger than half our normal-sized dish. Should I bring one of those as well as the tacos?
 - **Guests:** Sure!
 - **Server:** Great... and be sure to leave a little room, because we also offer some of our signature desserts in half-sizes. They’re perfect for those who want just a little treat.
 - **Guest 1:** We will. Thanks!
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[Jan. 5](#) • [Jan. 12](#) • [Jan. 19](#) • [Jan. 26](#) • [Feb. 2](#) • [Feb. 9](#) • [Feb. 16](#) • [Feb. 23](#) • [Mar. 2](#) • [Mar. 9](#)