

Chapter



LET'S GET THIS PRE-SHIFT MEETING UNDERWAY

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“**G**ood afternoon everyone! Let's get started - we only have a few minutes for tonight's meeting and there's some important news to share.

First, great job so far this month! Since making “increased appetizer sales” one of our quarterly objectives, appetizer revenue is already up 19% from the same period last quarter. The momentum from last quarter's focus, “increasing dessert sales,” is continuing! Dessert sales were up over 16%. Most importantly – your average tips were up as well! See what a smile, some eye contact, a little “suggestive selling,” and higher check totals do for us all!

Shilo, congratulations again – it's the second time this week you have led the group in “add on” sales and the highest check average. Thank you! (Robert and Ryan initiated the applause for Shilo.)

Second, the foundation we created months ago with the ENTRÉE MarketingSM program is paying off. We're seeing more customers this quarter versus the same period last year, and some of you have expressed your joy, and exhaustion, at seeing a full restaurant this early in the week. The data and your fatter pockets (more tips) are proof of our progress!

A few of you noted that our base of "regulars" seems to be increasing – that is correct. Some of these customers are even asking to be waited on by specific servers. Do you think these loyal customers tip better? No more need be said about this correlation!

Let's remember the Principles in our ENTRÉE MarketingSM program – we are creating the most loyal customers and friends in the city!

Any questions? Yes – Vanya.

"What are today's specials?"

Good question – thanks for reminding me. Everyone, don't forget to check the daily menu board in the kitchen for today's featured entrees; by the way, I loved the lamb and Paula told me the striped bass is fantastic!

Do not forget to tell your customers about the loyalty program via email – I expect three new customer sign-ups per server.

As usual, I will be on the floor as much as possible greeting our customers. Do not hesitate to

*contact me with any problems that you cannot solve,
or to meet some first time patrons.*

*Oh, and Brian, tuck your shirt in. Okay - let's get
started!"*

PRE-SHIFT AS A METAPHOR

You can think of this book, and much of your business, as a pre-shift meeting. In this meeting, you are checking your progress, encouraging your staff, informing them of today's specials, solving problems, and aligning the team with your objectives.

In *ENTRÉE MarketingSM: Six Critical Principles for the Overworked Restaurateur*, we will go through these steps, and much more. This book has been written to help every restaurateur, general manager, or anyone who dreams of owning and operating a restaurant, do a better job at marketing. Many of the concepts presented in this book came about through discussions with countless restaurant owners, your peers in the industry. *ENTRÉE MarketingSM* was created to address the most common challenges faced by restaurateurs of all types, from independent entrepreneurs to managers of national chains.

As we did in this pre-shift meeting, we will start briefly with progress. You need to honestly evaluate the effectiveness of your marketing, particularly as it relates to your business objectives. Careful - overstating your success will leave you vulnerable to new and existing competition since you are assuming more loyalty than your customers probably feel. On the other hand, setting your marketing objectives too low, even if achieving them, also

puts you at risk, as a better marketing program will lure your “occasional customers” away. All too often, significant customer loyalty frequently occurs accidentally, as opposed to by design.

Unlike the encouragement provided in a pre-shift meeting that is based on results, I am not in a position to give you feedback because I do not know where you started, how far you have come, and where you hope to go. You are in a great industry, but a very unforgiving business. You may have the finest wine selection in the city, but the upscale diner who feels slighted or ignored by your staff will find another fine dining restaurant, with a great wine list, to enjoy. If you are a “cheap eats” kind of restaurant, awareness of customer issues is also critical. Your local newspaper may have voted you as one of the “100 Best Bargain Restaurants,” but your customer has 99 other Bargain Restaurants listed right in front of him.

***You are in a great industry,
but a very unforgiving business.***

In your world “today’s specials” reflect varying availability of certain food items, their price, and even diet trends. Well, there are trends in marketing and advertising as well. Different media suit different size restaurants, at different times during their life cycles, and accomplish different marketing objectives. The point of this book is to help the committed restaurateur choose the correct marketing objective and the appropriate media at the right time, thereby resulting in a more loyal customer base and greater success.

In regard to problem solving, the fast-paced world of food service, with demanding customers, hot items served less than hot, and late food deliveries, does not support an environment for writing new operations manuals on a monthly basis. So we learn from our mistakes, correct them quickly (and permanently, if we are serious about success), and move on to the next customer.

The pre-shift meeting also serves to align everyone with the same goals. Your restaurant cannot succeed if there is a lack of clarity and commitment toward the goals, and alignment ensures that you are all “rowing in the same direction.”

WHY FOCUS ON MARKETING?

Why are we concentrating so much on marketing? (I get that question a lot.) Let us think about what we would consider to be most important in a restaurant’s success, based on our roles and training.

“People come here for my great food. I need to constantly improve the cuisine and menu,” says the chef.

“If I can solve my personnel issues, and provide perfect service, we will be packed,” says the General Manager.

“Given that I am now controlling food costs and expenses, we are more profitable than ever,” says the Operations Manager (who may be the Chef *and* General Manager as well).

Let us not forget the customer, or take his loyalty for granted. “Where do you want to go for dinner tonight?”

asks an *occasional customer of yours*. “Let’s go to the Olive Grove, they have the best crab cakes in Maryland!” *responds a loyal customer of theirs*. “Okay – the Olive Grove sounds good,” says *your customer*. (“What? You are my customer – show some backbone!” you think as you look out at empty tables in your own restaurant.)

The Chef is right, as are the General Manager, Operations Manager, and everyone in your business who is focused on specific tasks. But ultimately, the most important “business partner and advisor” you have, the customer, chooses where to be fed, entertained, and psychologically rewarded for his decision.

Marketing is the separator.

So why focus on marketing when there are other legitimate tasks that need attention? *Marketing is the separator*. Marketing encompasses the objectives of your Chef, General Manager, and the many employees who represent your restaurant to the outside world. Marketing done well, thoughtfully, and honestly, makes it easy for your customer, that necessary business partner and advisor, to choose you over and over.

Let me give you a personal example. Among the many fine steak restaurants in the Denver area, I ate at two of them, The Palm and Del Frisco, while in town on business.

Both restaurants are white tablecloth, fine dining, and comfortable. Service is typically exceptional and the

food is high quality. If you are into wine in a big way, they have impressive wine storage areas. The wine is stored on its side, tilted slightly at the perfect angle to impress unsophisticated customers like me as to how valuable a wine collection it truly is.

The check average is relatively high; for me it is usually \$65 - \$80 for dinner. In some ways, the interior, food and service are similar enough that if you changed the sign on the front door and the logo on the menus, I might not be able to tell the difference. (I hope I have not offended the brand managers at both The Palm and Del Frisco with that last statement!)

Back to Denver – my meals at both restaurants were great, as was the service. The people I brought with me, and whose meals I paid for, were in agreement. In essence, both experiences were good enough for me to consider dining at either restaurant during a return trip to Denver.

As a matter of fact, in choosing between the two, I could just flip a coin for my decision.

Yet, on my next trip to Denver, one night only, I did not flip a coin. I consciously chose one restaurant over the other, without any hesitation.

Why? I just spent a page telling you how similar they were, and how the food and service were both great. Was it proximity to my hotel? No. How about price? No. A preference expressed by my dining companion? Sorry. I bet you will *never* guess.

It was marketing. *Marketing was the separator.* By the way, this specific marketing tactic was not expensive. It

was not a TV commercial, radio jingle, billboard, or even a generous gift certificate (although that works very well for me too, by the way).

The reason I chose one restaurant over the other is because of something I considered remarkable. A few days after I returned home, as I was opening my mail, I noticed something unusual. Not “junk mail – this envelope is intended for recipients over the age of 21” unusual, but unusual because it had a Denver postmark. It was a handwritten “thank you” note from my waiter at The Palm. He had taken the time, possibly under the watchful eye of a very good General Manager, to write an out-of-town customer and invite him back.

I had never received a note like this from a server, so this marketing tactic was very effective. How effective? Not only have I been back to this Palm restaurant multiple times since, I have also told a handful of my friends, and tens of thousands of my readers, of this incident and how marketing makes a difference.

I know some of you are thinking to yourselves “Writing a thank-you note is not marketing. I am not sure what it is, other than a waiter with extra time on his hands, but marketing is advertising, or public relations, or coupons in the newspaper. It is what the big guys do to get people through their doors. What’s worse, I cannot afford to market like that, so I will not even bother.”

On the other side of the coin, some of you are thinking to yourselves “Okay, marketing is the “separator”, but when everyone is doing the same things, how can I maintain my uniqueness? I can always come up with a new idea (or copy some competitor’s idea, as long as he is out-

of-state), but is there a framework or structure I can use to help me create a sensible, affordable, and effective marketing plan?"

This is a book for all of you. I am not promising it will change your lives, but I do promise that you will increase revenue and profits, generate ideas, think more creatively, implement sound training procedures, and strengthen your brand in the customer's mind relative to the competition. All you have to do is overcome your inertia, your "we've always done business this way" mindset, and implement the principles you will learn.

Now tuck your shirt in, and let's get started.

"One morning, as I went to the freezer door, I asked my wife, 'What should I take out for dinner?' Without a moment's hesitation, she replied, 'Me.'"

Anonymous