

The Effect of Waiting Service in the Hospitality Industry in Sekondi-Takoradi

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Abstract: The provision of food and beverage service away from home forms a substantial part of the activities of the hotel and catering industry. According to Fullar (1990) in order to move food produced in the kitchen to customer, some form of food service (waiting service) is required. The hotel industry is a competitive market where hotel management's goal is to decrease the vacancy rate while increasing the customer return rate. (Heung, 2000). Unlike goods, many services are consumed in the process of production, and customer experiences a number of sequential stages. For instance, in the restaurant service delivery process this would begin by checking in at the reception of the restaurant and end with presenting the check to the customer and saying good-bye (checking-out). However, a difference in emphasis between the different value dimensions might be expected contingent on the purpose of visiting the restaurant (e.g. a business lunch, a romantic celebration). This in turn might also influence customers' perception of the service delivery process. This study examined one of the keys to a successful food and beverage operation-waiting service. The backgrounds of the waiters are investigated, together with the skills and expertise which they are expected to possess in other to meet customer satisfaction. The training offered to these waiters was compared with the service provided so that recommendations were made to the waiter and waitress in the process of food service. A selection of hospitality industries- restaurants were considered and views of the hotelier, waiters/waitress and the customers taken so as to put across the views of those involved. It's therefore recommended that a better trained workforce would improve standard. Again management should employ skilled and qualified people who have had the skills attained at both formal school and on the job. Training of waiting staff is minimal, yet they need technical skills, product knowledge and interpersonal skills. These skills can be taught, as can the role of the waiting staff in the process of customer satisfaction. Hospitality industries would either have to recognize and act on these obligation or they may expect a loss of business.

Keywords: Waiter/ Waitresses, Restaurant, Food service.

1. INTRODUCTION

The basic purpose of restaurant establishment is to make profit by providing meals. To be successful, it demands that appropriate food and beverage be offered in decent environment at a reasonable price. The provision of food and beverage service away from home forms a substantial part of the activities of the hotel and catering industry. Food and beverage serving and related workers are the front line of customer service in full-service restaurant, casual dining eateries, and other food service establishments. According to Fullar (1990) in order to move food produced in the kitchen to customer, some form of food service is required. This may vary from full silver service in a luxury restaurant or hotel where the food is brought to the customer's table to a self service cafeteria where customer collect their own food from a service counter. The modern waiter is aware that more people eat away from home than in pre-world war days when dining were dominated by hotels and fine restaurant. For all these activities to carry on, establishment use the service of a waiter before the food reaches the customer. Basically a waiter is a person who works in either the catering or restaurants industry, and is responsible to the food service process. A waiter not only serves food and beverage, but plays an important part as a salesman of food and beverage through its accompanying service, (Fuller, J 1992). A successful establishment with waiting service is one which guest wants to visit again and feel as comfortable as in their home. This pleasant atmosphere is produced by friendly courtesy, a welcoming attitudes, well cooked and efficient service. By this service both buyer and seller are satisfied and goodwill of the establishment is increased.

The United State of America Travel Data counter (1995) stated that many organizations derive almost all their sales from travelers, thus food and beverage. A waiter provides the sale of these services. Waiters and waitresses sometimes perform the duties of other food and beverage service workers, including escorting guest to tables, serving customers seated at tables, serving customer seated at counters, clearing and setting up tables, or operating a cash register. Customer surveyed on what they valued most in a waiter was smiling and welcoming blend of social qualities. This does not mean techniques are not important. For these reasons, the study will find out what waiters and waitresses can do to promote the development of the hospitality. Providing the required waiting service in the food service is required. This may vary from full silver service in a luxury restaurant or hotel where the food is brought to the customer's table to a self service cafeteria where customer collect their own food from a service counter. The modern waiter is aware that more people eat away from home than in pre-world war days when dining were dominated by hotels and fine restaurant. For all these activities to carry on, establishment use the service of a waiter before the food reaches the customer. A waiter not only serves food and beverage, but plays an important part as a salesman of food and beverage through its accompanying service, (Fuller, J 1992). A successful establishment with waiting service is one which guest wants to visit again and feel as comfortable as in their home. This pleasant atmosphere is produced by friendly courtesy, a welcoming attitudes, well cooked and efficient service. By this service both buyer and seller are satisfied and goodwill of the establishment is increased.

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Power (1995) states that 'service' is all action and reaction that customers perceive they have purchased. In hospitality, that is restaurants, eateries etc industry, service of food is performed for the guest by waiter and indeed from the guest point of view service is the performance of the organization and its staff. A central characteristic of services is that value is formed primarily during the (service) experience or process, not solely by its consequential object, but the general service output. Unlike goods, many services are consumed in the process of production. Lewis (1946), states that 'value is some potentiality of the object for realizations of satisfaction in experience'. Some authors have argued that the service process is more important than the service outcome (Lehtinen and Lehtinen, 1982; Brown and Swartz, 1989). Moreover, it has been advanced that there may be distinct stages in the service delivery process that customers use to base their evaluative judgment on (Singh, 1991; Danaher and Mattsson, 1994). This suggests that a service delivery process can be modeled in terms of a number of distinct stages depending on the nature of the service under investigation (Singh, 1991; Armstrong, 1992). According to Lillicrap et al, (1993), the product of food and beverage operation is not just the food and beverages itself but any member of staff coming into contact with the customer is also part of the product. No matter how good the quality of food, beverage, décor and equipment, a poorly trained or unhelpful staff can destroy the customer's potential satisfaction with the product. It also true that well trained, smart and helpful staff can sometimes makeup for aspect, which are lacking elsewhere in the operation. Pratten (2003) stated that the aim of catering establishment is to make profit by providing meals. To be successful, this demands that appropriate food be offered in decent surroundings at a sensible price. A customer experiences a number of sequential stages during the visit to a restaurant. In the case of the restaurant service delivery process this would begin by checking in at the reception of the restaurant and end with presenting the check to the customer and saying good-bye (checking-out). In addition, the customer will evaluate the table, the menu card, the ordering, the food and the service by restaurant personnel. Of course this variable will change according to the nature of establishment and target market. Thus, there appear to be a consensus that success depends on customer satisfaction, which depends on the entire eating experience, rather than one or two factors. Romm (1989) has argued that the interaction between people in a restaurant is in fact the core business in up-market restaurants. Similarly Andersson (1992) argues that the satisfaction of social and intellectual needs during a restaurant service delivery process is equally important as the satisfaction of physiological needs. However, a difference in emphasis between the different value

dimensions might be expected contingent on the purpose of visiting the restaurant (e.g., a business lunch, a romantic celebration). This in turn might also influence customers' perception of the service delivery process.

However, staff is a major variable. Perfectly cooked food could be badly received because it was badly served. On the other hand even when there has been failure in the delivery of service, an able employee can ensure customer satisfaction with an appropriate response (Bitner and Booms, 1990). Waiters and waitress are the main contact between the customer and the restaurant, and so it is their performance, which will have a major impact on the level of enjoyment. According to Jones and Sasser (1995) achieving customer satisfaction is explicitly linked to the success of companies in the hotel, catering and tourism industries. But Power (1995) says service is an intangible experience of performance that guest receives along with the tangible side of the product purchase. Because the service is performed and consumed at the same time, there is no inventory. Both servers and guest are part of the transaction, which makes quality control difficult. Fuller J (1992) is of the view that a waiter must never indulge in preferential treatment of customers according to or in anticipation of tips he may receive from them, indeed every customer irrespective of his financial standing should be treated alike. Tips should be acknowledged graciously. (Curtis and Lucas, 2000). Ursula (1989) observed that customer satisfaction is difficult to evaluate but there are signs which staff can be trained to recognize that will give an indication of customer's appreciation of service. Some of the positive sign are guest look happy and pleased, talk pleasantly to waiter, make enquiries about future bookings or visit, walk at leisurely place in a relaxed manner, eat and drink in relaxed manner. But on the signs that portray negatively, guest look unhappy, sullen, snaps at the staff and raise their voice, gives no indication of planning future visit, tend to hurry around in a tense manner, eat and drink in a quick and may even be aggressive manner.

All new employees receive some training from their employer. They learn safe food handling procedures and sanitation practices but most food and beverage serving and related workers pick up their skills by observing and working with more experienced workers. Some full-service restaurants also provide new dining room employees with some form of classroom training that alternates with periods of on-the-job work experience. These training programs communicate the operating philosophy of the restaurant, help establish a personal rapport with other staff, teach formal serving techniques, and instill a desire to work as a team. They also provide an opportunity to discuss customer service situation and the proper ways to handle unpleasant circumstances or unruly patrons. For these reasons the study sought out the influence of waiting service on customer, the measure that the hospitality industries can take to improve upon waiting and examine the importance of waiting service in the hospitality.

2. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The requirements of waiting staff may vary from one outlet to the other. The following groups of people were randomly selected, Management team, waiters (staff) of the hospitality industry and the customers who patronize the service offered by hospitalities industries. It covered randomly a number of hospitalities scattered in Takoradi metropolis to give a clear picture of waiting service. Due to the large number of hospitalities in the metropolis, it was not possible to visit all. The researcher went to Ghana Tourist Board and collected all the accredited hospitalities (restaurants, eateries etc). The questionnaire used was a set of written questions on a given problem, which the respondents were required to answer. The questionnaire was based on conduct of waiters, element of quality service, customers' complaint, training programs organized for waiters, customer-waiter relationship and importance of waiter service.

On the questionnaire for customer, it was also based on conduct of waiters, quality of service, and how waiters handle their complaints. The questionnaire helped to identify potential problem in the hospitality industries and brought to light the general views of people concerning the issue at stake. For the sake of good analysis, only the questionnaires returned were used as well as information collected through interview and observation. The entire questionnaire was grouped under the various finding and analyzed one after the other.

On the academic qualification of the waiters, it showed that 10 respondents, representing 25% had Middle School Leaving Certificate and 2 respondents, representing 5% had tertiary education (HCIM). This could amount to the poor service provided by most eating places due to the level of knowledge of waiters.

Regarding the questions concerning their profession; are they professionals or not, it revealed that 70%, of the respondents were unprofessional waiters. This proves Gustafson (2000) assertion that the hospitality industries in USA and elsewhere is experiencing a skilled labour shortage. He further stated that it is clear there is a real problem finding and

keeping suitable waiting staff, since young entrants view hospitality industry job as temporary opportunities while studying or travelling before beginning a career in another industry.

As to the question of the waiters attending training programmes, it revealed that 45% of the waiters representing 18 respondents have never attended training or any in-service training programme organized for the staff. This confirms Harrison (1997) that large companies may have resources to plan, introduce, run and evaluate ambitious training and staff development progress, but most hospitality are small business where training is often ignored because of the cost and the difficulties in releasing employees for training.

As to the role played by waiters in the hospitality industry it indicated 100% for that. The aim of establishing hospitality industry is to make profit by providing food and beverage. Nevertheless, the basic principles are the same whether the outlets offer fast food or luxurious dinner. Waiters are the salesmen in food and beverage areas so their relationship with customers goes a long way to increase sales.

The responses gathered from waiters' attitude to customers showed that waiters had genuine interest in people who visited the outlets. The responses from customers and personal observations, 71% of the customers agreed that staff exhibited some level of good human relation to their customers. This also supported the responses accepting the fact that customers were friendly in their approach to waiters. This is not to say that customers appreciated these efforts, for some customers had complains waiters did not pay prompt heed to customer request. This quite normal with the hospitality business, for people have difference and with difference expectations, which is bound to occur particularly during busy periods.

From the data collected it was deduced that the hospitality industry deals with customers complaints. This proves the fact that perfectly cooked food could be badly received because it was badly served. On the other hand, even when there has been a failure in the delivery of the service, an able employee can ensure customers satisfaction with an appropriate response (Bitner and Booms, 1990).

The results obtained from the fieldwork did indicate that waiting service in the hospitality industry is very important since people have to eat and drink in one way or the other away from home. Without waiters and waitress the hospitality business will come to an end which will not be healthy for the nation as a whole, hence the need to train waiting personnel who do not know the ins and outs of the hospitality industry.

Data analysis showed that the selected hospitalities in Takoradi do maintain and portray a high sense of good waiting service to the customers but this does not rule out the fact that there is still the need to improve upon the prevailing standard attained.

From some of the responses gathered and personal interviews conducted, it was proven that management did give some form of training to their staff at least once when the outlet feels fit for training, whilst others agreed that it was not the remuneration that kept them at the work place but rather the love for the job. Others too said through the interview that they were on the job because they had no option due to lack of jobs for people, a prevailing situation in the country. Some employees also made their observations about the manner in which management recruited people who had no academic qualification, lack the skills and above all interest in the food and beverage service. The acquisition and retention of suitable staff at any level should be seen as vital in any analysis of an organization's skills, yet waiting is undervalued. Training of waiting staff is minimal, yet they need technical skills, product knowledge and interpersonal skills. These skills can be taught, as can the role of waiting staff in the process of customer satisfaction. The hotel industry is a competitive market where hotel management's goal is to decrease the vacancy rate while increasing the customer return rate. Customers have certain expectations for the hotel service, however they are often disappointed with one or more of many restaurants attribute that stretch from value and service to amenities (Heung, 2000).

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings obtained on the research, the following were recommended; that a better trained waiters' work force would improve standards. Waiting staff be sensitized to the different needs of customers and management of various restaurants ought to organize courses for their staff quite regularly. Management should employ skilled and qualified people who have had the skills attained at both school knowledge and on the job training. However, despite notable existing contributions by waiters, there is more work to credibly claim identification of particular driver of the impact of waiter on hospitalities.

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