



Patterns for Service Delivery Success

by Craig Pendleton

Casino food and beverage along with many other casino hospitality departments are challenged with obstacles to delivering service success for a variety of reasons. Most staff and supervisors in the service industry are also consumers and customers at other businesses. All have experienced service successes and failures. In food and beverage, there are standard patterns of service in which service failures occur most frequently. Casino departments that have longer periods of interaction with the player/customers are the most susceptible to these failures.

A Common Casino Restaurant Service Scenario: Casino customers arrive at a restaurant and are enthusiastically greeted and personally acknowledged at the entrance. Guests are promptly seated. Service staff greets the guests using their own names and the name of the guests. Guests are engaged. Service staff make menu recommendations, describe items and specials, and suggest beverages customized for guests to enhance the guest experience. Beverages, appetizers and salads are delivered promptly with customized service. Entrees follow in a timely fashion.

And then... the service delivery fades. The server becomes scarce – it becomes difficult to get his or her attention and/or they pass the table with their back turned towards the table, make no eye contact and appear to be too busy with other tables to deliver any additional service. The service staff doesn't refill beverages, clear plates and service ware, or suggest dessert and after dinner beverages. It becomes difficult to pay for the meal, receive change or a receipt. A supervisor is never visible in the dining room and never stops by the table. None of the staff members offer a thank you, farewell or invitation to return. This is a failure to complete the service cycle resulting in a service failure.

Great Start – Poor Finish: The server's actions during the beginning of the service experience exhibit their ability to provide great service. The level of service delivered at the beginning of the meal would typically lead to an exceptional guest experience and often an above average tip. However, after subsequent failures of service, the opposite occurs. No allowance will be made by the guests for a possible inexperienced new server or one with a lower level of skills. It has already been demonstrated that this isn't the case. The guest's perspective at this time is most likely that the server really doesn't care. Without involvement from other service staff or supervision it is an easy presumption to make that no one on the staff really cares.

This experience of poor, incomplete and failed service leaves

the guests with disproportionately bad memories and the likelihood of not returning or even worse – sharing their negative experiences with others. How does this occur? There are a number of challenges to service that may cause problems, including staffing and logistics. Operators may find the following items often cause these challenges:

- Remote location in proximity to cities with a small labor pool of experienced staff.
- Requirements to license staff, including background checks and drug testing, create a limited labor pool to hire from.
- High levels of staffing turnover for a variety of reasons including similar compensation offered for employment in other industries that may require less physical labor than working in a restaurant. Often the hours and shifts offered by casino outlets are not compatible with the prospective candidate's desire or availability to work.
- A diverse age group of staff members from different backgrounds with varying reasons for working and different motivations to consistently perform and attend work.
- Inadequate first-level supervision working in the dining room who are responsible for direct management and development of front line staff.

Additionally, these challenges may be caused by a training failure. Operators may find the following items frequently cause these challenges:

- Guest service standards don't exist in training materials.
- Staff is not trained in the service standards, if they exist, and these standards are not enforced.
- Supervision is untrained in job skills and service standards, or if they are trained, have little or no effect on the service experience.
- Supervision is not actively engaged in the service experience.
- Staffing is inadequate for business levels or not directed to efficiently provide service.

The following are some common challenging scenarios many F&B establishments run into, and recommended solutions for success:

Challenge: Staff is well trained and able to deliver basic services but not talented in engaging guests and creating a personalized service experience.

Solution: Training must involve the understanding of what an excellent service experience consists of, how to personalize service, what to do when there are service challenges and when to involve other staff or supervision in the experience prior to a potential service failure occurring.

Challenge: Supervisors are not actively engaged on the service floor or are incapable of rendering assistance to the staff. This may be a simple inability to understand where the needs are to effectively adjust resources or an inability to perform these services themselves.

Solution: Establish supervision capabilities of staff prior to promoting them to supervision. The best workers are not necessarily the best supervisors. Effective training of supervision in the skills and service requirements of each staff position. A member of supervision must be on the dining room floor at all times providing inspection, assistance and personal interaction with each guest.

Challenge: Individual members of the service team are unable to perform at the same level or speed as the rest of the staff, creating a bottleneck and delay in the service cycle (e.g. servers not being able to keep up with the amount of tables in their station).

Solution: Do not place staff on the service floor if incapable of performing the required duties. Newer staff members must be more closely supervised and may require a smaller station or smaller amount of responsibilities. Mentoring of the new staff and pairing them as a service team with a senior service member may be effective in training new skills and providing improved service. Staffing levels must be flexible and constantly adjusted. This requires active participation by supervision during the entire service cycle and requires assistance and reallocation of resources as needed.

Challenge: Inefficient layout and dysfunctional organization of work areas.

Solution: Reorganize or remodel service areas with an emphasis on reducing or eliminating obstacles and extra steps to provide service.

Challenge: Staff not completing the entire service experience for the guest.

Solution: Constantly retrain the staff in the steps of the service cycle and service standards. Practice and role-play every step of the cycle including the discussion of most common challenges that may occur and what to do or who to get to salvage the service experience. Senior staff members can be instrumental in sharing stories, solutions and making suggestions regarding what works best in challenging service situations. Daily pre-shift meetings are a great time to focus the team and perform small training sessions.

How to Provide Service Delivery Success

- The staff must be knowledgeable of what their responsibilities are, what they are selling, and the actual timing standards and skills of providing this cycle of service experience.
- The entire team needs to understand that the guest service experience begins at the first contact with the guests either when calling the restaurant or at the entrance of the restaurant and continues all the way through the exit of the guests out of the restaurant. The exit experience must include a sincere thank you and an invitation to return for a specific casino or restaurant promotion, upcoming feature or special event.
- Staff needs to understand the difference between job performance standards and personalized service standards. Writing down a guest's order, entering it into the POS and delivering the food are job performance standards. "Reading" the guests, interacting, asking questions and making targeted menu suggestions to provide individualized service to guests while guiding them through their personalized experience are service standards.
- Conduct continuous training with the staff to advance skills and introduce new ideas. Train, train and train more. The industry and guests are always changing.
- Mentor new staff by pairing "the rookies" with "the veterans."
- Schedule and assign stations and staffing depending on each person's abilities. Overloading and overwhelming staff will only lead to poor experiences for both guests and staff.
- Supervision must always be on the dining room floor to assist in service, support staff, coach, encourage, and to inspect that proper job and service standards are followed while never compromising with lower standards.
- Use technology to your advantage in areas such as table control systems, server paging, guest paging, labor control and scheduling.
- Remodel any service areas that are inefficient.
- Continuously utilize the staff and guests to collect direct feedback in all areas of service.
- Serve the guests until they are no longer in the restaurant.

The ultimate test of exceptional personalized service is guests who want to return again. ♣

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