



What's Your Problem?

(Are You Sure?)

If Kim is always late, the problem is tardiness. If the storage closet is always packed, it must be too small. A problem is easy to identify. In fact, it's usually so obvious that it practically stands up and smacks you upside the head, right?

In truth, correctly identifying a problem isn't simple. Often, we jump to conclusions, accept the interpretations of others, or study it solely from our own perspective. But when we fail to look at a problem completely and objectively, we fail to find the best possible solution.

So, how do you solve the real problem and not the symptom? Identify it correctly by following these techniques:

- **Look deeper.** Maybe the storage area is too small, or maybe you were told this when you first started seven years ago. What else can be the problem? Write down as many possibilities as you can.
- **Huddle up.** Call together all of the stakeholders (the people who are most affected by the problem). If the storage closet is too full, invite key prep people,


those who unload inventory, assistant chefs, servers, and your largest supplier. Then, ask them if there is a problem and, if so, to define it. You'll find that the problem may not be that the closet is too small. Instead, it may be that two managers are ordering inconsistently or organization isn't anyone's "job."

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- **Write it down.** There will be many different views on the real problem. Write them down. Ask your brainstorming group to evaluate each cause of the

problem. Open a discussion about each key point. "If we schedule fewer deliveries, will we run the risk of not having supplies when we need them? Would that cause a bigger problem than the one we're trying to solve?" By pinpointing possible solutions, you'll more clearly define the real problem.

- **Determine the objective.** When everyone has agreed on the problem, write the problem using as few sentences as possible. Here is an example of a good problem statement: "the inventory system of the restaurant's paper goods is disorganized and lacks a cohesive monitoring, ordering, and stocking process." Then, determine the real objective. In this example, it is "to improve productivity of all team members and reduce wait time for customers."

Now begin the task of solving the real problem. See Team up on Tough Problems (page 2) for creative ideas and review the rest of this issue for a host of problem-solving strategies. 

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Put it to Work

Your establishment has to sparkle if you want to keep customers coming through the doors. After all, many are following the age-old advice, "Check out a restaurant's bathroom before you decide to eat there." Again, training is the key. One manager not only assigns general cleaning tasks, but also specific tasks that are kept on schedule and with a lot of follow-up and inspection. She also schedules host staff to come in early every day to do detail cleaning. It may be an added expense, but it pays off in the long run.

She says, "I'd rather spend a little more for the hostess to clean and do a good job in half an hour than to expect the cleaning crew to do this type of detail cleaning — they'd probably claim it took an hour to do the same thing!" The bottom line is this... one hostess @ \$6/hour x one-half hour x 365 days = \$1,095 vs. one cleaning crew @ \$5.50/hour x one hour x 365 days = \$2,920 = **\$1,825** saved over the course of the year. 

Excerpted from Pump Up Your Profits, Service That Sells!. Call 800-247-8514 to order.


Team Up on Tough Problems

After you have determined your problem (see the cover story if you need help), it's time to find a solution. But how do you create a true solution, instead of just putting a Band-Aid™ on an old symptom?

Pull your team together and try these creative problem-solving techniques:

- **Question everything.** You already know you don't have the time, the money, or the resources to solve the problem, but are you right? Ask your team if those assumptions are accurate. How much time will it take? How much will it save? Can you find more money? Can you get someone else to pay (a supplier, a college kid looking for an internship)? Can you do it without money? Often you'll find that your assumptions are standing in the way of your solution.
- **Brainstorm like pros.** You already know the basic rules of brainstorming: don't criticize ideas, write everything down, and encourage active discussions. Employ those strategies, but try new techniques as well. Ask team members to take on other identities. Make the server the dishwasher or the accountant the stockperson. Then, have each


person offer solutions from his or her new role. For example, the server might make a suggestion that would assist the dishwasher and so on. Soon, ideas will become more imaginative as people step outside their typical roles and offer new insights.

- **Take artistic license.** Sometimes words get in the way. Ask a team member to illustrate a part of a solution. Then, after just five minutes or so, have that person pass it to the right. The next person adds on to the illustration and passes it to the next person and so on. When the team is done, you'll find that you're closer to a solution and everyone has a better idea of the other person's perspective. 



Spanish Language Communication

Even if you can't carry on a complete conversation with your Spanish-speaking team members, they'll appreciate your efforts to use their native language here and there. It will help them feel welcome and accepted in your English-dominated environment. Here are some common words and phrases you can throw in to your mostly-English interactions:

You Say	Pronunciation	I Say
Español	[es-pan-yohl]	Spanish
Hasta la vista	[ahs-ta la vees-ta]	See you later
¡Bastante bien!.....	[bas-tán-te byen]	Great!
Amigo	[ah-mee-go/ah-mee-gah]	Friend
Cerveza	[ser-veh-sa].....	Beer
Así-así	[ah-see ah-see]	So-so
Algo	[al-go]	Something
Alguien	[al-ghee-en]	Someone
Siempre	[see-em-prey]	Always
Nunca	[noon-ka].....	Never 

Excerpted from You Say, I Say Phrasebook. Service That Sells!. Call 800-247-8514 to order.

Do You *Really* Have a Problem?

By Bill Marvin

I know, you don't have problems. You have "challenges" or "opportunities." And while it's less paralyzing to think of opportunities rather than problems, whatever the euphemism... you're still left with a problem in drag!

However, problems are a daily fact of life, and dealing with them seems to define the job of most hospitality managers. So it's important to clearly understand what is—and isn't—a problem.

Problems

A problem is merely a situation that you don't yet have a handle on.

Think about that for a minute: the only reason a situation is a problem is that you can't see how to solve it. If you knew how to handle it, it wouldn't be a problem. It might be a nuisance, but not a problem.

Virtually all of the situations you face in life ultimately have a workable solution. So when something looks like a dilemma, it is just an event

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where the answer is not yet apparent to you. You know there is a solution, you just have to figure out how and where to find it. See? No problem!

Conditions

If you have a situation where there is no possible resolution, you don't have a problem. You have a condition. For example, gravity is not a problem; it is a condition.

You can love gravity or you can hate it, but you're not going to change it! Accept conditions and devote your energies to pursuits more productive than complaining about it.

What other "problems" do you face every day (and waste time getting upset about) that are, in fact, really conditions? Government regulations? Taxes? Business seasonality?

When faced with a difficult situation, determine what you can change, what you can solve and what you have to live with. Then, put your energies to running your restaurant! 

Your Best Problem Solving Tool: Clear Expectations

By Ron Yudd

One of the most effective problem-solving tools is to ensure that problems don't happen in the first place. The best way to ensure we don't waste time and lose profits while correcting mistakes is to create clear expectations from the beginning.

Giving your employees the **gift of clear expectations** is one of the most effective ways to solve problems before they happen!

Setting clear expectations means telling team



members exactly what you expect. Think about it: employees who know what you want are much more inclined to actually give it to you. For example, if you breakdown expectations into very detailed "chunks" ("roll 50 sets of silver" or "set up 75 portion cups of salad dressing"), you're more likely to get what you want.


Be as specific as possible. Think in terms of time and quantities ("from 3 until 3:30 pm, prep three dozen lemons and six bunches of parsley"). Think about the opposite: what are the consequences for not being clear? Employees who don't know what you expect will deliver whatever they feel like. Consequently, profits will plummet.

Three Steps for Delivering Clear Expectations:

1. Determine what you expect each employee on each shift to accom-

plish. Walk through the shift in your mind, identifying exactly what you want to take place and how you want it to happen.

2. Quantify deliverables and create a realistic timeline. Make sure employees understand exactly their responsibilities.
3. Throughout shifts, let employees know how they're doing. Make adjustments periodically to the quantities as needed.


Training Tip: Help your developing assistant managers and supervisors by teaching them to try these three steps as they prepare for each shift they will manage. The greatest gift you can give a young manager is the knowledge that it is critical for their success to let their employees know exactly what they expect! 



QSR Corner: Senority Rules

In the action-packed world of quick service, it is easy to hustle customers through the lines and out the door. But some customers prefer not to be rushed, and some physically should not be.

When serving your senior guests, remember that a little consideration and courtesy goes a long way. Consider these tips:


- **Age before beauty.** Designate a cash register for seniors only. Standing in a long line is often a physical hardship and seniors will appreciate the extra service.
- **Seat seniors.** Help seniors with their trays and seat them in areas that offer them proximity to restrooms, doors, or other areas of preferences. Offer to help with their coats, bags, or other items as well.
- **Keep restrooms clean.** Make sure floors are dry and trashcans are emptied. When wet paper towels litter the floor, the restrooms can be dangerous for people of all ages. 

Angry Customer? No Problem!

Maybe the soup was too hot, the steak was too tough, the drink was all wrong, or the dessert never came. Maybe it was all of the above (eek!). But whatever the problem, your customer is angry and you have to fix it. Here's how to handle it and how to train your staff to turn unhappy customers into satisfied ones:

- **Know what customers want.** That's easy, right? They want you to fix the problem. Well, yes, but first they want to express their feelings and be understood.
- **Give it to them.** Listen like your life depends on it. Ask questions if you need to and don't interrupt. Only when angry customers are finished having their say should you begin speaking.
- **Find a solution.** Remember, you are solving a customer's problem.

You are not offering an appeasement. Ask customers how they would like a problem solved. Then, if you can, comply with their solution. If you can't, negotiate as politely as possible.

- **Make a personal goal.** Encourage your team members to promise themselves: "When customers are angry, I will get them to calm down; I will understand their problem; and they will thank me before they leave." Even if that goal is never achieved, it shifts the focus of dealing with a problem on your team member, instead of the customer. When that happens, customers are much more likely to leave feeling understood and team members become empowered to improve a difficult situation. 


Be A Show Off

Precision service is the invisible glue that helps hold the dining experience together. Nobody pays to watch an actress who doesn't know her lines, or a mechanic who doesn't know his way around a carburetor. Why should guests leave good tips for servers who don't know their stuff?

For guests, there's nothing worse than feeling like their words are going in one ear and out the other. The most basic component of precision service is getting the order right! To do this, servers must pay close attention to their guests' needs. Maintaining friendly eye contact helps servers focus on what is being said. Train servers to repeat the order while serving to let each guest know that they're receiving the correct items.

And don't forget the "two-bite check back." Getting the order right

doesn't do much good if the food isn't prepared to the guest's liking. Servers should always check back after approximately two bites. This allows for enough time to correct any mistakes right away. Guests will become frustrated quickly when they don't like their meal, and they'll refuse to order anything else if it's "too late."

Precision service is about executing the basic mechanics of service in a seamless fashion so guests will know just how seriously your staff members take their jobs. Today's consumers see value in knowledge, so your staff better be full of it! The more your servers know about your products, the more prepared they are to suggest those products. Make sure each on-floor staff member knows every product you carry, how it is prepared or manufactured, and which items go well together. 

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so your staff
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Role Play: “I Know You’re Upset...”

In this issue we discussed how to handle angry customers. When incorporating those strategies, certain phrases will make that process go even more smoothly.

Man: (angry) That’s it! Even the check is wrong. You double charged me for that awful steak! I can’t believe this!

Server: (concerned, looking at check) I see what you mean. That must be upsetting.

Man: (a little less angry) Yes, it is! We finally get a babysitter and this evening’s a disaster!

Server: I’m going to fix this check, but how else would you like this problem solved?

Man: (considering) Well, I don’t know. I don’t think I should have to pay for that steak. It was tough as nails... and you were nowhere around to take it back!

Server: I understand how frustrating this must be. I’ll remove the charge for the steak and ask my manager if I can bring you both a complimentary dessert. Would that help?


Man: (surprised) Yes, thank you!



Put it to Work

You should avoid promising in your marketing materials what your operation can’t deliver consistently. It’s impossible to build repeat business if you’re in the habit of building up customers’ expectations only to pull the rug out from under those expectations once you get the customers in the door.

It’s critical to understand the difference between external and internal marketing. What you do externally to attract customers—from newspaper ads to TV and radio spots—isn’t nearly as important as what you do internally to get them to come back. Before you waste money on external marketing schemes, you should invest an equal, if not greater, amount on solidifying your internal marketing, whose principal components are the quality customer service your staff provides and the marketing message you communicate to customers while they’re right there with you.

Your success rides on your staff’s ability to exceed the “Great Expectations” of guests entering your operation. You can start by delivering—over-delivering, in fact—on the promises made in your marketing materials. 

Excerpted from Slam Dunk Marketing, Service That Sells!. Call 800-247-8514 to order.

All Guests Are NOT Created Equally

By TJ Schier

“There is nothing more unequal than the equal treatment of unequal people.”

Say that five times fast! A quote arguably attributed to Thomas Jefferson, but relevant nonetheless in regards to restaurant service. All too often, restaurants try to process as many guests as possible through the restaurant’s “steps of service.” In a hurry? Want privacy? Been there a million times before? It doesn’t matter. All guests are treated the same. That’s “unequal!”


While we all want to treat guests to great service, the road map to get there takes a varied path depending on why the guest is visiting. Take some time to uncover why the guest is there and modify the steps you have so they leave saying, “Wow!”

There are two main items to find out: dining frequency (how often do they eat here?) and speed of the meal (are they rushing or relaxing?). When you know,

you’ll be much better prepared to deliver the service the guest wants.

Guests in a hurry need the check processed quickly, but they don’t need us to skip the dessert suggestion. Instead, move it up earlier in the meal or suggest it for carryout. On the other hand, if guests want a more casual dining experience, dropping the check too soon will make them feel rushed and uncomfortable.

Regulars need recognition and reminders of new items or specials since they often don’t open their menu. First-time guests need reassurance and guidance to the best items or deals on the menu. Treat guests the way they want to be treated; not the way we want to treat them.

The next level of service is to uncover celebrations, guests who haven’t dined with you recently, dietary concerns and so on. Customize the experience and you’ll reap the rewards. Now *That’s Service That Sells!* 

Treat guests the way
they want to be
treated; not the way
we want to treat them.

Order Up!

Put *Service That Sells!* on your menu

Romancing of the Stone (and the Menu)

By Michael Attias

How can you take an everyday item like fried chicken and make it sound sexy? Well, that was my challenge for our newsletter. Wanda, my operations manager, makes a killer fried chicken and we decided to test it as a blackboard daily special on Mondays to see if it had a place on our regular menu.


Now building desire takes more than writing "fried chicken" on a blackboard. It requires a little creative story telling or "Romancing of the Stone." Your job is to get your customers to long for, desire, or at least be curious enough about whatever you're selling to give it a try.

Consider Olive Garden: I think part of its rebirth is their ability to tell a good story. Their commercials feature new, limited-time, menu offerings that sell more than just food. It's a combination of stories, people and pictures.

I tried a little "Romancing of the Bird" in our newsletter. Here's a brief excerpt:

"When our Operations Manager, and her husband Frank helped Frank's father clean out his North Carolina home to move to Nashville, a lost, treasured family recipe for fried chicken was found hidden in the back of a kitchen drawer. Frank had talked about his Grandma Royal's recipe, but no one could find it for years..."

The combination of half truth and half blarney makes it a recipe to attract attention and get diners in to try it out.

If you send newsletters, try a little romancing. If you're consistent, your customers will actually look forward to reading your stories. The success of the J. Peterman mail-order catalog is tied directly to their ability to build a story around each item. 




Contributor Box

Many thanks to all of our contributors for the March 2005 issue.

Michael Attias operates a restaurant in Nashville, TN, and helps restaurant owners add or expand a catering profit center through his company **The Results Group**. You can download his FREE Report: *Tapping Into Your Hidden Catering Profit\$* at www.ezRestaurantMarketing.com.

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Tactics for St. Patrick's Day

Less Green for Green: Decorate the restaurant appropriately and have your wait-staff wear as much green as possible. Offer traditional foods, such as corned beef and cabbage, and create a larger-than-usual selection of green items — salads, green vegetables, green pastas, green drinks, limes in place of lemons, etc. Offer a special discount for the entire week on all green items. Promote the activity through a newspaper ad and your store's table tents and reader or specials board.

Free Soft Drinks: On St. Patrick's Day only, offer a FREE regular soft drink to anyone wearing green. To reduce the costs of this promotion, tie-in as a cross promotion with a local soft drink distributor. Offer to

hand out coupons for his product in exchange for his supplying the soft drinks or syrups.

St. Patrick's Day Discount: This one is good only on St. Patrick's Day. Like the "Less Green for Green" promotion, decorate your store appropriately and have your employees wear as much green as possible. Offer refreshments and snacks, all dyed green. Offer a special discount the entire week on certain items. Offer a coupon good for a discount to anyone "wearing green." 

Information from this article was taken from Tom Feltenstein's Encyclopedia of 401 Killer Promotional Tactics, Service That Sells! Call 800-247-8514 to order.

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OSHA Compliance: Better Safe Than Sorry



You've been told that OSHA (the U.S. Occupational Safety & Health Association) compliance is not required for restaurants.

Not true.

The only exception is that you are not required to file an OSHA 300 report. So, if OSHA were to visit, would you pass an inspection? Are you sure? Because the average OSHA fine is more than \$1,000 per violation... and each inspection typically results in an average of two violations.


Knowing that OSHA compliance and workplace safety go hand-in-hand is a good start. Now you need to take action and implement a comprehensive plan.

There's no question that implementing a fully-integrated workplace safety plan is a challenge. It's difficult

to find a tool that immediately informs managers and hourly workers which buttons they need to push—and what calls they need to make—in case of an emergency. And this challenge is amplified by OSHA's strict compliance regulations. For example, OSHA requires that employers log injuries and illnesses on record-keeping forms, keep the logs current, and retain them for five years at each establishment. And that's just the tip of the ever-changing OSHA compliance iceberg.

So how do you ensure that your operation is in compliance and that your employees are safe? First, develop a crisis management plan, continually emphasize the importance of safety procedures, and train your staff what to do in case of an emergency. According to *Nation's*

Restaurant News, "insurance underwriters support this kind of forward, proactive thinking and will often give preference to those companies that have implemented such plans."

Next, verify that you have all of the OSHA required postings, forms, and documentation and that your business meets all local, regional, and federal compliance requirements. Finally, talk with your employees about possible safety hazards within their work environment. Many forward-thinking companies have implemented safety committees, in which a small group of employees review potential safety concerns and develop solutions to prevent injuries before a worker's compensation claim is filed. 

Do you have a comprehensive, fully-customizable safety program that takes the worry out of workplace safety?



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Ask STS!

I'd like to boost my sales of after-dinner drinks and desserts. Any ideas?

Ah, how sweet is success when after-dinner sales soar! Creating desserts and drinks that customers can't stop thinking about is your first step. Then, communicate just how great those treats are. Here are some tips for training your servers:

- Don't ask customers if they'd like to see the dessert tray. Instead, bring it to the table and offer, "May I present our featured desserts tonight?"
- Remind guests that all desserts come with two (or more) forks, eliminating those "I'm so full" objections.
- When a dessert is ordered, suggest a specialty drink. "A Baileys on the Rocks or an Irish Coffee would go great with that. May I bring you one?"
- When a dessert is refused, offer cordials, liqueurs, specialty drinks, cappuccino, espresso, and "freshly brewed" coffee or tea.
- Offer incentives for desserts or after-dinner drinks sold. Keep running tabs and award bigger prizes until selling desserts becomes second nature.
- Remember the best possible after-dinner sale you can make is one for a repeat visit. 

Got a question for STS!? We're listening. Drop us a line at sts@ServiceThatSells.bz.

Your Servers are Your Salespeople (How Well Can They Sell?)

In 2005, *Service That Sells!* will undergo a dramatic transformation. We will move beyond simply being a great tool for managers and we'll become the certified standard for companies who are committed to turning servers into salespeople. We'll work with you to create salespeople who increase your profits and deliver a great dining experience for your guests.

The drive and intent behind developing a verifiable training and certification program is based on the question that many of our *Service That Sells!* clientele have been asking us: How can I transfer and enforce the skills and principles found in the books and videos to my servers? By speaking with restaurant owners and conducting thorough industry research, *Service That Sells!* recognized a weakness in the traditional training of foodservice employees. To fill the void that exists in too many organizations, *Service That Sells!* has developed a program that will raise the sales abilities of all foodservice professionals, leading to increased revenue at the restaurant level – guaranteed.

The only program of its kind, the *Service That Sells!* certification will have multiple phases. The program will feature fully integrated training modules for both managers and professional servers, which emphasize the importance of guest service and selling excellence. The management module will include sections such as

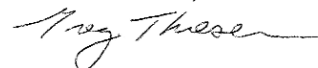
"How To Train" and "Recognition," whereas the employee module will focus on "Managing the Client's Experience" and "Successfully Increasing Overall Sales and Per Ticket Revenue."

The *Service That Sells!* certification program will ensure you employ world-class servers, allowing you to gain a distinct competitive edge over the competition. Best of all, the program can be used by family-owned restaurants to major concepts. For companies with over 10 units, the program can be fully customized to your specific needs, and will integrate the elements of your culture in customer service and selling.

If you are interested in learning more about this exciting new program, please call our corporate office at **800-247-8514** where you will find people passionate about this project that can answer any questions you might have.

We look forward to being your management solutions partner, and providing the resources you need to reach your goals.

To Your Success,



Greg Thiesen

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