Food Presentation and Service

Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service
The manager of a food service establishment and/or the manager and his superior need to take the time to make an overall analysis to determine the results that the organization is actually obtaining. This should be done several times a year. The evaluation should determine how well the food service operation is doing and where improvements should be made. Then some priorities, objectives, methods, and deadlines for improvements can be established.

This is one of a series of pamphlets describing how a person can fairly comprehensively, yet in less than a day, provide an overall evaluation of a food service operation. The key items, or food service conditions, to evaluate under each major category are described. Taken together, the key indicators of general conditions measure the degree of efficiency (minimal costs) and effectiveness (optimal organizational satisfaction). A major category that has a deficient key indicator should be investigated further, and corrective adjustment should be considered and/or made where appropriate. A discussion of facts by management with the operating personnel is perhaps most needed to develop mutual understanding of the problems. Attainable performance objectives should be jointly established and reviewed at a later date.

If all key indicators are satisfactory in a major category, other aspects of that category are probably being handled with similar care. If all of the key indicators are high, but the profit is not adequate, then it will be necessary to examine the operation for inefficient purchasing and receiving practices, improper menu pricing, inaccurate records or financial statements, inventory method and method of computing the value, production waste, plate waste, security and pilferage, and so forth.

These operational analysis guidelines may be used by the manager of a single food service establishment for self-analysis, or by the unit manager's supervisor.

1 Management—Planning, Organizing, Controlling (HE-202)
2 Personnel (HE-203)
3 Purchasing (HE-204)
4 Receiving, Storage, Issuing, Inventory (HE-205)
5 Food Preparation (HE-206)
6 Food Presentation and Service (this publication)
7 Maintenance of Building and Equipment (HE-208)
8 Sanitation and Housekeeping (HE-209)
9 Statistical and Ratio Analysis (HE-210)
10 Consumer Satisfaction (HE-211)

6. Food Presentation and Service

Finest food quality, preparation excellence, and service perfection should be constant objectives because they are the factors most noticed by the consumer. Top-notch showmanship and salesmanship stimulate interest and a higher check average. Consumer satisfaction is what builds favorable word of mouth advertisement and repetitive business. The consumer expects satisfaction of his needs, desires, and wishes. The attitude and performance of every employee who comes into contact with each consumer are important factors in creating and maintaining the "image" of the establishment. The "total image" is the sum of the price-quality-portion size-service-atmosphere impressions developed by the consumer in the course of his contact with the establishment. Consumers will come back again and again to the food service organization that provides excellent food, service, personal attention (including knowing names), prestige, adventure and pleasure.
The service employee can contribute significantly to the satisfaction by manner, appearance, and expert gracious service. No matter how high the food quality, consumer satisfaction can be destroyed if the food is shoved before him by an inexperienced or surly service person. The service employees build or lose business for the establishment. Unhappy or dissatisfied consumers seldom complain—they just walk out and do not return.

The key service indicators are eye appeal, palatability, portioning food, neatness, protecting the temperature, personal selling, efficient service, checklist for table service, quality cafeteria service, and control of guest checks.

**Eye Appeal**
The appearance of the food when served influences its acceptability to the consumer and his enjoyment of it. Eye appeal is gained through contrasting and interestingly arranged combinations of food on the plate and/or the serving counter. Do service personnel check for appearance, garnishing, and quantity? If any item does not meet the approval of a service person, will it be replaced by the cook without a hassle?

**Palatability**
Palatability depends on maintaining the flavor. Keeping foods hot for long periods causes deterioration. Therefore, food products should be prepared as close to the serving time as possible. Are terms used by sales personnel which indicate quality or palatability such as "hot" rolls, "chilled" watermelon, and "old-fashioned" strawberry shortcake? These terms create a mental impression of a delicacy which will help to sell. Of course, to use these terms, they must be true. Other adjectives like zesty, savory, delicious, mellow, spicy, tangy, succulent, tart, creamy, juicy, tender, ripe, tantalizing, and luscious should be part of the salesperson's everyday vocabulary and used often when they can be used to accurately describe foods to customers.

**Portioning Food**
Management must determine the portion size for each item served. The purpose is to prevent excessive cost and to provide a standard of appearance for the customer. Health care facilities are also concerned specifically about the nutritional intake. A standard portion chart should be posted near the serving area for easy reference. Specific means for measuring portions must be determined and communicated to cooks and serving personnel. Observe if management frequently checks that the proper size serving is portioned by the use of scales, dish or glass, paper cup, specific ladle, scoop or serving spoon or cooking utensils, or by purchasing specifications.

**Neatness**
Serving food neatly not only improves its appearance and makes it more attractive, but it indicates to the consumer that the management has set goals and has effectively trained personnel to reach high standards of service. Food should always be placed attractively on the serving plate or dish. Management should answer the following questions:

- Are cups or bowls well filled but not overflowing?
- Is any food dripped or spilled on the edge or outside surface of dishes?
- Is excess juice from one food item drained so that it does not intermingle with other food on the same plate?
- Is fat well drained from fried foods and not collected on the serving dish?
- Are there any fingerprints and stains on the edge of plates or on the rim of water glasses and sherbet cups?
- Are spilled foods immediately cleaned from service areas, tables, chairs, floors, etc.?
- Is spilled food sanitarily wiped from the outside or on the underside of plates?
- Are the materials used for garnish fresh and unblemished, and do they enhance the natural attractiveness of the food presented?

One of the main indicators for checking neatness is the serving of soup. When a server makes a quick fill of the bowl without hazard, unnecessary dripping or mess, this indicates that training and sound operating principles have been extended to the presentation and service system. The soup container should be stirred so that there is an even mixture of solids throughout. To keep soup from dripping, the ladle should be immersed by the server until full, raised vertically and quickly—almost with a jerk—held above the soup tureen for a fraction of a second to get rid of the inevitable drop or two, and then the soup transferred to the bowl. If soup is served without drip or mess, other items are likely to be served in a superior fashion.

**Protecting the Temperature**
A thermometer can be used to check food for
the following temperatures: **Hot Food** - 140 F. or more; **Cold Food** - under 40 F.; **Coffee** - 165 F.

Management through training and supervision is responsible to see that foods are served at proper temperatures. Hot foods at temperatures between 150 F. and 160 F. cool at about 4 degrees a minute. It is essential to reduce the time between dish-up and consumption so that customers consume hot foods at the preferred eating temperature of 140 F. An effort needs to be made, also, about serving cold foods at or under 40 F.

Are the following things done to serve foods at proper temperature:
- Cooked cereals and soup served in hot (140 F.) bowls and dry cereal served in cold (40 F.) bowls?
- Hot plates (140 F.) used for hot foods and cold (40 F.) plates used for cold food?
- Hot coffee poured into heated pots and immediately served to the consumer?
- Ice cream and ices placed into chilled (40 F.) dishes and served immediately to the consumer?
- Chilled foods remain in the 38 F. refrigerator to the last possible moment before service to the consumer?
- Food brought to the service area or consumer just as needed and served to the consumer at its most appetizing and delicious temperature?

**Efficient Service**

Efficient service requires the combined efforts of many, especially on the part of those who prepare the food as well as those who serve it. Efficiency is observed by the consumer in many ways, throughout the operation. Increased dining enjoyment, through efficiency, is one of the many gains. There is an intangible plus factor that sifts through to consumers who observe a job well done. Perhaps you could call it admiration. Whatever the word, it helps sell the overall food service organization.

**Personal Selling**

Often underused as a sales-making activity, personal selling refers to any activity which salespeople do to make sales to consumers. Check to see if service personnel increase checks by some of the following personal selling methods:
- Are suggestions made for cocktails, appetizers, wines, desserts, and after-dinner liqueurs?
- Are there friendly smiles, patience, and are consumers’ needs anticipated?
- Are first course and every other course served on time? Is the food served as ordered?
- Are the consumers flattered with service; additional silver provided as needed, water glasses kept filled, extra butter, more rolls and beverages?
- Are the order taken promptly and are related items subtly and skillfully suggested? Is the voice clear and pleasing, and is satisfactory grammar used?

**Checklist for Table Service**

Service involves the intangible of attitude, which is basic to the atmosphere of the establishment. Service includes the following tasks in making and keeping the consumer happy.

- Is the consumer welcomed as though he is a friend of the manager? Is the consumer warmly greeted and addressed by name?
- Are the tables, menu, glassware, and silverware neat and sparkling clean?
- Are consumers seated promptly after arriving? Does a salesperson appear at once, set up the table, present menus, and serve water?
- Is the order taken promptly and are related items subtly and skillfully suggested? Is the voice clear and pleasing, and is satisfactory grammar used?
- Are the consumers flattered with service; additional silver provided as needed, water glasses kept filled, extra butter, more rolls and beverages?
Are condiments, steak sauce, beverages, soup spoons, cocktail forks available when needed?

Is any special service request or substitute handled courteously and promptly?

Is the table cleared promptly after each course? After dessert course, is the table cleared but not in such a way that the guest is made to feel rushed?

Is the check legible, accurately totaled, and delivered without consumer having to ask for it?

Does the salesperson treat consumers with courtesy, politeness, warmth, respect, and understanding as he would if they were guests in his own home? Is there a genuine effort to please the consumer?

Is bussing done quietly and unobtrusively?

Is personal interest shown to the consumer and gracious service provided?

Is special attention shown to children?

Are complaints handled tactfully?

Are consumers thanked and a brief departure remark made such as, "Come back again soon"?

Is the consumer made to feel he is a friend of the restaurant? Is the consumer made to feel important? Does the consumer feel that the salesperson is there to serve him?

**Quality Cafeteria Service**

Cafeteria counters serve a large number of people in a short period with a small number of service personnel. There is the possibility of impulse sales. Are the following items done to provide quality cafeteria service:

- Correct menu board?
- Speed—five to eight consumers per minute—no bottlenecks?
- High food quality—cooked as needed?
- Hot foods 140 F. and cold foods 40 F. or less?
- Food attractively displayed—colors, texture, odor, flavors, freshness?
- Variety of food, well lighted?
- Size of portion related to quality and price, uniform portion sizes?
- Friendly, helpful, courteous employees with high standards of personal hygiene and dress?
- High level of sanitation evidenced by crystal-clear glassware, dishes, and flatware?
- Convenitently located cash register, and pleasant and efficient cashier?
- Help, if needed, with the trays?
- Clean serving area, dining room tables, chairs, floor?

- Fast and efficient bussing—dining room clean and free of soiled dishes?
- Low noise level?

**Control of Guest Checks**

Serial numbered restaurant checks should be issued on a daily basis. They should be used in a numerical order. All checks should be posted and entered on a daily traffic sheet which should include a breakdown among food, beverages, and tax. The cashier should never be allowed to clear the cash register readings. Management or the accounting staff should keep the "register reading key." A daily audit of all sales records should be made. The sales audit should include each of the following points:

- Accounting for all checks which were issued for the day.
- An examination of all checks for incorrect prices and additions, legibility of writing, and any attempted alterations.
- A reconciliation of the daily traffic sheet with the cash register readings.
- A reconciliation of cash register totals with the daily total of the guest checks.

**Summary and Conclusion**

Is the food placed on the plate and presented to the consumer with the garnishment to provide maximum eye appeal? Food presentation contributes greatly to a satisfying dining experience for the consumer. Employees must be assigned to perform their tasks and trained to do them competently and artistically.

Is the service swift, attentive, courteous? Taking the consumer's order, placing it with the production unit, and the pick-up delivery of the order to the consumer are of prime importance in creating a favorable consumer "image of the establishment."

Are there atmosphere, showmanship, and personal relations with consumers? What is done above or beyond the expected? How many consumers do management and service workers know by name? Service includes an attitude of the employees which the consumer senses, which is basic to the satisfaction of the individual consumer. It includes all the tasks involved in making the individual consumer feel he is "king for an hour of the day." The satisfied consumer rewards good service and presentation by increased repetitive business and enthusiastic recommendation of the establishment to friends and acquaintances.
References

Other Publications, Catalogs of Publications, and Correspondence Courses
National Restaurant Association
One IBM Plaza, Suite 2600
Chicago, Ill. 60611

Educational Institute of the American Hotel and Motel Association
Stephen S. Nisbet Building
1407 South Harrison Road
East Lansing, Mich. 48823

National Institute for the Food Service Industry
120 South Riverside Plaza
Chicago, Ill. 60606

Cahners Books International, Inc.
221 Columbus Avenue
Boston, Mass. 02116

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