

How to win customers and influence your employees

I WAS asked to speak recently on the subject of "How to Succeed in the Restaurant Business". After much soul-searching I managed to distil the subject into seven principles that have served me well over the years.

Remain immature

The adage states: As long as you are green, you are growing. As soon as you're ripe you start to rot. Once you have achieved success there is all too often a great temptation to stop learning, relying instead on past success. Once you find yourself replacing a customer's complaint with the thought that you "can't please everyone all the time", you will be dead in the water. Imagine instead that that complaint arose within the first year of your first restaurant's opening. You most probably would have labelled that complaint "useful feedback" and analysed every facet of it, like a jeweller searching for flaws in a diamond. Never, ever, lose sight of the lessons learned during that first and crucial year.

Remember the basics

The basics have always been the same in our business: a quality product produced at an acceptable cost and delivered with style and warmth at a fair price. Everything else is just window-dressing. If your business is in difficulties, always go back to first principles.

Profits follow quality, not the other way around

Accountants will tell you to get the profits picture right first. I think otherwise. If you are trying to flog fillet steak to a market that wants and can afford only hamburger you'll get nowhere. But if you're selling hamburger, never stop



Staying ahead of the competition in the restaurant business means sticking to seven basic principles, says **Michael Gottlieb**

looking for ways to offer your customers the best hamburger available at a fair price. Not all quality-driven expenditure can or should be measured against what return it brings. You can't put a slide rule over everything and sometimes you just have to go with your instinct as to what is and isn't important to your business. Let your accountant sulk. He'll survive.

You will never go broke by pleasing customers, no matter what it costs

My staff manuals all start with the words: "The worst sin you can commit in this organisation is to suspect that a customer is unsatisfied and do nothing about it." In my restaurants no member of staff is ever disciplined for compensating a customer for

bad service. This principle has cost me a lot of money and heartache over the years. Even when I disagreed, I've always supported staff's judgement. They were there and I was not.

Listen to your customers, but not too closely

Some customers are certain they possess the secret of creating a successful restaurant and they seldom shirk from sharing their opinions. I love my customers, yes, but it doesn't mean I should give them everything they ask for any more than I would indulge my children's every whim. I've learned to screen their ideas through the filter of my own vision. If you don't, your concept could lose its integrity and ultimately please no one.

Stay close to your employees and they will stay close to your customers

Treat them as human beings and not as underlings. Give them your trust until you have reason to believe it has been betrayed. Give them chances to manage and make mistakes. Try to create a positive atmosphere where staff are neither afraid of you nor fearful of speaking out when they disagree with a decision. And always try to promote from within.

Be perpetually dissatisfied

The world belongs to the discontented. Acons ago the Rolls Royce advertising slogan was "At 55 miles an hour the loudest noise you will hear is the ticking of the clock." The reaction of the company's senior engineer was: "Damn it, we have got to do something about that clock." My view is that as long as I am dissatisfied there is a good chance my customers won't be. ■

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Look after your staff and they'll look after your customers