



Mastering goodbye is the key to repeat business

Don't let your efforts go up in smoke at the finish line. Embrace a series of artful tactics and strategies to ensure a perfect ending.

1. Be hyper-vigilant at the end of the meal. Do your guests want to linger over Gran Marnier or bolt for the Cineplex?

* Work your table to the bitter end. Offer coffee refills and clear sip sticks, dirty plates, and glassware.

* Stay on the look-out for “check please” signals. Stay tuned for the “writing on the palm” — putting credit cards down and other gestures signaling guests want their checks pronto. Pre-print checks near the end of the meal. It's impressive to present the bill at a moment's notice.

* Avoid the “in the bag letdown.” Don't expect since your check is 60 bucks, it's an easy \$12 tip. Serve guests from start to finish.

2. Present the check and inform how to pay.

* Time the check presentation. Some restaurateurs want the check presented when the guest asks. Others want it delivered just after the last sip of Louis XIII has been savored. And remember, if you push too hard, guests camp. If you disappear, your gratuity will take a precipitous dive.

* Present the check and explain the payment process. Graciously present the check to the host or diplomatically place the check in the middle of the table. Try, “Mr. Jägermeister, (or ‘ladies and gentleman’), this is for your convenience. I'll be happy to take it when you're ready.”

* Watch like a hawk, but don't hover. How often have you seen



guests march up to the host stand to pay an imaginary cashier? There's nothing worse than a guest having to flag you down or go on an expedition to get the check. Get the credit card voucher, change, or room charge back ASAP. Respect guests' time.

* Don't ask, “Would you like change?” This lazy, manipulative approach leaves guests fuming. Simply bring the change with the appropriate dollar denominations (singles, fives, tens, and twenties) to make it easy to tip you.

3. Make goodbye special. “Thanks and have a nice evening,” won't cut it.

* Deliver a “verbal thank you note.” Consider, “Mr. and Mrs. Hersey, thanks for celebrating your tenth anniversary. I'm glad you enjoyed the Iron Horse Pinot Noir. Have a pleasant trip back

to Ashburn. I look forward to your next visit.” Now you've reminded guests of your expert recommendations, and you've created a personalized farewell.

* Thank all guests, not just the host. Don't be fooled. There are plenty of “hidden referral” quiet types who'll return with friends and family.

* Assist guests. Help guests with jackets and belongings. Move the table for their comfortable departure.

* Don't dive for the tip. Lunging for your payout not only sends a negative message to your guests but to nearby guests as well. Focus on the ball, and the scoreboard will take care of itself.

* Stand in the strategic goodbye position. In a final gesture of caring, stand in a place where guests must pass in order to leave. Smile, make

eye contact, and, if cues permit, seal the deal with a handshake.

Your guests' intent to return and how handsomely they reward you hang in the balance. The outcome depends on how well you execute a gracious and thoughtful goodbye. Hospitality is a start to finish affair. It never ends until the curtain falls.

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