

# Restaurant Staff Service Tips



## Introduction

This guide has been developed by Visa in order to provide service staff with guidelines and suggestions aimed at increasing service standards and gratuities.

This guide runs through a series of service techniques and standards, and makes useful suggestions that are easy to implement and may increase the level of “fun” you have during your career. While the guide may seem a little weighty, any one of the suggestions offered, once implemented, could have an immediate impact on the quality of service you offer and the financial benefits you may receive.

We hope this guide assists you and benefits your career by making it more rewarding on a personal and financial basis.

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## 1 Service Techniques

*Understanding the terminology and professional standards*

There are many types of restaurant service, from formal to casual, and from quick service to fine dining. It is helpful to be able to identify and understand all of these service styles and to know when and where to use elements of each of them. Most styles of formal service originated in the great houses of European nobility and have been modified over the years for restaurant usage. Many restaurants have taken elements of one or more types of service and combined them to accommodate their own style, menu or image. Following, you will find an overview of each type and a description of basic serving etiquette.



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## 1 Service Techniques – *Understanding the terminology and professional standards*

### French Service

French service is distinguished by the fact that the food is cooked or completed tableside in front of the guests. The service is quite formal and very elegant. The food is brought from the kitchen on heavy silver platters or chargers and placed on a tableside cart called a “gueridon.” The food is prepared on the gueridon, which has a small burner for sautéing and tabletop space for finishing the food. Some familiar items prepared in this manner are Steak au Poivre (Pepper Steak), Caesar Salad and Flambéed desserts.

Once the food is prepared, it is served to the guests on heated plates from the gueridon. This type of service is quite labour intensive and at times can require two servers, however, guests usually love the show and it allows the server to spend much more time one-on-one with each table. Usually, the greater the skill level of the server providing the service, the greater the appreciation of the guest, and the better the tip.

### Russian Service

Russian service is similar to French service in many ways, as it is also quite formal and elegant and the guest receives a great deal of one-on-one time with the server.

The main difference between French and Russian service is that all the food is prepared and arranged on formal or silver serving platters in the kitchen.

The server brings the platters and heated dinner plates to the dining room on a tray, which is placed on a side stand. The plates are placed in front of the guests from the right, proceeding around the table clockwise. Then standing to the left of the guest, the server presents the platter of food and, using a large spoon and fork, serves the desired portion to each guest. The server moves around the table counter-clockwise. All un-served food is returned to the kitchen. This type of service allows the server to spend more time at the table with the guests, as the service of the food is more formal and, therefore, more leisurely.

This is an environment where service skills and server personality can definitely increase the enjoyment of the guests.

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## 1 Service Techniques – *Understanding the terminology and professional standards*

### English Service

English service is used occasionally in a private dining room of a restaurant or at a club, but most often is used by service staff in a private home. The food is arranged on platters brought to the table, and placed with the heated plates in front of the host. The host then carves the meat or entrée, dishes out the vegetables and hands the plate to the server, standing at his left, who then serves the guests — starting with the hostess, then the guest of honour and finally all other guests. All sauces and side dishes are placed on the table and are passed by the guests themselves.

### American Service

American service is less formal than French, Russian or English, and is the style most commonly used in Canadian restaurants today. The main difference between American service and the other types is that the food is plated in the kitchen and served to the table with most of the food on the entrée plate.

The food is served from the guests' left and the beverages are served from the guests' right. All soiled dishes are removed from the guests' right. In this manner the server's hand and arm are away from the guest.

Depending on the degree of formality of the meal, there may be two, three or four courses. With each course the used silverware is removed and new silverware is brought to the table for the next course. For example, if a guest was having steak and another guest having lobster, the steak knife and lobster fork and crackers would be brought out after clearing away the dirty dishes from the previous course, but before the steak and lobster arrive at the table.

There are other styles of service used in many restaurants, such as banquet service, family style service and buffet style service. However, with these types, there is much less interaction with the guest and they comprise a less rigid approach to the above noted standards.

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## 1 Service Techniques – *Understanding the terminology and professional standards*

### Serving etiquette

It is always important to have the basics of good service at your fingertips, so you can concentrate on your guests, make their stay more enjoyable and, in the end, everyone wins.

#### *Acknowledging your guests*

Even if you can't get to the table right away, acknowledge your guests with a glance or a nod, which indicates you know they are there and will be over to them as soon as you can.

#### *Taking the order*

When taking a guest's order, stand to the left of the guest and use a pad of paper and pen to write out the order. Don't lean on the table or sit down next to the guest. Make note of any special requests, such as "no ice," "no salt," "specific allergies" and so forth.

### *Serving the table*

Ladies and elderly persons should be served first out of courtesy, unless there is a host entertaining guests. When there is a host, begin with the guest of honour at his/her right and continue serving around the table counterclockwise.

### *Serving beverages*

Always serve beverages from the right of the guest with your right hand. Place an already filled glass such as milk or soda to the right of the guest. When pouring beverages such as coffee or wine, do so without lifting the cup or glass from the table.

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## 1 Service Techniques - *Understanding the terminology and professional standards*

### *Clearing the table*

Clear the dishes only when all guests have finished eating each course. You can usually tell that a guest is done when the fork and knife are placed in a parallel position on the plate. If you are not sure, ask if they are finished. If the answer is yes, remove all soiled dishes, cutlery, wrappers and anything accompanying the particular course before serving the next item.

- > Always clear dishes from the right of the guest with your right hand if possible. Move from guest to guest in a counterclockwise direction.
- > If you are carrying the dishes always take only what you can comfortably manage, never stack the dishes on the table.
- > If you are using a tray on a tray stand, remove the dishes quietly and discreetly.
- > You may scrape and stack the dishes on a tray, but only put on the tray what you know you can comfortably carry.

When you have finished removing all the dishes, glassware and cutlery from each course, you should crumb the table. This is the process of sweeping any loose food particles onto a plate with a clean folded napkin or a crumber. Never brush food debris onto the floor or onto your hand.

### *Efficiency during service*

- > Minimize your steps.
- > Time is of the essence when serving guests.
- > Never walk back to the kitchen empty-handed.
- > Always check for food to pick up when you are in the kitchen.
- > Serve hot-food hot and cold-food cold.

By cutting down the time it takes you to serve a guest you increase the number of guests you can serve, you increase your efficiency and you will inevitably increase your tip.

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## 2 Be There For Your Guest

*From before they arrive to after they leave*

In all restaurants, at all levels of service, paying attention to the guest's every need is of utmost importance to building the customer base and to keep them coming back. While high-end restaurants are normally the only operations to cater to a guest's every need, the current changes in the marketplace now demand that every restaurant provide the same level of service as that offered in the very best restaurants in the country.



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## 2 Be There For Your Guest – *From before they arrive to after they leave*

### Readying the restaurant

Show your guests and your neighbours you care by being out in front of the restaurant everyday, sweeping the side walk, replanting and watering flowers, shoveling the walk in the winter and washing the windows.

Many fine dining establishments actually run a hose from the front of the building and wash the sidewalk as well — anyone can do this — and it shows a high level of care to cleaning the outside. A guest will think that the cleanliness and service inside is spectacular.

### Greet the guest

Every guest should be individually and personally greeted as soon as they enter the restaurant. The host or manager should not be running from the back of the restaurant to the front trying to say “hi” to each guest. Rather, the host should be at the front door, waiting for the guest as though this is the most important item on their daily agenda — helping with the door, assisting with a coat or an umbrella and providing a warm welcome. The initial greeting to each guest should be that of a long-lost friend.

When seating guests, the host should escort them to the table and offer the table (pulling out a table next to a banquette to allow for easier access) and holding a chair for guests sitting in them.

Menus should not be dropped on the table but rather, once guests are seated, the menu should be opened and handed to each guest. Before leaving the table, the host should inform the guests who their server will be and when they might arrive (e.g. “Rose will be serving you this evening and she will be with you in just a minute”).

Finally, the host should let guests know who is in charge of the restaurant for the evening and if guests need anything or have any concerns, they can ask for the manager (and provide his/her name).

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## 2 Be There For Your Guest – *From before they arrive to after they leave*

### Rotate the dining room

A good server and manager should rotate guests around the dining room when seating, in order to ensure the best service possible. By rotating the dining room in a restaurant that has four servers, the host is ensuring that each server gets one of every four tables. More importantly, however, is that the host is ensuring the best possible service for each guest table, as no one server is overloaded with new tables at the same time. In an ideal situation, no two tables in any one server section should be at the same place in the “meal cycle” (e.g. no two tables are putting in their drink or appetizer order or need clearing at exactly the same time). While servers do like to “load up” their tables as quickly and often as possible, the truth is that guests end up with inferior service, may tip less as a percentage — and most importantly, may never come back. So don’t “load up,” except in extreme cases.

### Get to the table

The server should arrive at the table as soon as possible after it has been seated. If servers are too busy to deal with table issues, they should at least pass by the table, indicate that they are busy and will be back in a few minutes to assist them (e.g. be specific: “I need a couple of minutes on my other tables and will be back to look after you in three minutes” — and then be back in 3 minutes.

### Guest rotation system

One of the most unpleasant experiences for guests at a restaurant of any caliber is the lack of attention given to them and to their table. In casual and up-scale restaurants this lack of attention creates questions as to why guests pay the prices they are paying. One method of showing guests that you know who they are and remember who they are from one table visit to the next, is to know exactly who is having what items and delivering them to the proper guests without “auctioning the food and drinks” every time you return to the table.

In order to avoid the “auction routine,” servers should develop a “guest rotation system” and use that rotation when taking orders. For example, if the guest closest to the front door is always the top guest on the “guest cheque” and the person to their right is always the second guest on the “guest cheque” and so forth, then when the server brings food to the table, they will always know exactly where the food or drinks should be placed. The other advantage to this rotation is that if your restaurant uses a “runner system” (e.g. where someone else brings out the food or drinks), they will also know exactly where each item should be placed without having to auction the item.

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## 2 Be There For Your Guest – *From before they arrive to after they leave*

### Approaching the guest

When you come to the table (ideally within one minute of when the guests were seated), you should welcome everyone to the restaurant, chat them up just a little and then move to drink orders. Take orders from women first and men second. Although you are taking orders in this manner, you must remember to write them down and enter them into the POS in the correct rotation, so that you can bring the drinks back without having to auction them off. Before you leave the table, suggest your favourite items and make mention that they leave room for dessert.

When returning with drinks, ask your guests if they have any questions regarding the menu and if they are ready to order. When taking their orders, write them down clearly and neatly so you can decipher the order later. As each guest orders, place the item in the right order (to prevent auctioning). If the guest does not order an appetizer or salad, then suggest they do so (e.g. “may I recommend our house shrimp cocktail to start...it is my favourite item on the menu”). Repeat this approach around the table, offering different suggestions to different people (e.g. “you know I think that the bacon wrapped scallops is a perfect appetizer before the New York steak”).

### Table maintenance

Table maintenance is a big issue and impacts directly on the level of service offered and, as a result, your tip. Guests like to sit at a clean table and one that is clutter free. Ensure that you are at the table often, clearing dirty dishes, removing wine and cocktail glasses that are not being used and replacing cutlery as necessary. Offer more wine, clean up spills and show the guests that you are mindful of their experience at the restaurant and in your section.

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## 2 Be There For Your Guest – *From before they arrive to after they leave*

### Present the guest cheque

After the meal, dessert and coffee, the server should present the guest cheque in whatever format the restaurant wants it presented. The check should be handed directly to the guest, not placed on the table, and you should look the guest in the eye and, with a smile, say “thank you for coming to xyz restaurant. I really enjoyed serving you this evening” (or something similar).

A major university study suggests that if you write “thank-you” and your name on the guest cheque, you will increase your tip percentage by 1 or 2 points. Another study found that if the server places a happy face on the check along with the “thank you” the tip can go up an additional 1 to 3 points. Try it out and see if it works for you.

If the guest pays with a credit card, this allows for a very personal good-bye as you now know their name. “Thank you Mr. Smith. I hope to serve you again soon.”

### But the service has not ended

Service does not end until the guest leaves the building. Sincerity is not real unless carried through to the end. After the guest pays and is leaving, drop by the table and say “good-bye, thanks for coming in and I hope you enjoy the rest of your evening.” If you have time to escort the departing guest to the door, you will add another level of connection and service. This is the guest’s second-to-last impression and you should do everything to make it as good as you can. The host does deliver the last impression. The host should always be at the door greeting guests, so saying good-bye is an easy one. Ask guests if they enjoyed their evening, thank them for coming in and tell them you hope they enjoy the rest of their evening.

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## 3 Guest Connect

*A sure-fire way to increase tips and keep guests happy... no matter what*

The dining experience can be made up of several significant points, however, the one that supercedes all, is that the service staff and management “connect with the guest.”

So what is the guest connection?



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## 3 Guest Connect – A sure-fire way to increase tips and keep guests happy... no matter what

### What is important

Most restaurateurs will say that the most important thing a server can do is wait tables with efficiency, take on as many as they can and maximize sales. However, sales maximization should be looked at over a longer period of time than just one visit, and to do this the guest must feel as welcome in the restaurant as they would in their own dining room at home.

It is true that the fewer tables a server has, the better the level of service that can be provided. When going after the “guest connect,” the fact is, a server can earn increased tips by providing better service to fewer tables than by providing adequate delivery service to more tables.

### Smile

Everyone should smile all the time when on the restaurant floor. The restaurant is a stage and the staff are actors... so **SMILE** all the time! Stand straight, don't slouch and **SMILE!**

### Shift the job focus

If the server's primary job is shifted away from “delivering food to the table” to “connecting with the guest” — a relationship with the guest can, in fact, be formed in a very quick period of time. We believe that “the guest connection” is as important for the server as the host, cooks and every employee within the restaurant environment. You need to make your customers feel at home — as your guests.

It is important that every staff member realize that their primary job is the “guest connect.” They should create an environment that makes every guest feel perfectly comfortable within the restaurant so that the guest will want to come back to enjoy it again soon.

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## 3 Guest Connect – *A sure-fire way to increase tips and keep guests happy... no matter what*

By making the guest connection the primary function of the server, the job changes from delivering food to the table, to chatting and making friends with the guest. This makes them feel at home. A restaurateur is better served when the server is responsible for creating the relationship and taking care of the guest needs in every respect, rather than be an order taker and a food delivery person. The guest connection is provided at every level. One article in this handbook discusses how to take care of children in the restaurant — when you read it you will see that it is an important part of the guest relationship and the guest connection.

The guest connection transforms the relationship between the service staff and the guest, and if executed correctly, eliminates most barriers and surprisingly most complaints.

### Eliminate guest complaints

Once you have the guest on-side and have created a relationship other than just one of server and guest, everything else becomes easy.

Guests no longer complain if they have a relationship with you and you put yourself in a position where you can provide them with information about what is going on. If dinner is going to be longer

than anticipated because of a kitchen backlog, if you forgot to put in their entire order, if the food is overcooked or cold, if the music is too loud or if the room is too cold or too hot, a guest is likely to complain. Once a guest is in the complaining mode, it is very difficult to get them back to a happy state and once one thing goes wrong, there is seldom an opportunity to make things right again — that is if you are their servant rather than their friend.

If you make the “connect,” then the guest can inform you of issues in a different manner — asking for help or asking what is going on. Then you — as a friend — can solve those problems either by providing polite explanations or by being proactive and informing the guest that there is a delay due to a certain reason and hoping that they do not mind the wait. In time of concern, you can always buy them a drink or drop a snack on the table.

### Saying goodbye

It has been found that the guest connect works best if you still care about the guest after they pay their bill and give you a tip. The guest connect is not a hustle but a sincere interaction with your guests. If you work it correctly, the guest will return and ask to be seated in your section.

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## 4 Service Timetable

*A practical guide to efficient service*

Restaurants are no longer patronized by individuals who are in need of nourishment alone. People dine out for a variety of reasons and choose locations based on quality of food, atmosphere and service.

Service staff should be natural during the service period. Beyond that, the restaurateur should control guest/staff interaction through the introduction of minimum standards which should be set as to the minimum number of table visitations that the staff should conduct. To that end, the Service Timetable helps facilitate proper interaction between the two parties.



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## 4 Service Timetable – *A practical guide to efficient service*

### The 10-step approach

The Service Timetable is a 10-step approach which could increase customers' positive experience at the restaurant, while ensuring that the service staff is providing the utmost attention to their guests. Management, along with service staff, should set time periods against each of the 10 phases, so that the Service Timetable works best at your restaurant.

1. The guest should be greeted at the restaurant's entrance promptly by the host/hostess or manager and escorted to an appropriate table. In order to allow the Service Timetable to work efficiently, guests should be seated in a rotated fashion so as not to provide any server with more than one new table at a time. On the occasion when neither the host nor manager is at the door to seat the guest, a server or bus person should greet the guest and tell them that someone will be attending to them momentarily. The objective of this stage is to recognize the guest and warmly welcome them to the restaurant.
2. In many restaurants, guests sit for an inordinate length of time before they are approached by their server. The Service Timetable suggests that the staff member should arrive at the table within one minute of guest seating. It is best to provide a warm greeting and to take the drink order at this time. In cases where service staff is too busy to attend to the needs of a table as soon as they are seated, the server should approach the table, still within the one minute timeframe, advise that they will be the server, but are presently busy, so they will be with the guests in one or two minutes. The recognition is what the guest is looking for and it will reduce any anxiety that may otherwise occur. When the server is at the table they should take a beverage order, inform the guests of the daily specials and advise them they will return momentarily to take the guest's order.
3. Drinks should be delivered promptly to the guest, so they feel they are being properly attended to. Upon the proper delivery of drinks, the server should take the meal order. This enables the server to reduce the steps to and from the table, as well as speed up the delivery of the order to the kitchen, which ultimately assists in increasing table turnover.

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## 4 Service Timetable – *A practical guide to efficient service*

4. If it takes the kitchen approximately 10 to 12 minutes to prepare the meal, then the server should go to the kitchen nine minutes after placing the order to pick it up. (If a “call system” is used, the server should wait until called). The meal should then be delivered promptly to the appropriate table.
5. Approximately one minute after the order has been placed in front of the guest (or after they have tried their meal), the server should return to the table to ensure that everything is fine. It is imperative that the server return shortly after the meals are served, in case there is a problem. It is usually the aim of the restaurateur to provide the best of all products. If there is an error in the item or the way it was prepared, it is always best to rectify the situation as quickly as possible. This illustrates good service and a respect for the guests’ needs and expectations.
6. Depending on the style of service, it will likely take the guest 15 to 20 minutes to consume their meal (longer in a formal dining situation or if adults are accompanied by children). For the most part, the guests should be left to dine in peace for this time period and should only be disturbed if they are obviously

looking for some assistance. When the guests finish their meals, the tables should be cleared immediately and the dessert and coffee order should be taken. It is important to take the dessert order as soon as the guest’s table is cleared, so that the service staff can keep the operational flow moving toward the table and its ultimate turnover.

7. Desserts should be picked up from the kitchen within three to five minutes of being ordered and should be brought directly to the table.
8. Once again, depending on the style of service and the type of dessert offered, it will take approximately 10 minutes for the guest to consume dessert. Once dessert is completed and the server has asked if anything else is required and the guest has indicated that they are done, the guest cheque should be presented. If the guest does not want to pay quickly, they will likely let the guest cheque sit on the table for a while. However, if they are trying to leave the restaurant quickly, prompt delivery will be noticed while slow delivery will be considered poor service.

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9. In quick service and theme restaurants, as well as in fine dining restaurants where people are lunching, most guests pay quickly and want to carry on with their normal activities. It is, therefore, imperative for the server to pick up the check and payment as soon as possible. Always return the change, even if it is just a few cents, and never ask if the guest wants change (it's like asking "are you going to leave me a tip?").
10. The table should be cleaned and reset within two minutes of the departure of the guests. This has several benefits. It shows the guests who remain, that you are concerned about cleanliness and it provides you with the opportunity to turnover the table quickly, thus potentially increasing sales and the resultant gratuity.

### Flexible timetable

The optimum service is the sum of the minutes that you set out for each one of the above noted steps. In some restaurants this time period is 35 minutes, but in most it will be somewhere between 45 and 90 minutes (generally in the 45 to 60 minute time frame in a casual restaurant and closer to 90 minutes in a fine dining

restaurant). While some may balk at the implementation of this system, it has been proven over and over again that it does increase service efficiency, effectiveness and assists in increasing table turnover. It is also important to note that, when implementing the system, cooks and support staff must be aware of what is expected of the service staff. The Service Timetable's implementation will only be effective if everyone on the staff works as a team.

Finally, a restaurateur should modify the time schedule in order to meet his individual circumstances, however, the parts of the Service Timetable that deal with guest satisfaction, should not be altered. Accordingly, guests should always be greeted promptly upon entering the restaurant and should be acknowledged by their server immediately upon seating. Additionally, one minute after the appetizer, entree or dessert is served, the server should come to the table to ensure that everything meets with the guests' satisfaction, and if not, the server should be empowered to remedy the situation immediately.

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## 5 Serving Children

*Make them happy and they will keep their parents coming back*

While many restaurateurs say that they cater to children simply due to the fact that they offer a children's menu, there are few, outside of the quick service market that really deliver on the promise.

Children are a special breed, and their needs are specific. Parents with children also have individual needs when they go out to a restaurant, and if you can successfully deliver and meet their demands, you will capture this group as a loyal clientele for a long time.

So what are the elements that make a dining experience fun for children?



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## 5 Serving Children – *Make them happy and they will keep their parents coming back*

### Instant food

First and foremost, children expect instant food. When they are called to the dinner table at home, be it for breakfast, lunch, dinner or snack time, the food is usually on the table waiting for them. They arrive at the table, eat and disappear.

When children go to a quick service restaurant (QSR) they experience almost the same speed as when they are at home — and QSR is where most parents take their children for their first dining experiences. By understanding this need for instant food, a restaurant and its service staff can focus on satisfying this need, and if you do, you will go a long way in making the dining experience a pleasure for the children and, more importantly for the parents.

Obviously the food in a full-service restaurant cannot be instant, however, by ensuring that the children at the table are provided with some sort of snack, almost as soon as they sit down or shortly thereafter, they will have something to eat and their parents will be thankful.

### Bring their meals quickly

When taking an order from a family that has children, ask the parents if the kitchen should make the children's meals first. Most will say no, some will say yes, and all will recognize the fact that you are making the effort to satisfy the needs of the family.

If they refuse the offer to bring the children's food first, and the parents order appetizers and the children don't, then consider asking the parents if they would like the children's meal brought with the appetizers. By doing this, children are eating at the same time that the parents are, which eliminates a lot of the whining which goes on, while making the parents feel less anxious. You will find that most parents will appreciate this effort by the server. However, make sure that you confirm with the parents that they would like this to happen, as some parents may prefer that their children eat with them.

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## 5 Serving Children – *Make them happy and they will keep their parents coming back*

### Special menus

Many parents do not believe that their children need to eat meals priced at the level of most casual or high-end restaurants. Special menus should be developed for children that either provide adult meals in children's portions or that provide special meals for children, which are familiar to them. The latter could include items like macaroni and cheese, hamburgers, or even a children's portion of chicken and steak. In most cases the children's meal should include a soft drink, juice or milk, and an inexpensive dessert. If the children's meals have three courses, then the parents will likely also have three courses with the children — which will ultimately increase sales and, therefore, the server tip.

### Entertainment

Entertaining children as best you can increases the enjoyment of the dining experience for all.

The easiest form of entertainment is to provide the children with something to do. A fill-in colouring sheet with either crayons or coloured pencils, a special children's menu they can draw on or has "word searches" or other similar diversions, are just enough to take the edge off and give the children something to do. Offering something like little puzzles with the restaurant's name on it that they can take home also acts as a marketing vehicle.

A server can also develop some interactive riddles or children's jokes they can tell at the table, directing the jokes to the children. This brings a little levity and shows the children and parents that you have a real interest in the well-being of the family during the evening.

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## 5 Serving Children – *Make them happy and they will keep their parents coming back*

### Tours

If the restaurant offers a unique cooking technique or has something really interesting on the premises, a server could offer a tour for the children (although many parents may tag along). The time away from the table prior to service, or between courses if the kitchen gets backed up, will go a long way for the children, as they will not have to sit for so long. Kitchen tours, provided the children do not go “behind the line,” are always fascinating for them (just make sure the kitchen is clean and that you have asked the kitchen staff prior to bringing children to the back).

### Focus

When dealing with children, understand that they are a special breed and connect with them. It will make the time with you more enjoyable for them, their parents and will likely relieve some of the stress related to servicing them.

You should also ensure the table is safe for children by removing all table settings that could be dangerous to children under age 3 (e.g. candles, knives, forks, wine glasses, hot beverages). Make sure that the glasses you serve them are only half full (so spills are not as messy to clean up) and refill their glasses often.

You must understand, as a good server, that dining out can be a very stressful endeavor for the parents as they are very aware of their children’s “behaviour.” What goes almost unnoticed at home — a spilled drink or something dropped on the floor — can be a great cause for tension on the part of the parents who are trying to make sure the kids are on their best behaviour. If the server is attentive and helpful, by being right there to clean up the spilled drink with a smile and friendly “no problem, let me get you another one right away,” it will go a long way toward alleviating stress at the table — and you are more than likely to be rewarded for the effort.

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## 6 Wine Service

*A fantastic way to increase sales, customer satisfaction and your tip*

Selling and serving wine can be fun and very rewarding to both a restaurateur and server and in almost all situations, wine enhances a meal — and in some cases can make a restaurant relatively unique in the marketplace. We are familiar with one restaurant that sold \$50 to \$100 bottles of wine with their hamburgers. We know of another failing steakhouse that still serves the same low quality meats, but has developed such an astonishing wine list that the guest is willing to forgive the food and its sales are booming. Every casual restaurant should serve wine professionally, and aggressively, in order to increase guest satisfaction, sales, profits and server tips.



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## 6 Wine Service – *A fantastic way to increase sales, customer satisfaction and your tip*

### Wine list

The restaurant's management should develop a wine list, wine card or wine book (to whatever level is necessary) so that the host or server can present a written wine list with the menu. The wines offered should be priced in accordance with the menu pricing and should complement the foods offered (e.g. they should drink well with the food offered). Most guests find it pretty difficult to order wine from a verbal list and a listing on a blackboard does not necessarily promote sales. A wine list, outlining the wines by region or grape varieties, is usually the best way to present your wine offerings to guests.

The wine list should always be presented to the host or hostess of the evening, notwithstanding if they have asked for it. In many cases, those guests who would not normally buy wine, may do so if encouraged gently... and presenting the wine list is the first of several methods of encouragement.

### Staff knowledge

Wine has come a long way in the past twenty years and so has the sophistication of the consumer. While staff do not have to become "wine snobs" in order to sell wine, it is best that staff are reasonably well-versed in the grape types (usually called varietals) and the origin of the wines (e.g. Bordeaux wines come from the county of Bordeaux in France).

In order to learn about wines at a basic level, staff should enroll in an introductory wine class (usually offered in the local culinary college, by a local newspaper wine columnist or the provincial liquor control board) to learn the fundamentals of wines and the foods that they complement. Once armed with this knowledge it will be easier for the server to have a positive interaction with the guest as to which wine they may enjoy most and which wines complement their meal.

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## 6 Wine Service – *A fantastic way to increase sales, customer satisfaction and your tip*

### Suggestive selling

If the guest has not ordered wine before their meal, then a server would be well advised to make suggestions of wine by the bottle or glass after the meal order is taken. Rather than be brash and ask “Would you like a glass of wine with that?” you could take the approach of “can I suggest the house Chardonnay which is from Australia, and would taste great with the salmon you ordered?” The second approach provides a more appealing sell and allows you to focus the guest on the order, up-sell the wine and leave the table without having to wait while they continue to peruse the menu. Having wines available by both the bottle and glass makes it more easy to sell.

### Delivering a bottle of wine to the table

Where wine service usually breaks down is in the service and delivery of wine. Guests in high-end restaurants expect a certain level of elegance and professionalism to be tied to the presentation, opening and pouring of wine, while those in casual restaurants look at a bottle of wine as a treat and require some level of service to justify the price of the wine. While most restaurants should provide the server with their preferred wine service techniques, the key points follow:

- > Don't shake the bottle.
- > Carry the bottle to the table and present it to the host (or the person who ordered the wine). The presentation is simple and should consist of the server holding the wine bottle on a slight angle with the label facing the guest. The server should repeat the name of the wine and the vintage (year) of the wine. This allows the guest to verify both and ask you to proceed. (Some service staff present the wine holding it in a white linen napkin which adds a bit of elegance).
- > Without putting the bottle down on the table, open your corkscrew knife (a server's corkscrew has a small knife for cutting the foil top off, a corkscrew and a leverage arm), and in one wrap around motion, cut the foil top off the top of the bottle about  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch from the top. At all times the bottle should remain still, and the label facing the table.
- > Next, close the knife, open the corkscrew, and without moving the bottle, twist in the corkscrew until it has fully penetrated the cork.
- > Finally, flip the leverage arm onto the rim of the bottle and slowly and gently lift out the cork.

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- > With a napkin or the cork, wipe the top of the bottle to ensure that no residue cork is left on the bottle and pour 1 to 1.5 ounces of wine for the host, or person who ordered the wine, so they can try it. While they are trying the wine stand next to them, holding the bottle with the label facing out.
- > Most guests enjoy the fact that servers present the cork to them (it is a ritual) and while some sniff the cork, the main purpose is really so the guest can examine the condition of the cork.
  - If it is rock hard, it has dried out and air may have gotten into the wine and oxidized it.
  - If it smells musty, there may be a problem with the wine.
  - If the cork feels wet and spongy, air may have gotten into the wine.
  - If there is a red wine stain on the outside of the cork, it is no longer airtight, as the seal has been broken and air has gotten into the wine.
- > A guest may complain that their wine is “off” or “corked.” That simply means that the wine has reacted to something in the cork (e.g. the chemical used to bleach and wash it). When this happens, the wine will give off a very distinctive odour — which is dank and musty — like an old book or smells of vinegar. This will turn the wine and make it undrinkable. If the wine is off, then suggest to the guest that you bring out another of the same bottle (sometimes an odd bottle is poorly sealed) or suggest another similar varietal wine.
- > Once the host has indicated that the wine is fine, pour wine for everyone at the table, starting with the women, then the men and finally the host (whether male or female).
- > When pouring wine ensure that the bottle remain relatively still, do not rest the neck of the bottle on the glass, and fill the glass only one-third to one-half in volume. This allows the guest to “swirl” the wine to enjoy the nose (aroma) and to examine the colour and legs (viscosity) of the wine, should they decide to do so.
- > Once you are finished the pour, place the wine (if red) at the end of the table with the label facing the table. If the wine is white, place the remaining wine in an ice bucket with a napkin draped over the bucket, either on or next to the table.

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## 6 Wine Service – *A fantastic way to increase sales, customer satisfaction and your tip*

### Special wines

In some restaurants where older red wines are served, it is appropriate to “decant” the wines. This is a process where the wine is poured into a glass decanter in order to allow the wine to “open up” or “breathe.” It also allows the server to remove the “sediment” that has settled at the bottom of the wine bottle after years of proper storage. Decanting wines is a process which takes a little bit of time and is usually not done for younger red wines. If working in a restaurant that is serving older wines, the owner or manager would likely be well-versed in the “art of decanting,” and service staff should be trained in-house as to the best ways to decant wines. However if a guest asks you to decant the wine, no matter what the age, always oblige them and do so with a smile — never embarrassing your guest.

### Final notes

Great servers will ensure that guests never have to touch the wine bottle and are always watching the table and are there to pour more wine as the glasses deplete. Also, if you are looking at ways to expand your tips, then you should be aware that one bottle of wine pours about 5 glasses. For larger tables or tables of four or more, an aggressive server may suggest one bottle of wine with appetizers and another with dinner. Another approach is to bring the wine out early in the dining experience, pouring most of the wine prior to appetizer service and topping off the glasses prior to dinner service. When dinner arrives, the server can suggest another bottle of wine that may augment the dinner choices.

And finally, if a guest, for whatever reason decides to return the wine — just take it back and inform your manager. If the wine is “corked” it is not useable. If the wine was simply not to the guests taste, then it can be used at the bar and sold as wine by the glass.

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## 7 The Up-Sell

*Increasing sales... increases tips*

So many servers, so little time. So much opportunity, so little drive. When it comes to being the best you can be, there are certain objectives. Give great service as we have outlined earlier, but you also need to increase your sales and increase your table turns.

If you can add another \$10 in sales to each table you serve and if you can turn-over each table 10 minutes faster each evening, you will end up with another \$1.50 in tips, at the least, per table.

So how does a server increase revenues? Well, there are many methods and if the management of your restaurant does not implement them, you should!



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## 7 The Up-Sell - *Increasing sales... increases tips*

### From server to salesperson

All servers should become sales people because that is really their job. You need to meet, greet, connect and deliver a set of goods. If you actually sell the goods to the guest you can better meet the goals of the “connect” (discussed earlier) and better meet the needs of the guest by showing them you know your way around the menu. If you think of yourself as having the opportunity to promote items, and as a result you are going to get a 15% commission — rather than a tip — you are in a better position to earn more money.

### Incentives

Some restaurateurs provide incentives, others don't. If your management team doesn't, that should not deter you and your fellow sales staff. Create an incentive to make you all work harder, drive more and sell more. Chip in for a bottle of Scotch, pool some money and set your goals — who can sell the most desserts, the most bottles of wine, the most side dishes, the most appetizers, who can earn the largest percentage tip on a credit card. Each one of these ideas will make you work harder on one area of the business and provide you with a benefit for being the best.

By switching your incentives around from one idea to the next, you will develop new selling techniques and work on better service standards.

Try it internally — run each competition over a two-week period of time — and keep it going every two weeks. With 6 servers in a restaurant the contribution only has to be \$5 each to make a \$30 prize (which is a good bottle of wine, lots of beer or a casual dinner somewhere) and everyone will make more money as a result.

### Suggestive selling

Suggestive selling is a great tool. Most restaurant guests have no idea what they want when they come to a restaurant. I know of a rib restaurant that sells more fish, because the staff tells everyone that the fish is the best thing on the menu. Every table has onion rings, because the staff tells the guests that they cannot dine in the restaurant unless they order onion rings (the guests laugh and they all buy them). Suggest a milkshake to a child over a soft drink, and you have just added \$2 to \$3 to the guest cheque.

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## 7 The Up-Sell – *Increasing sales... increases tips*

### Sell what you like

When asked, many restaurant staff will tell a guest that “everything on the menu is great,” which is of little help to the guest. When a guest asks what is good, you have to be specific — they are opening the door for you to sell them what you would like to sell them — so go for it. Be genuine — “my favourite dish is the brisket platter and I always substitute the beans for the asparagus... although the asparagus cost a little more”... and you have the sale complete. Then upsell a little — “our house draft was brewed specifically for us and is amazing with the brisket”... and you have another up-sell completed.

### Sell larger portions

I think up-selling has advantages and disadvantages, so I encourage you to be careful. Ultimately you don’t want the guest to over buy so they are unable to finish their meal and feel that you sold them too much. If they feel that way, they may not come back again. As a result, up-selling should be done carefully and with the guest experience in mind. Here are a couple of suggestions that may work.

- > If someone orders water, suggest bottled water (flat or bubbly), and let them ask for tap water if that is what they really want.
- > If someone orders a glass of wine, suggest a half carafe, which is the same price as two glasses but provides the volume of three.
- > If someone orders a steak, suggest the larger one for \$5 more... a great deal!

Selling techniques are an essential tool for a server to carry — just don’t over do it and you will be able to increase your average guest cheque by at least 10%.

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## 8 Guests From Another Planet

*A survival guide*

We have all experienced the guest from another planet.

The episode replays itself over and over in your mind, you tell all your co-workers, your friends and family about it. It was that one situation in which you felt absolutely out of control, there was nothing you could do or say to satisfy that guest.

There will always be guests like that, but there are a few things you can do to make it easier for everyone, and turn this situation into a great time for everyone. Guests will remember the server who saved the day and turned things from terrible to wonderful.



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## 8 Guests From Another Planet – A survival guide

### Don't get angry

When a difficult situation occurs don't get angry, upset, scared, or be rude to the guest. Take control of the situation by calmly finding out all the information about the problem and then proceed to break it down into solvable pieces. Think about it from the guests perspective and see how you might feel if you were in their situation.

Servers often only look at these situations from their own perspective and get defensive if they perceive that it's not their fault. A guest screams because the steak is medium-well instead of rare, which is not the server's fault, but the customer doesn't think about it that way.

Remember customers often don't distinguish between different employees in a restaurant. A server, a busser, a hostess, a manager or a chef are all members of the restaurant team and all work together to create the guest experience. If a customer feels that they were treated badly by one staff member, everyone else on staff suffers as well.

### Identify the situation

If you approach your guests to welcome them and take a drink order, and they respond to you with a sarcastic comment: (e.g. "well I sure hope it doesn't take you fifteen minutes to bring us our drinks"); you know right away that something has gone wrong somewhere for them today and they have responded by taking it out on you. Perhaps the hostess was rude to them, or she couldn't find their reservation. Maybe they came highly recommended to your restaurant, only to be treated indifferently at the door.

This person is telling you something loud and clear, they are **NOT HAPPY**. He or she is not concerned with whose fault it is. To diffuse a difficult situation you can handle the complaint in the following manner:

#### *Acknowledge the complaint.*

It is important to the customer that you acknowledge they are upset about the situation.

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### *Apologize courteously.*

This doesn't mean that you have done something wrong, it means you are telling them you are sorry they are upset. There is a big difference between the two.

### *Act immediately to try to remedy the situation.*

Offer to replace the steak, tell them the drinks will be out momentarily and you will be back in three minutes. They are in your restaurant to eat and to have a good time, not to spend the evening arguing with the staff.

Always refer a guest problem to the manager on duty, even if you have solved it. A visit to the guest by the manager demonstrates you are taking their situation in hand and making sure they are happy. All guests like to have the manager visit their table; it makes them feel cared for and special. A second person can also diffuse the situation and introduce another perspective, letting you get back to your immediate job.

### Don't let it get you down

Don't allow a small problem to become a big one. Deal with problems immediately. Always be positive when handling guest complaints. Take action, take control, don't give excuses and never say:

- > "The kitchen is overloaded."
- > "It's the chef's fault."
- > "We are really short handed today."
- > "It's not my section."
- > "I just started today."
- > "No..."
- > "I can't..."

When you are proactive and positive, you can turn a disaster into a success.

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## 9 Serving the Visually Impaired, Handicapped and Elderly

*Lending a helping hand – pays big rewards to all*

Every guest must be treated with the same level of dignity and service quality not withstanding any handicap, visible or not, that they may have. These groups have their very own needs that must be attended to in order to execute a high level of service standards. In many cases, restaurants are ill-prepared to assist these groups of individuals and it is imperative that individual servers can “step up to the plate.” Here are a few ideas that can be implemented and which, if done nicely and with respect, can generate increased sales and obviously, tips. Many of the concepts noted below apply to all three groups and some to specific ones.



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### Menus

Guests with visual impairments and elderly guests may have difficulty reading a standard restaurant menu. For those restaurants that have fancier menus, it may be prudent to develop a few menus that have very large black print (e.g. 1/2 inch to 3/4 inch) and a white or off-white background so that the menu is easier to read. Furthermore, a restaurant may find a benefit to having a flashlight on hand to better illuminate the menu for those with failing eyesight.

Three percent of the visually impaired population in Canada has the ability to read Braille. For help in preparing a Braille menu, you can contact your local Institute for the Blind for assistance. Having a Braille menu available allows those who are visually impaired and read Braille to have a feeling of being welcomed.

Finally, a great server will offer assistance in getting through the menu. If the service staff offers to read the menu to the guest or inquires as to what the guest enjoys, then the server can make multiple recommendations as to what the offerings are in the category the person is interested in. When servers are reading the menu to a visually impaired person, you should ask them if they would like you to sit with them for a minute to assist (while I think sitting with guest is very unprofessional — in this case it may make the guest feel less conspicuous).

### Escorting to the table

The visually impaired, handicapped and elderly are people going out for a dining experience — effort should be made to provide them with a good table in the heart of the action and not an out-of-the-way corner, unless it is asked for. There are few issues that revolve around wheel chairs as far as space is concerned and seeing-eye dogs are trained to curl up in a ball under the table (Note: eye dogs are allowed in all restaurants and bars in Canada under national, provincial and municipal legislation). As a result everyone can be seated everywhere.

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The only exception to this concept is that elderly guests generally do like quieter spots, especially in busy and loud restaurants. When seating an elderly guest that you think may have an issue with noise or music, ask them and seat them in an appropriate area.

In cases of visually impaired guests who are not escorted by a sighted person, the host should offer them their elbow to hold while they are being escorted. Tell the person that you are about to seat them, tell them they can take your arm and touch the back of their hand with the arm you are offering — they will find your elbow. Walk them directly to their table, remembering that they will need room between you and the other obstacles in the dining room (e.g. tables, chairs, guests, servers, stuff on floors) and you must inform them of everything in their way. You must also remember that they are visually impaired yet can walk at a normal pace. When you get to the table tell them you are there, take their hand and place it on the back of the chair. Tell them if the chair has an arm so they feel for it before they sit on it.

When seating a visually impaired person ask them if you can tell them a little about the dining room and where the facilities are. If they say yes, then tell them first what is on the table, then what is around them, and finally where the washroom facilities and host stand are, along with providing a quick review of the room's atmosphere.

### Helping with coats

While it is always a nice gesture to assist any guest with their coat on a cold or wet day, it is important to assist those with disabilities and the elderly. When the guest is at the table or about to sit down, offer to take their coat to a hanger or closet, telling them you will bring it back after the meal is done. If someone says yes, try your best to assist them in taking off the coat and hold it for them while they add their scarf, gloves and so forth. When they are done and seated, take the coat to where it is to be stored and bring back a “coat check” to the table, or at least return to the table to advise them where their coat is.

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### Serving visually impaired

When serving the visually impaired you must take the time and make the effort to be considerate of their needs. If you adapt yourself for this group, you will be more considerate of all other groups with special needs. For example, the visually impaired person may have no idea when the server is at the table and not. Let them know when you arrive, when you are leaving and, if there are more guests at the table, try and let them know you are directing questions to them. When you deliver their food or clear their plate, let them know what you are about to do — before you do it. Also when presenting food, let the guest know what is where (e.g. “Your steak is directly in front of you on the plate, the mashed potatoes are at the top right and the vegetables are on the top left of the plate. The vegetables include cut asparagus, carrots and grilled zucchini”).

### Presenting the check

Some visually impaired and elderly guests may not be able to read a guest cheque. If this is the case, you should ask them if they need help reading the check. If they say yes, read them the bill total, outline the taxes and tell them the final amount owed.

### Saying good-bye

These groups of individuals may need a little extra assistance when leaving the restaurant. You can offer such assistance by asking them if you can get their coat, helping them on with it and escorting them through the dining room. Moving a table out of the way or holding a chair is also helpful, as is carrying a bag or doggie bag for them, as they move toward the door.

Where this assistance may not turn into a tip right away, it will show the guest that you care, are interested in their well-being and they will return. If they experience the same care and attention when they come back, they will return more often, and, as a result, you will benefit along with the restaurant owner.

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## 10 What Do Guests Want?

*Casual and comfortable are in... stuffy is out*

Guests want great service but what they get is often lacking.

If you are really interested in providing the best possible service and want to exceed expectations, then go to the restaurant you work at with a friend and have dinner. You will see everything the way your guests see it. Once you identify any weaknesses, you will become a much better server and your tips will likely increase as the quality of your service increases.



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## 10 What Do Guests Want? – *Casual and comfortable are in... stuffy is out*

### Walk in unannounced

When you walk into the restaurant unannounced (e.g. none of the people there know you are coming) is there someone to meet and greet you? Would you like to be greeted by a smiling person who welcomes you and inquires how you are doing?

When the host takes you to the table, do they drop the menus on the table and walk away or do they hand them to you and suggest that you have a nice evening?

Do you sit in a clean chair or booth and is the floor under you clean enough or is there too much residue from the previous guest? Is the table really clean or are you wiping a few strands of the last person's meal off the table? Is the salt, pepper, ketchup, etc. full?

### When your server arrives

Does your server arrive when you need them, or do they arrive when it is convenient for them? Is this the standard that you want to live up to? Do they take your order properly? Can they answer all of your questions? How long did you wait until they arrived?

### Delivery

Did your drink come to the table when you wanted it? Was the wine opened properly? Did you have to order it by number or could the server repeat the name of the wine? Was it served properly?

Was your appetizer plate cleared prior to your dinner arriving? Did the server ask you to keep your fork or did you get a clean one? Has your table been maintained yet?

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### Look around

Check out the room, the tables next to you— is there someone trying to get the servers attention by looking around or waving their hands? Is someone trying to wave down anyone in order to pay their bill (and no one wants to take their money?) Did someone arrive to check on your meal yet? Are you having fun yet?

### Pay your bill

Are they nice to you? Did they bring your bill fast enough or too early? Did your server remember to offer you coffee and dessert? When you provided your credit card or cash did they come and get your card for you? Did they make you package your own carry-out doggie bag? Did someone bring the check back with the credit card slip or are you to remember the amount? If you paid with cash, did you get change? Did anyone say thank you yet?

### As you leave

Did the manager (your boss) come over enough times to see how you are doing? Did they check any other tables while you were there? Are they supporting your service standards and helping out or are they just “minding the store”? Did someone thank you at the door and make you feel special and important on the way out?

As you leave, take note that you were likely the most important guest in the restaurant that night — your friends and boss were serving you — and it is very likely that you got the best service that was delivered that night. Was it good enough? Can you improve on it? And if you can, will you?

You should get all your co-workers to do the same — it is an unbelievable experience, usually an embarrassing insight, and it provides you with the tools to become a much stronger professional.

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