

The Art of Hosting

The Art of Hosting

*The Complete Training Guide for
Waiters and Restaurant Hosts*

Gerard A. Pollion

*The Art of Hosting:
The Complete Training Guide for Waiters and Restaurant Hosts*

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To you, who want to learn the Art of Hosting,

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FOREWORD

All Gérard Pollion's experiences, from the time of his birth in La Ferté sous Jouarre, France, are totally reflected in the writing of this book. A practical, comprehensive guide to the art of hosting, it will allow any server to understand his or her profession by rediscovering the ancient tradition of hosting—using simple, easy to understand and logical guidelines. And every 'rule' is clearly explained, so you know why you're doing what you're doing, not just how. After all, it's easier to do something the correct way when you understand the logic behind it.

From the time that he observed the culinary activities of his mother as a child, Gérard has been fascinated by the art and practice of cooking and hosting. It was therefore not surprising that in 1961 he enrolled at the Université de Paris to study cooking with some of the greatest Master Chefs and Maîtres d'hôtel of France. His enthusiasm paid off in 1963 when he won the Diplôme d'Honneur Coupe Baptiste at the Maitre D' open tournament.

This book, therefore, devotes almost the same amount of attention to the total setting as the actual hosting or serving itself. This approach is very much in keeping with the tradition, philosophy and professional experiences Gérard has cultivated over many years in the restaurant industry as a chef, manager, maitre d' and owner.

Gérard Pollion is uniquely qualified to bring this information to you, and I genuinely hope that you get the most from what he has to share. I wish you the best of luck in your career in this wonderful industry!

Stanley H. Smith, PhD
Human Resources Academy Dean (Ret.)
South Illinois University, Carbonale, Illinois

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*The Best Dish in the World Served
in a Sloppy Way is a Disgrace*

INTRODUCTION

The goal of this book is simple: to teach you to be an outstanding host. Whether you wish to work in the finest of restaurants (and garner the greatest possible tips for excellent service) or a neighborhood bistro, you'll learn everything there is to know to host spectacular meals and banquets with professionalism and attention to detail.

Excellent hosting is not difficult, but it is an art that must be learned. And in my over 40 years in the restaurant industry, I have seen this art becoming more and more a 'lost' one as the years pass. In our hectic modern world, thorough (and correct!) training for servers in restaurants is very rare. This is what inspired me to write this guide for you. So you can work in the finest of restaurants (or any other restaurant that values good service) and hold your own, having complete knowledge of the proper way to serve your guests.

In this guide, I will cover every aspect of setting up, serving and clearing away food and wine. Using simple, concise descriptions, supported by an explanation of why you're doing things the way I describe, and clear illustrations and photos, you'll be able to quickly learn the proper techniques for hosting any guest.

Hosting is no more than using common sense in displaying all the tools needed to serve food & wine to your guests. Your goal should always be to host your guest just like you would like to be hosted: in a simple, elegant and undisturbed way. A total misconception that I hear too often is that "you must treat your guest as if he or she were your best friend" WRONG! Your guest is a temporary boss. The guest comes, orders and pays you. The guest, therefore, deserves respect, obedience and service.

The best host is a silent one: you don't feel his presence. He is as discreet as a shadow, using the art of efficient silence. Succeeding at this art means that the guest ignores your presence, as

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everything comes naturally, just like magic. The less your presence is noticed, the better the reward, and the better you will be remembered when it comes time to tip.

Everyone goes to a restaurant to have a good time, just like when you're going to a movie. You expect that it will be good and enjoyable. Just as a movie has many elements that are interwoven to make it good, so it is with a restaurant visit. The décor, ambiance, dining room set-up, lighting, music, choice of drinks and wine, food—even the perfect coffee must be just so in order to blend together to become the ultimate dining experience. And to crown all of this, smiling faces from the valet, hostess, bar and dining room staff. This must all be presented to the guest with efficiency, discretion and reserved politeness.

The proper hosting done this way will result in success, reward, recognition and repeat business. When the guest leaves happy, everybody has won. Let's begin our journey toward becoming a successful host.

A Lawyer has clients
A doctor has patients
A pilot has passengers
A mechanic has customers
A server has ... GUESTS



On Being a Server

Before you can be a server at the finest restaurant in town, you must first become an apprentice. This is a given in the restaurant industry. In fact, it takes years of practice to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to perform with complete confidence and earn the respect only the best waiters receive.

In 1936, the first Hotel & Management Institution & Culinary Institute was created at rue Médéric in Paris, France, originally named “Ecole Hôtelière Jean Drouant”. The primary goal of this institution was to alleviate the years of on-the-job training needed to become a professional in only one single field by giving three years of intense teaching that combined the theory with training and practice. This teaching included Dining room, Enology, Culinary, Accounting, two foreign languages (spoken fluently), Hotel and Management.

The advantage of this system is to give a total overview of all professions within the hotel/restaurant business. And later, to give a better understanding all the facets of this industry.

Once graduated, one was able to choose the branch of his/her choice and be able to enter and climb rapidly the echelons of that field. Six months after graduation, anyone could ask for a server’s job in fine dining establishment, knowing in-depth tableside carving & flambéing, decanting and wine knowledge.

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In my own places in France, whoever applied for a job in the kitchen had to spend one full month in the dining room and vice-versa; this practice allowed my entire staff to better understand the difficulty of the other side, making the better able to perform their own function.

In North America, it seems that a great number of the wait staff lack the basic knowledge necessary to work in the restaurants where the money is. The goal of this book is to teach you just that, without having to spend thousands of dollars and several years on a formal education in Europe.

The Wait Staff

No one starts in this industry as a Dining Room Manager! The restaurant business is a TEAM effort, where the higher level masters the lower one. Here are the duties that must be learned and the necessary steps to become one of the best:

- Bus Boy

This job is basically one of a handy man: performing the lowest duties while learning the restaurant and how it runs. During mealtime, the busboy's duty is to have the first contact with guests, bringing bread & its garnishes, clearing emptied plates and carrying them to the dishwasher. It requires discipline, obedience, total devotion and service without question.

- Food Runner

He or she must first have a full knowledge of all dishes and their presentation and the station locations. Picks up food in the kitchen, makes sure there are cold plates for cold food and hot plates for hot food, covers hot food plates with a cover. Carries food on a tray to the proper table, sets it on a tray jack that is carried at the same time and advises the Captain of its arrival.

- Server

The waiter's job is to wait for the food to arrive, and then serve it. He or she also assists the Captain in all duties and situations.

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- Captain

Takes the food and drink orders, including wine orders when a wine steward is not available. He or she also performs tableside carving & flambéing and stays in his station at all times to see to the guests' needs.

- Bartender

Serves all drinks to bar guests. The only wait staff member that is allowed to be social (in a respectful way) with guests.

- Wine Steward

A former Captain who has spent years of studying Enology (the scientific study of wine). In charge of the cellar and "Cave du jour". Advise guests on how to properly marry their food with wines, takes wine order, does the decanting and serves the wines and after dinner drinks.

- Host/Hostess

In charge of the lobby cleanliness, updates daily the reservation book, takes telephone reservations, welcomes guests and conducts them to the table. Brings menus (if not already on the table), informs the Captain of guest's specific information or requests (the paying guest, birthday, etc.) and thanks guests on their departure.

Note: Hosts and Hostesses should always be dressed appropriately and be well groomed, with no jewelry, perfume or cologne.

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- Maitre D'

In charge of the entire dining room. Performs scheduling, oversees the guests' tables. Visits guests' tables and inquires about their satisfaction or any problems that they may not feel comfortable telling their Captain.

- Dining Room Manager

Often combined with the Maitre D' position; the Dining Room Manager fills out the necessary paperwork, including shift and daily reports, and reconciles bartender and dining room cash register tills. Establishes wait staff station assignments. Issues menus, specials menus, cocktails, coffees, cocktail coffees, after diner drinks and wine list. Arranges special parties, banquets and buffets. Brings more business to the restaurant by working with the Public Relations firms, wine suppliers and others. Orders any equipment needed in the dining room.

The Dining Room Manager is in charge of the entire restaurant operation, while having permanent contact with the Chef. Finally, the Dining Room Manager reports to the General Management and ownership.



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Dining Room Set-up

This chapter will show you how to set up a dining room, taking it from an empty space to an arrangement of tables for a comfortable guest seating in the finest of restaurants. Since different styles of restaurants have different requirements, we'll talk about how the dining room setup can be tailored in each case.

Positioning Tables

Positioning Chairs

Booth Options & Shapes

Numbering Tables

Guest Positions

Floor Plan

Dressing the Table

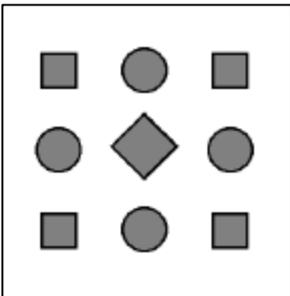
Server's Stations

POSITIONING TABLES

The main concern when it comes to a dining room is the seating capacity. There are basic rules, depending on the type of restaurant: upscale, fine dining, ethnic, family, fast food, banquet, or anywhere in between. The owner's investment is therefore a major component of your irrevocable decision.

Below are the recommended dining room floor plans. Variations can be made based on this framework. Always keep the comfort of your future guests in mind—décor, ambiance and music all play a part. The more expensive your prices will be, the more comfort you can afford to give and the less seating capacity you will have!

Arrange the table setting according to the pole of attraction inside the dining room (fountain or other example, or outside (ocean view, scenery, etc). While inside your restaurant, every one of your guests wants to have the best table, so strive to place all tables around the focal point so that everyone can have a good view of it. If your restaurant has an outside view, place your table rows on steps (which is excellent, but expensive!), or place your tables in the shape of “wolves teeth” in order to squeeze additional tables.



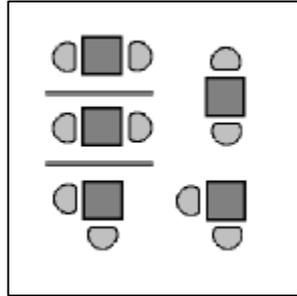
HARMONY

The visual harmony of the entire dining room is your main concern. In order to be pleasant to the eye, you must avoid monotony. Therefore: *always alternate square and round tables.*

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PRIVACY

Keep in mind that guests like a maximum of privacy. Whenever possible, place a large plant or a thin wall divider between two tables to create 'alcoves'. When placing a table, always remember to avoid facing a chair face to face with another chair from another close table. If guests want to sit next to each other, have the same chair position from the other table.



COMFORT

- Leave a minimum of 5 feet between each table to allow fluid service and guest privacy.
- Leave room around tables for tray-jacks and service.
- Never place tables at the back of the room or near the kitchen, service door, heavy traffic or bar areas.
- Avoid placing tables next to sources of noise (bar, live entertainment, etc.)

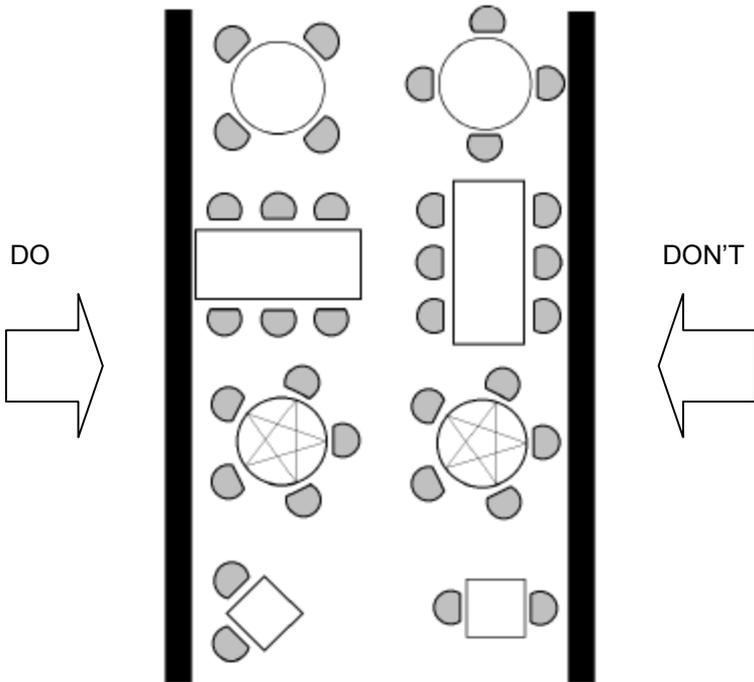


POSITIONING CHAIRS

PRIVACY: Positioning chairs & armchairs properly means keeping in mind the maximum privacy that the guests always request: a date, a business occasion, a family reunion, etc.

COMFORT As common sense dictates, the use of armchairs is always preferable for round tables and square tables that seat 2 or 4 persons. For long tables, regular chairs are recommended as they use less space in between each guest.

THE ENEMY The walls: they are the chair-positioning enemy. Here are some simple chair DOs & DON'Ts:



BOOTH OPTIONS & SHAPES

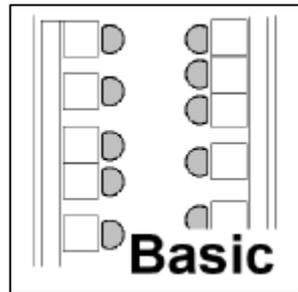
Although initially more expensive than chairs, the investment in booths is worth it, as more people can be seated in less space. Using a banquette allows the tables to be against each other with limited, but acceptable privacy for the guests. Keep in mind that a booth layout is a fixed set-up for a limited number of people and cannot be extended as with tables.

BRASSERIE TYPE

Originated in France, this set-up accommodates a large seating capacity with comfort as guests are seated closer to each other (extra room in between tables is eliminated).

The “Straight line” is the basic layout, allowing the seating of duces (2 persons) at one table, and more people by putting additional tables against one another.

The disadvantage is that one person is seated to a comfortable booth (generally the lady) and the other on a chair facing the wall!



THE “E” SHAPE

This shape is more economical to build than the “S” (below), but has less privacy, since one table faces the other. Therefore it has to be seriously considered before building it; it is not recommended if the majority of your clientele will be business people (or, even more, with romantic couples on dates!).

