

*Now
That's*
**SERVICE
THAT
SELLS!**[®]

The Art of Managing the Sizzle

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Thank you.

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CHAPTER 6

Situational Selling

S.A.L.E.S — Sell A Little Extra Something

Many guests are tired of pushy sales staff. Why? **When suggestions are not made in the appropriate fashion or at the right time, they seem insincere and mechanical.** It's been called "suggestive selling," "informing," "up-selling," "permission selling," and so on. It's evolved to "situational selling."

Sell what guests need to buy, not what the restaurant is trying to sell. The goal may be to sell as many Grande Appetizer Plates as possible, but many guests (parties of two or senior guests) would rarely buy it. So why ask everyone?

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You've probably been out to lunch, dressed in business attire and received the "Anyone in the mood for a margarita?" suggestion. "Yes, I'm in the mood for a margarita, but I can't since I'm sitting here with my boss and we have to go back to the office to work!" Focus your energy and sales tactics in areas where you have the greatest chance of success. There is no one-size-fits-all answer.

The most common questions asked of servers are:

- ① What is the special?
- ② *What is good here?*
- ③ Where are the restrooms?
- ④ What would you recommend?
- ⑤ What is that table over there eating?

Situational selling can address most of these issues (along with help from the host on the restroom question). Before delving into specifics, take a look at the types of selling:

Types of Selling

Upselling

1

Upselling is enhancing an item already ordered (such as “up-sizing” a value meal or a draft beer, or adding cheese and guacamole to a burger).

Suggestive selling

2

Suggestive selling is describing an item guests have not ordered yet.

Situational selling

3

Situational selling is assessing the situation and *informing* guests of items or deals that best enhance that situation (let them make the choice).

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Knowing why guests are paying a visit makes it easier to sell. Lose the monotone “Would you like to try our special today?” and insincere “I have to tell you about our soups or we get counted off by our mystery shopper,” or “I’m trying to win a contest – would you like to buy a gift card?”

Is there any benefit to the guests in the previous situations? Suggesting enhancements to the meal is a key step in the cycle of service, but the practice needs to be subject to interpretation. While guests may not like to deal with pushy salespeople, there is no doubt they like to spend money and buy things they like or want. Make it easy for the guests to say yes.



For example, regular guests may never open their menu.

They know what they want. Can your servers skip the suggestion step? Sure, if you want to lose revenue!

Consider: A woman takes a client to her favorite local restaurant. Not needing to open the menu, she orders her usual meal. The client goes with the grilled chicken Caesar salad. "What? I didn't know that was on the menu. I'll have one of those also," the woman says.

Moral of the story: Alter suggestions to the situation: "Were you aware we now have a grilled chicken Caesar salad on the menu?" or "Since you like chicken, you may want to try the blackened chicken pasta special we have today. It's out of this world."

Another reason servers don't sell is they lack confidence. Why? They don't have enough knowledge. If, for instance, they don't drink wine or beer and haven't been trained well on these subjects (or the training was so long ago it's been forgotten), they're not likely to suggest these items. **They're afraid they won't know an answer to guests' questions.**

So what can be done to increase knowledge? Train them! Servers don't need to be experts on every ingredient and flavor profile, but they do need to be able to suggest items confidently and answer questions that guests may have. Simple ideas such as daily tastings, item-of-the-day discussions before the shift or recipe-card reviews will help the staff become more valuable to the guests and you!

Here are other ideas to help situational selling become a reality:

Ask questions. If guests can't decide which bottle of wine to order, an on-the-ball server can ask questions about what type of wine the guests usually like to drink and how much they prefer to spend. If they tend to gravitate toward inexpensive brands, it's wise to suggest something in their price range. Otherwise, they might suffer sticker shock at the end of the meal. Sell to the situation.

Servers don't need to be experts on every ingredient and flavor profile, but they do need to be able to suggest items confidently ...

Suggest unique items. Everyone offers standard fare, and it should be on the menu, but to get guests coming back again and again, it's a good idea to let them know about items they can't get anywhere else. Or maybe it's the method of preparation that sets a familiar dish apart. In other words, promote what makes your food distinctive:

Server: “You may be thinking it’s just another hamburger, but we cook ours over an open flame with mesquite and special seasonings. If you’re not a meat-lover, you can order it with a veggie or black bean patty instead.”

Modify suggestions to address specific dietary needs. Servers should find out if there are any dietary needs or concerns right up front: “Before I tell you about my favorites, does anyone have any dietary concerns or questions I can answer?” If they want a low-carb meal, suggest a low-carb beer or a glass of wine.

Watch what you say. When it comes to celebrations, determine who’s paying. Is it OK to make suggestions about specials or is there a price range in mind? Work with the party host to identify parameters and customize suggestions.

Follow the lead. During business meetings, guests often hesitate to order an appetizer, dessert or alcohol. Servers can usually identify the person in charge and take his or her order first. If an appetizer or, say, a beer is ordered at that point, others will follow suit. On the other hand, if the top dog goes last, chances are a bunch of waters with lemon will be heading to the table. Another approach is to discreetly ask the person in charge if it would be appropriate to suggest items such as beer or wine.

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Eliminate questions such as “Would you like...” and “Do you want...” They virtually encourage a “no” response. For example, “Would you like dessert?” If guests are indecisive, “no” is the easy way out. Or perhaps they’ll decline because there are too many unanswered questions: “How much is it?” and “What do you have?” and “Which one is the best?”

When you don’t make it easy for guests to see the benefits, expect “no.” What’s more, the proper answer to “What’s good here?” is never “Everything.” Guests want direction. What are they in the mood for? What type of meal are they looking for (pasta, salad, steak)? Information is power. Power to deliver *Service That Sells!*

Watch the negatives. Since most servers only sell like they’ve been sold to, they tend to repeat what they hear when they eat out. Unfortunately, many of those phrases are negative and may have crept into their vocabulary. When was the last time you actually listened to one of your servers or hosts make suggestions? Post a sign in the break area or on the POS terminal with a big red X through these phrases:

"You don't want dessert (or an appetizer or another beer) do you?"

"Anything else?"

"Decided yet?"

"Is that all?"

Offer a choice of two. Servers should use "Which would you prefer?" instead of "Would you like...?" It's not selling as much as it is informing guests of their choice and letting them decide. For example:

Beer

Guest: "I'll have a draft beer."

Server: "We have two sizes of draft, 16 and 22 oz. Which would you prefer?"

Wine

Guest: "I'll have a chardonnay."

Server: "The house chardonnay is _____ and we also feature _____ and _____. Which sounds good to you?"

Alcohol

Guest: "I'll have a vodka tonic."

Server: "Which type of vodka do you prefer? Our well vodka is _____ and we also offer _____ and _____."

Desserts

Guest: "What do you have for dessert?"

Server: "Are you chocolate lovers?"

Guest: "Yes!"

Server: "We have a chocolate mountain cake and a chocolate mousse truffle. Both are ideal for sharing. Which should I bring out — or should I bring them both out?"

Inform guests about favorites or features. Pointing out value can be helpful, too. Sell the benefit to guests. Let them buy what they want, not what you're trying to sell. Effective phrases are:

- "John is in the kitchen tonight and his specialty is _____."
- "My favorite chicken dish is the _____."
- "The most popular beers we sell are ..."
- "If you're really hungry I'd recommend the _____."
- "Were you aware we also serve _____?"
- "Did you know tonight's feature is _____?"
- "The best deal is _____."
- "The last expensive way to do that is _____."
- "If you want to splurge on this happy occasion, I'd suggest _____."
- "If it were me, I'd get the _____."
- "If you want low carbs, may I suggest the _____."
- "If you're looking for something low-cal, the best tasting item would be the _____."
- "You may not realize we offer some 'bigger kids' meals which are actually smaller portions of our fajitas or rib baskets."
- "If you want to save a few dollars, you can order the half-rack and chicken combo. It's still a lot of food and leaves room for the dessert I heard you mention."
- "The best meals under \$15 would include _____."

Remind staff to say it in guests' terms. Suggesting the best deal to value-conscious guests is ideal but may be offensive to those wining and dining a party. If they want to splurge, let them! When going through the car-buying process, the salesperson usually puts buyers into a fully loaded model, then removes things not wanted. More often than not, the buyers spend more money than planned, but feel like they saved money because things were eliminated.

The same can work for a restaurant: Package an appetizer, two entrées and a dessert to split at a slight savings (as an off-the-menu special to test). Guests go for the deal, save a few cents (but spend more than planned), and the server doesn't have to be pushy. It's a win for guests, the server and the restaurant.

Suggest dessert to go. Face it, with the large portion sizes of most restaurants, guests typically don't buy dessert, and many servers would rather turn the table than have guests remain for another 15 minutes (and an additional \$1 tip). The answer? Offer dessert to-go. *Now That's Service That Sells!*

Keep score. Retail chains routinely post sales check averages, as well as the highest total sales on a quarterly or annual basis. Imagine your servers' faces when they see their total sales for the year are over \$100,000 or they have the top check average in the store, district or whole chain. Information is power — the power to deliver *Service That Sells!*

Situational selling is based on the confidence to guide guests to yes. Success requires training. There's an old story about a couple of shoe salespeople who get sent to a remote area to sell shoes to the tribes people. The first salesperson calls in to the supervisor and says: "No opportunity here — nobody wears shoes." The second salesperson calls in to the supervisor and says: "**An incredible opportunity here — nobody wears shoes!**" *Now That's Service That Sells!*

