



with Lou Perri, from the Stunned Mullet.

palate pleasures

HUMAN NATURE AND THE RESTAURANTEUR

Hello Everyone and welcome to winter! Temperatures have plummeted here in Port, fostering a burning desire to drink red wine. A welcome season indeed.

Last month's article on service in the States has kept me pondering over all the intricacies involved in the relationship between those in the restaurant game and their customers.

Dealing with the general public is tricky in any occupation. We all have wildly diverse personalities, different requirements, moods, health and age issues which call for different levels of care and interaction. Some people are 'high maintenance' and some are 'low maintenance'.

In the restaurant game all interaction between staff and customer is immediate and in real time, which adds an urgency and extremely minimal margin for error to proceedings.

Couple that with the placing of social interactions and important personal occasions into a public space where the exchange of money is involved, you sometimes have a recipe (pardon the pun), for trouble...

Let me throw in an example...

Maybe a dinner with the In laws (the sort where tensions can run high). You are seated at a table. There's a draught, and no table for you to move too. The conversation is a bit stilted as you don't see each other much. You could murder a gin and tonic, but you can't seem to flag down a waitperson. Eventually your waitress arrives. She's having a terrible night – they're short staffed, she has a nasty stress headache. Your order gets lost and you are left waiting. No one lets you know what is happening and you are left without food. Family style bickering begins, you get more and more stressed. The waitress, after an agonisingly long period comes to let you know there's been a mistake with your order..... You can imagine the rest.

This is an extreme example where you have the worst possible errors occurring on the restaurant's part, but also a tense social situation where the customers just didn't want to be there. If you applied the same mistakes in service to a group of great friends having a joyful reunion, you would have a bit of exasperation maybe from the wait for food but the table may well have left reasonably happy as they

all wanted to be there and were enjoying each other's company.

When people dine out, they have grand expectations, and not just with the food. Important occasions are set in restaurants – first dates, anniversaries, birthdays, reunions, deal making meetings. Some people rarely dine out, and aren't sure how to tackle the menu in front of them – these people need to be made to feel comfortable, and might require extra help and patience.

There's tons of emotion involved before many customers arrive at the door, and an enormous responsibility hoisted onto the many staff that are accountable for making or breaking their experience.

As a Restaurateur I can try to make the customer's experience as seamless as possible. I can create systems and procedures for my staff and extensive ongoing training. I can source the best and freshest ingredients and have them prepared by my kitchen team with

skill, flair and originality. I can strive towards the greatest ambience and comfort for my customers in the restaurant space. I can cater towards those with special dietary requirements.

But I know, even if I get all these things right, I still can't please everyone. You just don't know what sort of day

someone's had. A young waitress can be an easy scapegoat for someone with a chip on their shoulder.

A customer can walk in right in middle of a busy service with a list of dietary requirements a mile long, leaving the chef no time to design an appropriate dish.

Someone might just not enjoy their meal – even if it was perfectly executed, it just wasn't to their taste.

Anything can happen at any time in the restaurant trade, we just have to be ready to use instinct, intuition and amateur psychology when required.

As a restaurant owner it is generally difficult to relax and just be a customer, as you are constantly analysing every aspect of the ambience, service and food quality.

