

7

Food and beverage service

Aim

To identify the key features of food and beverage service and their related management requirements.

Objectives

This chapter is intended to support you in:

- Developing your understanding of the service sequence and the service process
- Identifying and categorising food and beverage service methods
- Exploring the relationship between levels of customer service and resource productivity
- Developing approaches to the maintenance of good customer relations
- Dealing with the management of the volume in food and beverage service
- Managing the stages of the service sequence
- Controlling revenue.

7.1 The nature of food and beverage service

Food and beverage service is a difficult job. Whilst there have been changes in food and beverage service, with less emphasis on the high level technical skills (mistakenly bemoaned by some as deskilling) what wasn't initially being recognised was that other parts of the job are just as, if not more, important. The other thing that wasn't initially recognised was that the provision of high quality service was not confined to a particular type of restaurant and a particular type of service style. In other words excellence in food and beverage is not defined by the inclusion of a narrow range of high-level technical skills.

For food and beverage service the key requirements for staff are:

- Sound product knowledge
- Competence in technical skill
- Well-developed social skills
- The ability to work as part of a team.

Good food and beverage service is achieved where management continually reinforces and supports service staff in the maintenance of good standards of achievement in these aspects. Additionally the provision and maintenance of good service is primarily dependent on teamwork, not only among service staff but also amongst and between staff in other departments.

For managers within the food service operations, skills in marketing, staff management, team development, training, customer relations, financial management and operational management are necessary for the management of the service sequence and ultimately for the survival of the business.

7.2 Food and beverage service systems

Food and beverage service had traditionally been seen as a delivery system. However, as we saw in Chapter 1, food and beverage service actually consists of two separate systems, which are being managed at the same time. These are:

- 1 **The service sequence** – which is primarily concerned with the delivery of food and beverages to the customer
- 2 **The customer process** – which is concerned with the management of the experience the customer undertakes to be able to order, be served, consume and have the area cleared.

Separating the service process into two systems provides for a better understanding of the processes as well as providing an indication of the potential options for the organisation of food and beverage service.

■ The service sequence

The *service sequence* is essentially the bridge between the production system, beverage provision and the customer process (or customer experience). The service sequence may consist of eleven or more stages (Cousins *et al.* 2014a) as summarised in Table 7.1.

Table 7.1: Food and beverage service sequence

- 1 Preparation for service
 - 2 Taking bookings
 - 3 Greeting and seating/directing
 - 4 Taking food and beverage orders
 - 5 Serving of food
 - 6 Serving beverages
 - 7 Clearing during service
 - 8 Billing
 - 9 Dealing with payments
 - 10 Dishwashing
 - 11 Clearing following service
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Within these stages, there are a variety of alternative ways of achieving the service. The choices on how the service sequence is designed, planned and controlled are made taking into account a number of organisational variables. These include:

- Customer needs
- Level of customer demand
- The type and style of the food and beverage operation
- The nature of the customers (non-captive, captive or semi-captive)
- Prices to be charged
- Production process
- Volume of demand
- Volume of throughput
- Space available
- Availability of staff
- Opening hours
- Booking requirements
- Payment requirements, and
- Legal requirements.

■ The customer process

If food and beverage service is viewed as primarily a delivery process, then the customer can often be seen as a passive recipient of the service. As a result, systems and procedures tend only to be designed from the delivery perspective. However, as has been discussed in Chapter 3, a customer service specification cannot be achieved if it does not take account of both the infrastructure supporting the specification as well as the ability to implement standards within the interactive phase.

If the whole issue of quality is to be taken seriously, then the customers' involvement in the process must be considered. Customers are not passive but provide the impetus for the operations in the first place. With casual dining becoming more prevalent, people now dine out regularly; therefore, customer demands and expectations have increased. In essence, the customer experience must be focussed on in more detail than ever before.

Activity:

Using your favourite food and beverage establishment as an example:

- Complete a 'virtual walk through' of the customer journey from entering the establishment to leaving it.
- Identify the key elements that make your visit there memorable.

For food and beverage operations, 15 separate service methods can be identified within the industry if the delivery system, or service sequence approach, is taken. However, this number is reduced when the analysis of the various service methods is taken from the customer process perspective. Four basic customer processes can be identified based on what the customer has to be involved in. These are:

- A Service at a laid cover:** the customer is served at a laid table. This type of service, which includes plated service or silver service, is found in many types of restaurant, cafés and in banqueting.
- B Assisted service:** the customer is served part of the meal at a table and is required to obtain part through self-service from some form of display or buffet. This type of service is found in carvery type operations and is often used for meals such as breakfast in hotels. Many contemporary casual style chain restaurants have now adopted this style of service. It may also be used for functions.
- C Self-service:** the customer is required to help him or herself from a buffet or counter. This type of service can be found in cafeterias and canteens.
- D Service at a single point:** the customer orders, pays and receives the food and beverages, for instance at a counter, at a bar in licensed premises, in a fast food operation or at a vending machine.