

Food & Beverage - Handling Customer Fear & Doubt: Building Relationships - By Ken Burgin

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A confused or anxious customer usually says 'No' - it's safer.

How you handle their spoken or unspoken questions will either strengthen the relationship or undermine it. With the world economy in meltdown, there's plenty to worry about - your warmth and honesty will be very welcome.

The more you answer questions upfront, the more you build trust. It's also a useful check on the strength of your service and systems.

Use party bookings as an example - common customer concerns include:

How much will this event really cost?

Have I forgotten to ask for something that will cost more later?

Will they do it the way I want, or the way they want?

Have we allowed enough time for this party?

What will happen if we arrive early or late?

Will there be enough food?

Will there be food that everyone will want to eat?

What about people on a diet - will they be happy?

Will the food be as good as promised?

How clean is the kitchen?

How will they deal with children who get fidgety?

What will the staff be like on the day?

Will I be embarrassed by anything during the event?

How do they handle people who drink too much?

What else could go wrong that I don't know about?

You know most of the questions people will ask. A great way to answer them and show your attention to detail is to prepare a Frequently Asked Questions list (FAQ). Have it available on your website and as leaflet, and use it with staff training. These are easy to write - you've heard them all 100 times! Make sure your staff deliver them with a smile, not a sigh - how are they feeling in the midst of an economic downturn?

Make sure the answers are presented in 'sales mode' eg:

Q: Are seat covers included in the banquet price?

A: No [wrong answer]

A: We have a great range available at a small extra charge of \$5 per chair [better answer]

Q: What time do we need to vacate the room?

A: Rooms must be vacated by 1am [wrong answer]

A: The room can be used beyond 1am for an additional charge, or your guests can move to the Star Lounge which is open until 3am [better answer]

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