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## **Factors Affecting Guest Satisfaction in the Restaurant Industry of South Mississippi**

Kinsey M. Eiland  
*University of Southern Mississippi*

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The University of Southern Mississippi

Factors Affecting Guest Satisfaction in the Restaurant Industry of South Mississippi

by

Kinsey Eiland

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Honors College of  
The University of Southern Mississippi  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Bachelor of Science  
in the Department of Economic Development and Tourism

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Approved by

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Russ Willis, J.D., Thesis Advisor  
Professor of Practice of Management

---

Bill Smith, Ph.D., Chair  
Department of Economic Development  
and Tourism

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Ellen Weinauer, Ph.D., Dean  
Honors College

## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study is to examine the factors that affect guest services in the restaurant industry of South Mississippi as examined from the line level employee. This satisfaction can include things in the servicescape (e.g. noise level, parking availability) as well as the service support that a waiter receives from their coworkers and supervisors. By combining a research model that examines the guest server exchange with a typical guest satisfaction questionnaire, the researcher developed a two part internet survey to be administered to both restaurant patrons as well as line level employees working in the restaurant industry. The results of the two surveys were analyzed and it was determined that line level employees must be customer oriented and trained properly in order to deliver the best service possible to their guests.

### Keywords

Customer Service

Restaurants

Hospitality

Management Style

Attitude Theory

## **Dedication**

For my mother.

I could write all day and the words  
would never be enough

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## Chapter 1

Guest service industries such as hotels and restaurants spend thousands of dollars on unhappy guests each year without a guarantee that this spending will ensure guests are entirely satisfied. Websites such as Yelp, TripAdvisor, and Urbanspoon were developed so that people can share both their good and bad experiences with other potential guests. Surveys of guest satisfaction ratings have been studied and analyzed for many years. Padron (2011) notes that hotel satisfaction surveys “are an indicator of what the guests’ perceptions of the hotel are along with the services they receive... The inherent value perceived in these surveys is directly related to how the hotel’s management responded to the satisfaction ratings.” But how do establishments work to incorporate these findings into improving their business? Within the hospitality industry, and particularly within the context of quality service, it is important for establishments to assess themselves and assess the achievements of competitors on a regular basis.

The hospitality industry is unique in the fact that it sells an intangible product and/or service. The customer pays a specific price for a bottle of wine or an upgraded hotel room, but ultimately what turns a customer into a guest is the experience they have while at an establishment and ultimately their desire to return. Memories, pictures in photo albums, stories about delicious food: these are what the hospitality industry prides itself in selling. Therefore, all interaction with the guest and any employee should be an enriching experience for the guest and leave them feeling appreciated and welcomed. The flip side to selling an enriching experience is that if something goes wrong, the guest leaves unsatisfied.



The restaurant industry is the largest portion of all the hospitality industries. A hotel sells rooms, but they can only book one party of guests per room per night. A restaurant sells meals, but they can sell multiple meals per party of guests per table and also have multiple parties of guests sit at any specific table per night. Restaurants serve a much larger volume of guests; therefore there are many more interactions and the possibility of a negative experience is increased. When these negative guest interactions occur, the line level employee is charged with resolving them. Line level employees are those that are the first line of contact with a guest, in the restaurant industry these employees are the waitstaff, host/maître d', and busboy. Line level employees need to make sure that the guest is completely satisfied with the services received in order to secure the best tips possible from the party. It is commonly accepted that 15% gratuity is the norm for tipping a waiter, but ultimately leaving gratuity is optional. If the guest is not satisfied, they can show the server by simply not leaving a tip. It might not be the fairest system, since the minimum tipped wage is less than \$3 an hour, but it does serve as a good motivational tool for the servers to ensure the best possible experience for the guest.

Even with the server trying to ensure the best dining experience possible for their guests, there are many situations outside of their control for which the server is still held accountable. The line level employee has very little control over external factors such as noise level in the restaurant, how bright the lighting is, available parking outside, but they still have to compensate for the factors that are disturbing the guest's visit. Other factors that would have an effect on the service a guest receives include wait time for a table, how many tables the server is assigned, how busy the kitchen is, other servers going on

break or lunch, the original server having to pick up the slack, variety of food offered, etc. Ultimately, though, it does not matter what factors affect the guest's visit at a dining establishment as it is still the duty of the server to satisfy their needs and make them want to return.

*Climate for service* refers to employee perceptions of the practices, procedures, and behaviors that get rewarded, supported, and expected with regard to customer service and customer service quality. For example, to the extent that employees perceive that they are rewarded for delivering quality service, their organization's service climate will be stronger. Additionally, perceptions that customer service is important to management will also contribute to a strong service climate (Schneider, White, & Paul 1998). A strong service climate is necessary for any successful dining establishment. Not only must the employees be diligent with keeping their own guests happy, they also should be available to assist with any other needs that may arise for their coworkers. To establish a service climate, one must first develop the fundamental support. A climate for service rests on a foundation of fundamental support in the way of resources, training, managerial practices, and the assistance required to perform effectively (Schneider, White, & Paul 1998). As a method of describing how service providers and guests respond to the service process, Hogan, Hogan, and Busch (1984) used the term service orientation that first originated in the 1980s. They described service orientation as “a set of attitudes and behaviors that affects the staff of any organization and its guests” (Hogan, Hogan, & Busch 1984).

According to Susskind et al. (2003), “In this investigation, we specifically limit our analyses to examine the organizational level relationship between customers' reports

of satisfaction with their service experiences and service providers' perceptions of their service-related duties, connecting customer service employees' perceptions of service encounters to customers' evaluations of service experiences within the same organization.” I plan to focus my research on the guest service experience in restaurants, by looking at factors from both the perspective of the line level employee and the guest. At the end of my study, I would like to know how various factors in the guest service experience affect the guest satisfaction level and their intentions to return to the establishment.

## **Chapter 2**

The purpose of this study is to better understand the various guest service factors that affect guest satisfaction in the restaurant industry, from both the point of view of the guest and the line level employee (waiter/hostess).

### **The Psychology of Attitude Theories**

Dr. Richard Bagozzi published an article in *Social Psychology Quarterly* that outlines some of the various theories that psychology has provided to explain this idea of organizational theory. He credits the Theory of Reasoned Action as being a fundamental model for explaining social action. By explaining that the theory of reasoned action states that behavior is determined directly by one's intention combined with the consequences of both performing and not performing the behavior, he is able to illustrate how this theory influences attitude and subjective norm in an organization. Bagozzi later continues on to talk about the similarities between the theory of reasoned action and the theory of planned behavior. The addition of perceived behavioral control to the theory of planned behavior is what differentiates it from the theory of reasoned action. This addition allows the behavior to take into account actions that are out of their control because they are influenced by internal and external forces (Bagozzi, 1992).

### **Practical Application of Attitude Theory**

Behavioral intentions are defined as the subjective probability that an individual will take a particular action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). However any number of outside factors can be added to the theory and ultimately alter the results of the original intentions. In Gotlieb et al.'s article for the *Journal of Applied Psychology*, the researchers take the attitude theories mentioned by Bagozzi and try to fit a theoretical framework to them that would help explain the relationships among perceived quality, satisfaction, perceived situational control, and behavioral intentions (1994).

In their research Gotlieb et al. designed two theoretical models to help better connect the aforementioned factors to the previously discussed attitude theories. Their first model suggests that the sequence of cognitive events is disconfirmation of expectations > perceived quality > satisfaction > behavioral intentions (1994). This can be illustrated in the hospitality industry as follows. A guest orders a T-bone steak- rare, it comes served to the guest well done. The guest does not like this as much as the rare so the perceived quality is much lower, therefore their satisfaction is much lower. Their behavioral intentions are probably going to be negative or unsatisfied. On the other hand, if the server brings another steak and it is absolutely what the guest ordered and cooked to perfection, the perceived quality of the meal is going to greatly increase as well as the satisfaction level. Therefore the guest's behavioral intention would be more positive, which could potentially mean a larger tip for the server.

The second proposed model is similar to the first, but it states that satisfaction should precede perceived value in the model. If the same situation mentioned above were applied to this model the server would bring the wrong steak, the guest would not be satisfied and therefore would perceive the value to be much lower than the original steak even if they were the same cut of meat at exactly the same price. The guest was not satisfied; therefore a lower value is given to the meal which would then translate to a negative behavioral intention.

### **Attitude Theory in the Hospitality Industry**

Bagozzi's article is very relevant to my research because he illustrates the fundamental theories that go into any kind of deliberate behavior. Guest satisfaction in the hospitality industry depends heavily on the actions on the line level employees who have the greatest amount of contact with each individual client. If a guest was unsatisfied

with the service received at an establishment, the theory of reasoned action would say that the employee should consider both the rewards and the consequences of trying to appease the guest. Will the guest be satisfied with the accommodation? Will they choose to return to the establishment? How will the situation affect any potential future guest interactions?

The theory of planned behavior takes into account the actions of other employees and various other factors and the effect of such actions on the original employee. In the hospitality industry some factors are going to be out of the hands of the guest services representative. Factors such as noise level, lighting, and selection of food offered are not really under the direct control of the line level employee. Perceived behavioral control allows the employee to choose what appropriate accommodation for the guest is without having to take sole responsibility for the issues. If the guest complained about the lack of parking and an inaccurate order, the employee would only need to base their actions on the poor service for which they are directly responsible, not the lack of parking. Both of these theories can be used to explain actions of line level employees in the hospitality industry.

### **The Guest-Server Exchange Model**

Because of the very competitive market that the hospitality industry is now facing, many businesses are looking to set themselves apart from the competition to ensure customer loyalty. Many organizations in the service sector are looking for ways to improve guest satisfaction with both tangible and intangible products (Schmidt, 1995). In their article written for *Personnel Psychology*, Mark Schmidt et al. found that there was a relationship between the employee perceptions of service quality and the guest's satisfaction level with the service they received. They stated that employees who report a

higher level of satisfaction also believe that they deliver excellent service to their guests (Schlesinger & Zornitsky, 1991).

Susskind et al. developed the proposed Guest-Server Exchange (GSX) model to better illustrate the direct relationship between the perceptions of service from the employee's point of view and the customer's level of satisfaction with the service they received. They make the claim "When service providers are committed to their role in the service process, they are more likely to consistently offer their guests better service. (2007)" According to the GSX model, there are four main elements that factor into customer satisfaction: standards for service delivery, co-worker support, supervisory support and customer orientation. Each of these factors is an antecedent of the next one and they all must build on one another to create the best possible outcome for customer satisfaction.

### **Standards for Service Delivery**

The first factor is Standards for Service Delivery. Sichtmann et al. conducted their research on German exporting firms to highlight how important quality control and standards for service are to giving their business a competitive edge. They focused on the role of quality control initiatives in their study, as it applied both to the product sold as well as any interaction the customer may have with the employees or management. The quality control initiatives were designed to act as a "specific, service provider-initiated directives aimed at influencing both employees and customers to perform service delivery in ways that positively affect the quality of the service outcome (Sichtmann et al., 2011)." They concluded their study by saying that the quality control initiatives should be understood by all employees and that they should understand how to use these standards in their day to day interactions with guests.

These standards are important for carrying out a company's mission by outlining the duties and expectations of both the staff and management. In the hospitality industry, line-level employees typically have much more direct contact with guests than management staff. These standards provide a foundation to ensure that the line-level employees deliver quality customer service to each guest. According to Litwin and Stringer (1968) organizational standards for service can be defined as the key influence on individuals' behavior in organizations and defined standards as consisting of organizational members' perceptions of (a) organizational goals and objectives, (b) managerial expectations for job performance, and (c) the implicit importance placed on those goals, objectives, and performance demands.

### **Co-worker Support**

The second standard is Coworker Support. Susskind et al. (2003) defined coworker support as the extent to which employees believe their coworkers are willing to provide them with work-related assistance to aid in the execution of their service-based duties. In most instances, coworkers' perceived support is vital to the accomplishment of work-related tasks but influences more than just tangible issues, such as morale. In order to have strong coworker support within a restaurant, there must be clearly defined Standards for Service Delivery. These standards define the tasks that must be accomplished, allowing coworkers to understand when to help each other with a task.

The *Journal of Applied Psychology* published an article by Eisenberger et al. (1997) that surveyed line level employees from a variety of different areas of business to determine how strong of an influence perceived organization support has on the work environment. They wanted to see if the social exchange theory and the idea of reciprocity played a strong role in the day to day routine of the work environment. The social



exchange theory explains “the initiation, strengthening, and continued maintenance of interpersonal relationships, provides a possible conceptual basis for understanding relationships between individuals and their organization”, and the ideal of reciprocity upholds the thought that doing nice things for others will have a return of them doing nice things in return. Their survey was designed to ask how much perceived control an organization has over certain factors and how favorable these factors were to the worker. The findings showed that training conditions are a factor that all of the companies had control over while the relationship between coworkers was shown to have very little control. Therefore, the companies need to instill a standard of teamwork and coworker support into their training to help supplement the need for coworker support (Eisenberger et al., 1997).

### **Supervisory Support**

The third standard is Supervisory Support. Supervisory Support is defined as individuals' beliefs that supervisors offer them work-related assistance to aid in the performance of their job. In the hypothesized GSX model they proposed that standards act as a prompt for support from both coworkers and supervisors to help ensure the delivery of service-related behavior to customers. Susskind, Kacmar, and Brochgrevink (2003) argue that standards motivate service providers to perform supportive behaviors in the execution of their duties. Supervisory support is much less hands on than coworker support. The duty of the supervisory staff when related to the Guest-Server Exchange is to ensure that the standards for service delivery are being upheld.

Wayne et al. (1997) published an article in the *Academy of Management Journal* that looked at the perceived organizational support and how it related to the leader-member exchange. “Perceived organizational support refers to the exchanges between

coworkers, and leader-member exchange refers to the exchanges between a worker and his or her leader/supervisor. (1997)” While the two seem to be similar concepts, they affect the work environment in vastly different ways. Leader-member exchange is important for keeping the workers on task and adhering to the standards that the company has set up. The leader-member exchange has also been shown to have a great influence over the perceived organizational support. The leader should ensure that his subordinates are working as a team to fulfill the mission statement of the company. By ensuring that the subordinates are working as a team, the leader causes perceived organizational support to increase boosting morale around the work place (Wayne, Shore, & Liden, 1997).

In the restaurant industry the workers have to depend on each other and on their supervisor to ensure that the guest is receiving the best experience possible. The servers depend on the host to seat the guests in a proper manner, they depend on each other to help carry food or meet any miscellaneous need that the guest tells a different server, and everyone depends on the busboys to clear and clean the tables in a timely manner so another party of guests can be seated as quickly as possible. Supervisory support focuses more on making sure that all of the line level employees are doing their job to the best of their abilities as well as helping other team members wherever it is needed. The supervisors are also responsible for making sure that the work environment is safe for all workers, that all of the workers are highly trained and informed of their duties, and for solving any problem a guest might have that the server cannot solve themselves. Supervisory support can be a hands on interaction with guests in the front of the house, the general dining area, or making sure that operations are going smoothly in the back of

the house, the kitchen, office areas, storage closets, basically anywhere guests are not allowed. Co-worker support and supervisory support work hand in hand to ensure that the restaurant runs smoothly and is able to meet and exceed the guest's expectations.

### **Customer Orientation**

The final factor on customer satisfaction according to the GSX model is Customer Orientation. Customer orientation is defined as the importance that service providers place on their customers' needs relating to service offerings and the extent to which service providers are willing to put forth time and effort to satisfy their customers (Kelley, 1992). If a business is customer oriented, it means they are actively working to better their everyday practices to anticipate and exceed guest expectations.

According to Bitner, Booms, and Mohe (1994) in their article for the *Journal of Marketing* "In service settings, customer satisfaction is often influenced by the quality of the interpersonal interaction between the customer and the contact employee." They continue on to explain that customer oriented service organizations ultimate goal is "zero defects." This does not mean that everything needs to be perfect from the moment that the guest walks in the door until they leave; it just means that the guest is entirely satisfied with all the services they received while at the establishment. After taking into account that not all situations that arise are the fault of the server, they decided that the best way to determine if a company is customer oriented is to look at both sides of the service interaction with the guest and the server. They determined that most front-line employees are very customer oriented and are focused on meeting and exceeding the guest's needs. They also determined that some guests can create their own problems with unreasonable demands or unruly conduct. The research was concluded by making the observation that just because an establishment has strong customer orientation does not

mean that they must adapt the “customer is king” frame of mind. Establishments must accept that there are some situations that arise for which there simply is not an easy solution, but still trying their hardest to meet and exceed all guest expectations in the future (Bitner et al., 1994).

### **Guest Loyalty and Word-of Mouth intentions**

According to Han & Ryu (2012) little empirical study has tested the effects of service encounter performance, satisfaction, trust, commitment, and switching costs on word-of-mouth intentions in a single framework. Service failures are likely the main reason for customer dissatisfaction and resulting negative word-of-mouth (2012). Word-of-mouth is a very important factor in the restaurant industry. If the word-of-mouth is positive, it is essentially free advertising. If the word-of-mouth is negative, it can mean that a business will lose a large number of potential guests. Han and Ryu (2012) wanted to see if the perception of switching cost had any effect on the word-of-mouth intentions of the guests. Switching costs are “customers’ costs in changing services from one provider to another, including not only monetary expenses but also nonmonetary factors such as time, effort, and psychological costs (Han & Ryu, 2012)”, in other words switching costs are how much it would cost a guest to stop returning to this restaurant. The results of Han & Ryu’s (2012) study showed that the level of restaurant customers’ trust and commitment is independent of any perceived switching costs. For restaurants, creating ways to enhance service performances will eventually contribute to increased satisfaction, trust, commitment, and word-of-mouth intentions from their guests. The restaurant’s efforts to enhance the service encounter performance would contribute to building social bonds between service employees and individual customers, increasing customers’ confidence level, enhancing their enduring desire to maintain a valued

relationship, and finally boosting their intention to recommend and spread positive word-of-mouth (Han & Ryu, 2012).

Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara, Suárez-Acosta, & Aguiar-Quintana (2014) studied the effect customer loyalty had on a situation in which a service failure occurs. “Instead of having satisfaction with service recovery directly influencing guests’ supportive actions, loyalty acts as a precondition to consumers’ positive citizenship behavior (Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara, Suárez-Acosta, & Aguiar-Quintana, 2014).” A guest’s reaction to the establishment’s complaint handling can affect whether or not the customer may defect, may feel increased loyalty and plan to return to the establishment, or may share positive or negative word-of-mouth. They found that loyalty did play a large part in how the guest responded to the service recovery effort (Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara, Suárez-Acosta, & Aguiar-Quintana, 2014). This reflects well on the establishment, because to have guest loyalty it must be earned through previous satisfactory visits. A loyal guest is more likely to return to the establishment, be willing to forgive service errors, and to recommend the establishment to others. Guest loyalty in the hospitality industry is a good reflection on the entire operation of that establishment.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **Sample**

For my research, I plan to survey 25-50 line level employees working in the dining industry in the Hattiesburg area as well as 25-50 casual dining guests. These employees will need to be currently working in the industry and have at least six months experience working with their current employer. There are no restrictions placed on the dining guests.

#### **Variables/Instrumentation**

I will be using portions of the survey designed by Susskind et al. to test their original model, but I will be modifying and expanding the questionnaire to include factors of how attitude theory applies to the guest experience, demographic information, and a more detailed description of their workplace (Appendix A). I will also be circulating a second questionnaire for the general restaurant consumer input so that I can compare the results of the two surveys (Appendix B). The surveys are a combination of multiple choice and a five-point Likert scale.

#### **Procedures**

I will be circulating the questionnaire via Qualtrics, an online survey tool. The survey was emailed to various professors in the College of Business. Additionally, I requested that they forward the link to others. Links for the survey were published in the Honors College Weekly Newsletter. I sent the link directly to my contacts working in the restaurant industry to circulate to their coworkers. The participant will then select whether they are a restaurant worker or a restaurant consumer and Qualtrics will then direct them to the corresponding questionnaire. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the key variables used in the Guest-Server exchange model are standards for service quality, co-worker support, supervisor support, and customer support. The Guest-Server exchange

model is designed to take the results from these four variables and compare them to the results obtained by surveying guests in the restaurant. Since I am doing an adapted version of the Guest-Server Exchange model, the other variable factors include attitude theories, demographics, and restaurant classification.

I have obtained IRB and departmental approval for my research. All survey responses are anonymous and will not be able to be traced back to any specific dining establishment, which means I will not need any kind of approval from management staff.

## Chapter 4

There were a total of 126 respondents to both of the surveys administered.

Seventy-nine participants completed the survey designed for restaurant patrons and 47 participants completed the survey for line level restaurant employees. Of the workers surveyed, 43% were between the aged of 18-21 and 31% were between the ages of 22 and 25, 26 % were over the age of 26. 95% of respondents were from the Southeast.

Of the guests surveyed 20 were between the ages of 18 and 25, 16% were between the ages of 26-35, 33% were between 36 and 50, and 25% were over the age of 50. The majority of the guests were raised in the Southeast with 89% of participants, 3% were raised in the Northeast, 3% in the Northwest and 6% from the Southwest.

### **Findings: Employee Questionnaire**

Participants were asked to select the level to which they agree the following statements apply to their workplace. Thirty-seven participants answered the questions relating to the standards for service quality. 86% of respondents agreed to some degree that their management sets high standards for service quality for their guests. 67.5% of workers highly agreed that management believes that well-trained workers are the key to excellent customer service. 70.2% believe that the service standards are set by the organization. 47% agreed that management believes there is no job done so well that it could not be improved upon. 46% stated that management thinks that happy workers result in happy guests. 11% of respondents answered the questions with neither agree nor disagree, and 2% disagreed with the concept.

The second factor the guests were surveyed about was the amount to which the employee depends on their coworker support. 67.6% of the 36 respondents that answered the question agree to some extent that they are dependent upon their coworker support.



33.3% agreed that their coworkers are very helpful in performing customer service duties. 16.7% stated that they rely heavily on their co-workers. 19.4% highly agreed that their co-workers provide them with important work related information and advice. 26.9% neither agreed nor disagreed with the questions asked, leaving 18.5% that disagreed with the concept of coworker support.

The third factor examines the role that supervisor support plays on customer service. 63.2% of workers agreed that supervisor support has a large impact on customer service. 35.2% highly agree that they find their supervisor very supportive when performing customer service duties. 11.8% agreed that they rely heavily in their supervisor when serving customers. 17.6% reported that their supervisor provides them with important work-related information that makes their job easier. 47% state that they can highly count on their supervisor to do the “right thing” when serving customers. 20.6% neither agreed nor disagreed with the role that supervisory support plays on guest services. 16.2% disagree that supervisory support plays an important role in guest services.

Customer orientation is the final factor discussed in Susskind’s model of guest service factors. 99.2% of the 34 participants who completed the questionnaire believe that customer orientation is the key to providing excellent customer service. 64.7% highly agree with the statement that the customer is the most important thing when performing work-related duties. 76.4% said that they meet all requests made by customers if at all possible. 82.4% stated that they believe providing timely efficient service to customers is a major function of the job. 1% of guests chose to neither agree nor disagree with the role

of customer orientation in the service world. No participants disagreed with the statement.

The workers were presented with a scenario about an overcooked steak at a restaurant and were then asked a series of questions regarding the theoretical guest interaction. In the scenario the guest replaces the steak the way the guest ordered it. 32% of the 37 participants viewed this as a highly satisfying solution for the guest. The remaining 68% viewed the situation as being just satisfying. 30% of the respondents would expect the guest to want to speak with a supervisory staff member, although 68% of the workers are likely to seek a supervisor's help on their own. 82% of the workers polled said that they expect the guest to leave a form of gratuity. The average tipped percentage that the 36 workers expected to receive 12.19%. The minimum percentage expected was 4% and the maximum was 22% with a standard deviation of 4.8. 84% of the workers expected the guest to want to return to the restaurant.

The workers were then given an open ended question in which to list any additional ways that they would accommodate the guests. The workers' responses can be divided up into three main categories: offering the guest an additional food item (e.g., dessert, round of drinks, additional side item), offering to lower the guest's bill or offer accommodation for a future visit, and an oral apology with no accommodation offered. 41.4% offered an additional food item, 34.5% offered some variety of monetary compensation, and 24.1% offered an apology with no monetary compensation offered.

### **Findings: Guest Questionnaire**

Of the guests surveyed, 31% of respondents eat at a restaurant multiple times a week, 32% once a week, and 37% 0-2 times a month. The guests were then asked to rank various factors of dining at a restaurant on a scale of 1-5 with one being the most

important and 5 being the least. Prompt seating had an average ranking of 1.79, service area had an average rank of 1.75, menu variety was ranked at 1.81, and accommodation of special needs was listed as 2.76. Guests were then asked how likely they are to tell other people about a good and bad dining experience. On a scale of 1-7 with seven being the most likely, the likelihood of a guest sharing a good experience had a mean value of 5.96 with a standard deviation of 1.54. The likelihood of a guest sharing a bad experience had a mean value of 6.15 with a standard deviation of 1.36.

The guests were then asked to think about their most recent dining experience. When asked about their wait time to be seated, 46% said that their wait was shorter than expected and 46% said their wait was on par with their prior expectations. The majority of the final bill was between \$26-50 with 40% of the response and a standard deviation of 1.13. 84% of respondents were return guests to their restaurant of choice. When asked to rate the service received from their waiter on a scale of 1-5 with one being the highest satisfaction and 5 the lowest, the mean of the guest responses was 1.82 with a standard deviation of 0.9. When asked to rate any other restaurant workers that may have assisted them, 69% reported satisfaction with the service received, 15% of respondents selected not applicable. 22% of guests reported that they were assisted by a supervisory staff member. 97% of guests would recommend the restaurant to a friend.

The guests were then presented with the same scenario about an incorrect steak order that the employees were asked about. 65% of respondents agreed that a replacement steak and an apology from the waiter would be a very satisfying solution, with a standard deviation of 0.68 on a 5 point scale. 22% of guests said they would expect to talk to a supervisory staff member. 50% of guests said they were very likely to leave a tip. The

average tipped value listed was 15.67% with a standard deviation of 4.36. The maximum tipped percentage was 21% and the minimum was 5%. The guests were then asked to rate on a scale of 1-7, with 7 being the most likely, their intent to return to the restaurant and their intent to tell others about their experience. The likelihood of the guest returning to the restaurant had a 43% response of likely to return with a mean value of 5.5 and a standard deviation of 1.38. The likelihood of them telling others about their experience had 24% of respondents saying somewhat likely, with a mean value of 4.85 and a standard deviation of 1.49.

### **Discussion**

When comparing the results received from the four aspects of Susskind's Guest Service model, it can be seen that customer orientation was agreed to be the strongest factor that affects guest service. This means that not only is the organization oriented toward satisfying any and all customer needs, but also that the waiters themselves have to be very highly customer oriented with a desire to make each experience the best possible for each of their guests. The second largest factor affecting guest service are the standards for service delivery set forth by the organization. Therefore, along with hiring a very customer oriented wait staff the organization must set strong standards to regulate the level of service given to each guest. These standards can be implemented through training to teach that there is always room for improvement and that happy workers can lead to happy guests. Supervisory support and coworker support were ranked the lowest in terms of contributing to guest service.

When the guests were asked about their most recent dining experience, factors such as prompt seating and the service area were rated higher than menu variety and accommodation of special needs. Prompt seating and the service area are factors that can

be controlled by the line-level workers and their supervisors. Menu variety and being able to accommodate a special needs such as a peanut allergy are not factors typically in the control of the waiter.

When comparing the results of the steak scenario from both questionnaires, a more forgiving trend can be seen in the views of the guests than the wait staff. 65% of guests found the apology and replacement steak a highly satisfying solution, while only 32% of waiters anticipate a highly satisfactory response from their guests. Only 22% of guests would expect to talk to a supervisor, when the anticipated response from the worker was 30% of guests. 50% of guests stated that they are very likely to leave a tip when only 11% of the workers responded with very likely to the same question. The average tipped percentage was also 3.48% higher from the guests' responses than the workers responses. Only 5% of the workers stated that the guest is very likely to return when 22% of the guests said they are highly likely to return. Workers anticipated 22% of their guests to tell others about their experience while 10% anticipated sharing the experience with others.

The open ended question that was posed to the workers provides the most insight into providing guest satisfaction. Out of 29 total responses, 12 talked about offering something in addition to the initial order such as a dessert or a round of drinks, 10 stated that they would offer some form of monetary compensation such as removing a percentage from the bill or offering coupons or gift cards for future return, 7 offered an apology and additional attention throughout the rest of the visit. Only 5 respondents mentioned seeking supervisory permission or management support in their solution. This illustrates the concept that even though supervisors are a crucial factor in the success of a

restaurant, customer-oriented, front-line employees, with the proper training, can meet and exceed the guest's requests without needing the additional support from management.

## Chapter 5

In conclusion, empowering line-level employees to serve the guests to the best of their ability is the main contributing factor to guest services in the restaurant industry of South Mississippi. A restaurant should focus on hiring customer oriented workers and then provide them with the proper training to perform their tasks to the best of their abilities. Supervisory staff members should be present and willing to provide any aid necessary when called upon, but should trust that their staff knows how to solve most problems on their own and allow them to rectify any situations that may befall them. The significance of the study lies mostly in the effect that it could have on the hiring and training practices of current restaurants. By showing that line-level employees are capable of handling most of their guests' wants and needs, the reader can infer that this means the roll of management and support staff should lie mostly in the back of the house and operations management.

Some limitations of my study include the small sample size of both the worker pool and the guest pool, as well as the limitations of the respondents being mostly raised in the same region of the country. I believe that for further study, a researcher could expand the geographic area of the research to gain a more varied sample size. Future research may also include further investigation into the role that hiring customer oriented servers and their subsequent training has on the overall guest dining experience.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Employee Questionnaire

#### Demographic

- 1) How old are you?
  - a) 18-21
  - b) 22-25
  - c) 26 and over
- 2) How do you identify your race?
  - a) White/Caucasian
  - b) African American
  - c) Hispanic
  - d) Native American Indian
  - e) Asian American
  - f) Multi-Racial
  - g) Other
- 3) What region of the country were you raised in?
  - a) Southeast
  - b) Northeast
  - c) Midwest
  - d) Northwest
  - e) Southwest

#### Employment Information

- 4) How long have you worked in the restaurant industry?
  - a) 6-12 months
  - b) 1-2 years
  - c) 3-5 years
  - d) 6 years or more
- 4) Have you worked in any other restaurants?
  - a) Yes
  - b) No
- 5) If yes how many other restaurants have you worked at?
  - a) 1

- b) 2
  - c) 3 or more
- 6) Are you full-time or part-time?
- a) Full-time
  - b) Part-time
- 7) How would you classify your restaurant?
- a) Quick Service
  - b) Casual- Independently owned
  - c) Casual- Chain
  - d) Upscale casual- Independently owned
  - e) Upscale casual- Chain
- 8) What is the average ticket size of a party of two people?
- a) \$0-\$25
  - b) \$26-\$50
  - c) \$51-\$75
  - d) \$76-100
  - e) \$100 and over
- 9) Do you receive tips?
- a) Yes
  - b) No
- 10) Does your workplace pool tips?
- a) Yes
  - b) No

**Standards for Service Quality**

- 11) The managers believe that well-trained customer service employees are the key to providing excellent customer service.
- a) Highly Agree
  - b) Agree
  - c) Neither agree nor disagree
  - d) Disagree
  - e) Highly disagree

- 12) In the organization I work for, we set very high standards for customer service.
- a) Highly Agree
  - b) Agree
  - c) Neither agree nor disagree
  - d) Disagree
  - e) Highly disagree
- 13) Our management believes that no job is so well done that it couldn't be done better.
- a) Highly Agree
  - b) Agree
  - c) Neither agree nor disagree
  - d) Disagree
  - e) Highly disagree
- 14) The managers believe that if the workers are happy, excellent customer service will result.
- a) Highly Agree
  - b) Agree
  - c) Neither agree nor disagree
  - d) Disagree
  - e) Highly disagree

Co-worker Support Items

- 15) I find my co-workers very helpful in performing my customer service duties.
- a) Highly Agree
  - b) Agree
  - c) Neither agree nor disagree
  - d) Disagree
  - e) Highly disagree
- 16) When performing my service duties, I rely heavily on my co-workers.
- a) Highly Agree
  - b) Agree
  - c) Neither agree nor disagree
  - d) Disagree

e) Highly disagree

17) My coworkers provide me with important work-related information and advice that make performing my job easier.

a) Highly Agree

b) Agree

c) Neither agree nor disagree

d) Disagree

e) Highly disagree

Supervisor Support Items

18) I find my supervisor very helpful in performing my customer service duties.

a) Highly Agree

b) Agree

c) Neither agree nor disagree

d) Disagree

e) Highly disagree

19) When performing my service duties, I rely heavily on my supervisor.

a) Highly Agree

b) Agree

c) Neither agree nor disagree

d) Disagree

e) Highly disagree

20) My supervisor provides me with important work-related information and advice that makes performing my job easier.

a) Highly Agree

b) Agree

c) Neither agree nor disagree

d) Disagree

e) Highly disagree

21) I can count on my supervisor to do the “right thing” when serving customers.

a) Highly Agree

b) Agree

- c) Neither agree nor disagree
- d) Disagree
- e) Highly disagree

Customer Orientation Items

22) When performing my job, the customer is most important to me.

- a) Highly Agree
- b) Agree
- c) Neither agree nor disagree
- d) Disagree
- e) Highly disagree

23) It is best to ensure that our customers receive the best possible service available.

- a) Highly Agree
- b) Agree
- c) Neither agree nor disagree
- d) Disagree
- e) Highly disagree

24) If possible, I meet all requests made by my customers.

- a) Highly Agree
- b) Agree
- c) Neither agree nor disagree
- d) Disagree
- e) Highly disagree

25) As an employee responsible for providing service, customers are very important to me.

- a) Highly Agree
- b) Agree
- c) Neither agree nor disagree
- d) Disagree
- e) Highly disagree

26) I believe that providing timely, efficient service to customers is a major function of my job.

- a) Highly Agree
- b) Agree
- c) Neither agree nor disagree
- d) Disagree
- e) Highly disagree

Consider the following situation:

You are dining at a restaurant. You order a steak cooked rare. The waiter returns with a steak that is cooked more than you wanted. You are displeased and inform the waiter of your displeasure.

27) You apologize and bring the guest another steak that is more to their liking. How satisfying do you believe is this solution to the guest?

- a) Very satisfying
- b) Satisfying
- c) Neither satisfying nor unsatisfying
- d) Unsatisfying
- e) Very unsatisfying

28) Would you expect the guest to want to talk to a supervisory staff member?

- a) Yes
- b) No

29) How likely are you to seek the assistance of a supervisory staff member?

- a) Very Likely
- b) Likely
- c) Neither likely nor unlikely
- d) Unlikely
- e) Very Unlikely

30) What additional steps could you take to rectify the problem?

31) How likely do you believe this guest is to leave a tip?

- a) Very Likely
- b) Likely
- c) Neither likely nor unlikely
- d) Unlikely



- e) Very Unlikely
- 18) What percentage of a tip would you expect to receive from this guest?
- 19) How likely do you believe the guest is to return to the restaurant?
- a) Very Likely
  - b) Likely
  - c) Neither likely nor unlikely
  - d) Unlikely
  - e) Very Unlikely
- 20) How likely do you believe the guest is to tell people about their experience at the restaurant?
- a) Very Likely
  - b) Likely
  - c) Neither likely nor unlikely
  - d) Unlikely
  - e) Very Unlikely

## **Appendix B: Customer Questionnaire**

### Demographic

- 1) How old are you?
  - a) 18-19
  - b) 20-21
  - c) 22-23
  - d) 24-25
  - e) 26 and Over
- 2) How do you identify your race?
  - a) White/Caucasian
  - b) African American
  - c) Hispanic
  - d) Native American Indian
  - e) Asian American
  - f) Multi-Racial
  - g) Other
- 3) What region of the country were you raised in?
  - a) Southeast
  - b) Northeast
  - c) Midwest
  - d) Northwest
  - e) Southwest

### General Dining Information

- 4) Approximately how often per month do you dine out in restaurants?
  - a) 0-2 times a month
  - b) Once a week
  - c) Twice a week
  - d) Three or more times a week
- 5) How important is it for you to be seated promptly?
  - a) Highly important
  - b) Important
  - c) Neither Important nor Unimportant

- d) Unimportant
  - e) Highly Unimportant
- 6) How important is the service area (e.g. lighting, noise level, available parking) for a satisfactory dining experience?
- a) Highly important
  - b) Important
  - c) Neither Important nor Unimportant
  - d) Unimportant
  - e) Highly Unimportant
- 7) How important is menu variety to the dining experience?
- a) Highly important
  - b) Important
  - c) Neither Important nor Unimportant
  - d) Unimportant
  - e) Highly Unimportant
- 8) How important is a restaurant's ability to accommodate any special needs (e.g. vegetarian, food allergy, high chairs for children)
- a) Highly important
  - b) Important
  - c) Neither Important nor Unimportant
  - d) Unimportant
  - e) Highly Unimportant
- 9) How likely are you to tell people about a good dining experience in a restaurant?
- a) Very Likely
  - b) Likely
  - c) Neither likely nor unlikely
  - d) Unlikely
  - e) Very Unlikely
- 10) How likely are you to tell people about a bad dining experience?
- a) Very Likely
  - b) Likely

- c) Neither likely nor unlikely
- d) Unlikely
- e) Very Unlikely

Consider your most recent dining experience:

11) What was the purpose for your visit?

- a) Business
- b) Pleasure

12) The wait time was

- a) Shorter than expected
- b) About what was expected
- c) Longer than expected
- d) Much longer than expected

13) What was the approximate cost of your ticket?

- a) \$0-\$25
- b) \$26-\$50
- c) \$51-\$75
- d) \$76-100
- e) \$100 and over

14) Have you dined at this establishment before?

- a) Yes
- b) No

15) How many people were in your party?

- a) 1-2
- b) 3-5
- c) 6-8
- d) 9-12
- e) 13 and over

16) How would you rate the service you received from your waiter?

- a) Highly satisfactory
- b) Satisfactory
- c) Neither satisfactory nor unsatisfactory

- d) Unsatisfactory
  - e) Highly Unsatisfactory
- 17) How would you rate the service received from any other employees that may have helped you?
- a) Highly satisfactory
  - b) Satisfactory
  - c) Neither satisfactory nor unsatisfactory
  - d) Unsatisfactory
  - e) Highly Unsatisfactory
  - f) Not Applicable/Only helped by one waiter
- 18) Did any supervisory staff member help you during your visit?
- a) Yes
  - b) No
- 19) Would you return to this restaurant?
- a) Yes
  - b) No
- 20) Would you recommend this restaurant to a friend?
- a) Yes
  - b) No
- 21) Please describe any special circumstances that affected your visit (e.g. birthday party, food allergy, wrong order delivered)

Consider the following situation:

You are dining at a restaurant. You order a steak cooked rare. The waiter returns with a steak that is cooked more than you wanted. You are displeased and inform the waiter of your displeasure.

- 22) The waiter apologizes and brings you another steak that is more to your liking. How satisfying is this solution to you?
- a) Very satisfying
  - b) Satisfying
  - c) Neither satisfying nor unsatisfying

- d) Unsatisfying
  - e) Very unsatisfying
- 23) Would you expect to talk to a supervisory staff member?
- a) Yes
  - b) No
- 24) What additional steps could the waiter take to rectify the problem?
- 25) How likely are you to leave a tip?
- a) Very Likely
  - b) Likely
  - c) Neither likely nor unlikely
  - d) Unlikely
  - e) Very Unlikely
- 26) How likely are you to return to the restaurant?
- a) Very Likely
  - b) Likely
  - c) Neither likely nor unlikely
  - d) Unlikely
  - e) Very Unlikely

## Appendix C: IRB Approval



**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD**  
118 College Drive #5147 | Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001  
Phone: 601.266.5997 | Fax: 601.266.4377 | [www.usm.edu/research/institutional.review.board](http://www.usm.edu/research/institutional.review.board)

### NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Effect Report Form".
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months.  
Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 15040609  
PROJECT TITLE: Factors Affecting Guest Satisfaction in the Restaurant Industry of South Mississippi  
PROJECT TYPE: New Project  
RESEARCHER(S): Kinsey Eiland  
COLLEGE/DIVISION: College of Business  
DEPARTMENT: Economic Development and Tourism  
FUNDING AGENCY/SPONSOR: N/A  
IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Expedited Review Approval  
PERIOD OF APPROVAL: 09/01/2015 to 08/31/2016  
**Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.**  
**Institutional Review Board**