

HOW TO GREET YOUR TABLE

REAL SERVER TRAINING



The greet is really more important than a lot of people recognize. This sets the tone for the relationship that you'll be developing with your guests, and while you may never see these people again, you will be interacting quite a bit over the next couple hours. So it's worth considering how exactly you approach as the rapport developed will determine the ease of your entire interaction. And the ease of interaction is ultimately what will determine your entire experience serving them.

This is a detailed guide on how exactly you may greet your guests and should give you a better understanding on the nature of the relationship.



To begin with,

After people are brought to their table, I want to scope the situation a bit before I approach. If they came in a large group or met up at the restaurant and haven't seen each other in a while, they're going to be too busy catching up to even be ready to talk to me. My introduction will be awkward, and I'll just end up wasting my time...

Now, once they do look situated, I'm at the table quick -- usually within a minute or two. There are a couple of reasons for this:

- 1 I'm not getting paid for my time here. I get paid for my output. The sooner I can get going on this, move it along, and get to the next, the better.
- 2 When people come into a restaurant and get sat down, it does not take long before they start to wonder if their server knows they're there-- literally within just a couple minutes.

With the initial approach, I'm not doing it in a rush or on my way to deal with something else. It needs to be intentional and without distraction. Remember this is where first impressions are set, and those are hard to change once formed. If I walk up flustered and preoccupied with a crisis in hopes that I can quickly say hello and collect drink orders, I'll likely give the impression that I'm stressed, rushed, and not quite capable of taking good care of them. This is why I'll always encourage people to handle said crisis and/or take a moment to breathe, then approach when in a better position to slow down and be completely present with the guests.

When I do approach, I walk up slowly and maintain just a bit of distance (maybe two feet). As the night progresses, I will be having to enter their space to do my job, and that's perfectly fine. But we're still strangers at this point, and getting too close will feel intrusive.

I'll pause briefly and say hello.

Now exactly what I say will vary. I don't treat every table the exact same way. If I have a big group of bachelorette party girls, I'm going to be a lot more casual than I am with a business luncheon or what appears to be a nice date. This applies to everything in this job. I always leave room for judgment as situations inevitably vary and warrant varied responses.





BUT I do always follow a general template. Here's why:

If I'm just winging it at every table and having to come up with something new every time, I'm demanding a lot of my mental resources. Decisions and improvisation are cognitively expensive tasks. It's far less draining to have a general idea of what it is I'll be saying than to be making up a new performance 20-30 times a shift.

Hence I have a general template that I follow, but I do want to emphasize once more that I never stick to a defined script. If I approach my table and the first words out of the guest's mouth is can I get a diet coke? I don't want to start asking how they're doing and talking about specials.

It'll be annoying to them and a waste of time for myself. I'll just respond with, "absolutely," pivot out, then revisit the formalities later if it's appropriate.

So without further ado, here's my general template:

Once they see I'm there, I'm going to calmly say, "Hi there, how y'all doing?" That works where I'm from and in my particular restaurant environment. Yours may need to be more like, "Hello, how is everyone this evening?" For example.

Note that it's nothing too exciting and elaborate. I'm not bringing a whole bunch of fake energy or personality to the table. Nor am I delivering a 5-minute script before I've even given them a chance to at least respond with a "hello."



Most important thing with this question here is that I'm actually going to wait on a response. I'm not just blowing into the next thing like, "Hey, how y'all doing? What can I get you to drink?"

If you're nervous, it may feel like an eternity as you wait on a response which may in turn drive you to start speaking. I promise you it's not an eternity, you don't look weird by pausing, and you don't need to rush into speaking more. Pause. Wait. Get a response.

Much of my intent here is to establish dialogue. This entire dining experience requires input from both parties. This is an interdependent relationship where nothing can be achieved without clear, accurate communication from both sides, and the greet is the best (if not only) time to establish this.



Have you ever had a table that just wasn't responsive? You walk up and ask about orders and they just stare at you? It makes serving them pretty difficult doesn't it?

I want that when speak, I'm heard, understood, and acknowledged. Else I can't do my job. So I'll try to get them to speak up in the beginning so we're all comfortable communicating with one another. Make sense?

So back to the dialogue:

Eventually they'll respond with something like, "We're good, thanks. How are you?" to which I'll respond with a very generic, "I'm doing well. Thank you."

As far as these guests are concerned, I'm doing well. Always. I'm never not doing well. Responding with, "Fine, but it's just been crazy busy," or expressing anything personal is not advised. They don't need to know, they don't care to know, and they'll likely be put off by it.

So, "I'm doing well. Thanks." Pause. Take a beat.

Then I'll bring them another question. Basically, the exact same question. I just word it a little differently. My first was, "Hi there, how are y'all doing?" My second is, "Are you having a good evening?"

Now I have no issue forgoing the second question or altering it depending on the general vibe of my table. As mentioned, I have zero hard and set rules for service and will always adapt to the situation. The point is that I'm just devoting enough time for both parties to feel each other out before getting into business. If that takes 1 question, great. If it takes 2 (which I've found it usually does hence why I suggest it), I'm adding maybe 10 seconds to the interaction. Again, the point is to just BE with my table long enough to establish some level of familiarity and comfort before taking orders.

I want to emphasize that most of the communication taking place here is NON-VERBAL. They're likely not even listening to what's being said anyways. What I'm doing here in this first 30 seconds with my table is just building some rapport. They're just getting a feel for me -- so I slow it down and let everyone get comfortable with my presence.

This is rapport in a nutshell: a mutual understanding, trust, and feeling that we're on the same page. Once I've established rapport, we can more seamlessly move into orders.



To further illustrate, let's do an exercise. Try reading these two dialogues out loud:

☞ Hi there, how are you doing?

☞ We're good, how are you?

☞ Doing well, thanks, what can I get you to drink?

☞ Hi there, how are you doing?

☞ We're good, how are you?

☞ Doing well, thanks, are you having a good evening?

☞ Yeah it's fine, how's yours?

☞ It's going well! Can I go ahead and get you anything to drink here?

The transition into getting orders in the first is almost abrupt, whereas in the second, it flows a bit more smoothly with only 5-10 seconds of added dialogue.

Now after asking how they're doing, getting a response, delivering a second question, and getting a response, there are two basic paths forward depending on the restaurant you're working in.

Above, I immediately transitioned into drink orders.

In a more casual restaurant, that's perfectly fine. Enough time has been taken for everyone to feel reasonably comfortable and we can get into ordering.

But let's pretend we're working in a more upscale restaurant.

These are restaurants where guests will likely be spending more time, spending more money, the menu is often a more unique concept, and you as a server will be expected to do more for your guests. Thus you'll need to devote a bit more time to cultivating the relationship and establishing your role.

But first, let's better define what our actual role is as a server. It is not to take orders and serve plates. That's certainly part of it, but those are merely tasks. Your role is that of a facilitator.

fa·cil·i·ta·tor

/fə'silə,tādər/

a person or thing that makes an action or process easy or easier.

Think of yourself as the middleman that makes orders between the consumer (guest) and the supplier (restaurant) easy or easier.

You know everything about the goods of the supplier (dishes/ cocktails/ wines). And hopefully, you'll learn something of the demands of the consumer. This uniquely qualifies you to best guide, advise, and tailor their experience.

None of this is possible, however, without communication and some level of trust.

Thus we're going to take a little more time here during the greet to cultivate our relationship, better understand our guests, and better educate our guests.

And this is generally how I go about it.

Note this is just a template, and its elements may be rearranged. As with all of Real Server Training, the objective is not that you learn a specific way to do things, but that you understand the underlying principles and concepts.



So after asking if they're having a good evening, and they say fine, THEN I'll say, "Well thanks for coming in. Have you been here before?"

This is a key piece of information to extract from your guests as it will help you determine just how much information/ assistance you need to provide them.

Let's assume it's their first time. "No, it's our first time."
"Alright, well glad you came in. I'm Patrick, I'll be taking care of you."

Again, the specific words aren't that important. Just let them know they're welcome, you're glad they're here, etc, and that they're in good hands.

Assuming they haven't been here before, this is when I'll deliver my elevator speech.

A lot of restaurants require this. I actually despise scripted service, and if that's what your restaurant requires, that's what you'll do. But regardless (be it scripted, mandated, or completely up to you), I think it's important to recognize the purpose of this monologue.



It is for the purpose of educating your guests so that they can better understand the restaurant, navigate the menu, and know how to proceed.

Briefly!

Let's say the concept is tapas, and tables should plan to order roughly two plates per guest then everyone shares...your guests need to know this right?

So deliver that not because your manager told you to but to help set them up. It's only going to make your job easier moving forward.

Then I'll follow the overview with:

"As you go through the menu this evening, please don't hesitate with any questions, I'm happy to offer recommendations as well."

Then transition into drinks:

"What can I get you all to drink?"-or- "Can I go ahead and get you started with some cocktails?"

So here's an example of everything:

ABC restaurant is a Pan-Latin-inspired cuisine and most of our dishes are shareable. This lets everyone get to try a number of our unique dishes. I'm happy to provide some recommendations and help you decide on how much to order when we're ready. And here is our list of crafted cocktails that all pair nicely with any of our appetizers listed here. Would you like me to get you some waters while you look over the cocktails?

Again, just a rough example, but you get the idea. I didn't go on and on, I'm just giving them some information. And from a guest's perspective, I now know a little about the cuisine, how ordering works, where to find the cocktail and appetizer list, and that my server is willing to help me.

So once I'm getting drink orders (or getting waters while they look over the drink menu), we've crossed the threshold. Now we can really start.

Introduction has been made and from here forward, it's about providing service: What can I get you? What do you need? What questions can I answer? What problems do you have? What can I take care of? What can I do for you? How may I serve you?

The initial greet and time spent in the beginning was not so I could in some way charm my guests or make them like me. It was so they had the chance to get comfortable with me and get an idea of how to proceed.

And if that communication and rapport have both been established, everything moving forward can really be quite effortless.

THAT'S WHY THE GREET MATTERS. AND THAT'S WHY I'VE WRITTEN LIKE 10 PAGES ON IT FOR YOU. SO YOU CAN HAVE AN EASIER TIME DOING YOUR JOB.

Lastly, I'd like to touch on the nature of the relationship with your guests and how to more accurately think about it.

Try to think of yourself as their host, guide, and facilitator which you are. You're taking care of them. If you see yourself as inferior to the guests-- their servant, their errand boy -- they'll likely see you that way as well and treat you accordingly. The world is so often a reflection of how we see ourselves.

Try to see yourself and your guests as equals -- both humans worthy of respect-- in simply different roles. They are guests in your place of business, and the inverse could be true tomorrow when you go to their place of business for a desired service.

Deliver a good experience, and the money should take care of itself. Income is proportionate to the perceived value we contribute to the world.

And for the days you really don't care about the world nor the people in it, try to perform well for the sake of respecting your own standards. How you work says more of you than it does of the job itself.

Thank you for your service. :)

Overview of Real Server Training

**FREE, IN-DEPTH TRAINING FOR SERVERS BY SERVERS
DETAILED | PRAGMATIC | REAL**

Much of our training is more pragmatic in nature -- how to hold three glasses, carry plates, serve drinks, etc -- while some of it is more abstract which is to say aimed at cultivating a better way of thinking and angle of approach to the job.

Most restaurants don't provide much training, and most servers never thrive. Our attitude is this: better training leads to better performance. With better performance comes better money and a less-often considered benefit: a better time. That's important.

It doesn't matter if you're only doing this job on the weekend until you finish school, you should have a reasonably good time doing it. At the very least, not a miserable one, because this job really is miserable if you suck at it, and it can be pretty fun if you're good at it.

This is for servers by servers designed to set you up for success and do a better job. Not for your boss or manager, not for your guest, but for you: the server. Enjoy.