

From James the Sommelier -The Perfect Customer

'Wine honors the soul, so honor it with yours'

There is a rare but enlightening thing in the restaurant business. The perfect customer. This is a person who, upon entering and until leaving, conducts themselves with such charm, grace and humility that they cement that establishment's loyalty for life. Restaurateurs talk about loyal customers; customers should be talking about loyal restaurants. And there is such a thing, by the way. Have you ever noticed while having a meal that a certain customer receives service, complimentary nibbles and drinks, preferential treatment all round as if it's an extension of their own body doing the work. Well that's *their* perfect customer. That is a person who - irrespective of what they look like, how much money they spend or what they order - the restaurant wants to see again.

Why would you care? It is standard protocol in the business of hospitality to be treated as a friend but not actually become one, so why would you care if they remember your first name- have your favorite drink ready- give you preference over tables- treat you better- talk to you and are actually interested in what you have to say. Because you do! Image is a huge thing in today's society and having the image of being special, favored, liked is something that everyone craves.

Now, there are ways that this becomes an expectation. Being friends with the owner, spending an extortionate amount of money, regularly attending on Friday or Saturday night can all put you in the top rung but, I guarantee you, not the very top. You will be considered loyal but not perfect. So, how can you solidify your presence among the greats? How can you become part of the family and be considered one of their own?

It is *so* easy. To become one of these legends that create a lightning stir among staff, one of the ghosts that change the atmosphere for the better, the main thing you have to avoid is arrogance. Some customers love to walk into a restaurant and take the opportunity to act like they have 5-10 servants at their disposal for the night. Wrong decision, teman. Very wrong decision. The most this will get you is a cold dinner and a quick bill. Just in case you do want to play dumb, what I mean is not acknowledging a welcome at the door, interrupting a waiter's recommendations, talking down to your waiter, calling your waiter over, acting as if you know more about the food and wine than the staff, pretending that you are close friends with the owner (I'm afraid the staff already know the owner's close friends), pretending you are the owner himself.

The most likely customers to be greeted and treated warmly are those that do not impose. Those that do not expect. Those that respect the environment. Those that *want* to be treated with an extra little bit of consideration. The most surprising thing is it is all down to the customers, not the staff, as to what type of service they receive.

Even with the mark-up on prices, customers should not expect to be treated nicely. There are a lot of things your money goes toward in the restaurant business and it is certainly not the guarantee that the staff is friendly towards you. To be the perfect customer, take all of these things into consideration. Seriously, try them out. I think you will find the difference astounding.