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Deterministics engineers **Brian Sill** and **Hugh Cade** identify 10 Commandments to ensure companies don't over-promise and under-deliver, but make excellent service an achievable goal

10 golden rules of service delivery

Attention to service is fast becoming a key component of success: guests are seeking a quality service experience whereby they feel 'in control' – and with increasing wage rates, operators are looking to match staff levels exactly with the service expectations of their brand.

Many companies are experimenting with new fast-casual versions of quick-service or casual-dining concepts. This means that quick serves will need to design a service system employing more table service, while casual brands will have to become savvy about counter-ordering and faster throughput.

We are testing a further hybrid of these service concepts with a good level of success in London. We call it 'high street casual' (high volume, full service) where the guest places their order at a counter and food and beverages are delivered to their table by a server who provides full service (assigned sections) with refills, desserts and cash out.

There are many options for slicing and dicing service delivery, depending on your brand's throughput objectives. We have developed Deterministics' 10 commandments of service delivery, which we believe will assure your success. Whilst we would not claim that these are carved in stone, nor that the hand of God can be detected in their development, they are based on service delivery design across the US and UK.

Configuration

Configure your service framework around three objectives. First, consider the number of 'service events' (meal courses, delivered drinks and so forth) the guest will choose. This determines the duration of service time – in other words, how the guest will use the experience and the frequency and scope of the service you must provide. Second, take into account the maximum throughput time (cooking

duration) of meal orders. Note that this is not the 'average' throughput time – it makes no sense to use a throughput target that is only attainable 50% of the time. And thirdly, decide the peak volume you wish to target in peak hourly sales or tables per turn.

Step one determines the length of the service cycle and service labour required. Step two determines the length of the production cycle, breadth of menu you can handle and type of equipment and cooking labour required. Scaling steps one and two to meet the peak volume in step three will determine the optimum Service Delivery System (SDS), as well as dimensions of facility, equipment and number of staff necessary to assure a successful service experience.

Co-ordination

Successful co-ordination of service steps will determine the quality of guest service. Just like lines delivered in a play, rhythm, tempo and timing dictate the flow of the performance and, ultimately, the audience's level of enjoyment. If the tempo is too slow, the audience grows restless; too fast and their understanding and sense of participation is jeopardised.

It is critical that 'timing goals' are established for each step of service. Common standards for full service include: one minute to greet, four minutes to take the order, eight minutes for appetiser throughput and fifteen for entrées. In contrast, quick-service throughput times are often calculated at one minute and fast-casual at four minutes. Counter-order taking should not exceed one minute for both styles.

Perception of time – their time – is essential to positive fulfilment of every guest experience. Time is to be savoured, and an intuitive server will stall runaway service to prevent the guest from feeling rushed. As time is precious (and expensive), achieve perfect balance throughout the service cycle and the guest experiences a seamless event. A smooth ride engenders feelings of enjoyment within the guest and, ultimately, the sense that they are in control.

Control

To enable the guest to feel in control, the scene must be set for their benefit. However, in rehearsing their performance and orchestrating the setting, the server is, in reality, seizing and maintaining control for themselves. To achieve a perfect balance (guest feels in control/server maintains control), it is essential that the server has licence to impro- ▶

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Deterministics 10 Commandments of Service Design

- 1 Configuration** of service steps determines optimum delivery system
- 2 Co-ordination** of service timing determines guest service quality
- 3 Control** of service steps by the guest and by the server benefits both
- 4 Choice** in menu and service deliverables is key to guests feeling in control
- 5 Continuity** of coverage by a single server consolidates the guest-server relationship
- 6 Capacity** measurements of service steps helps realise potential
- 7 Consistency** of roles and methods builds service and staff confidence
- 8 Communication** builds guest-staff relationship
- 9 Compensation** and reward propels the success of service delivery
- 10 Celebration** and recognition inspires continuous team excellence

wise, either in response to a particular event, mood or guest make-up, or when expectations are not met and service-recovery steps are required. Creative licence on the part of the server is vital in bringing the central illusion to life – that the guest is in complete control.

Choice

The offering of choice across menu and service deliverables is key to the guest feeling in control. The server presents each alternative and the guest acknowledges or dismisses it. As the guest is given the latitude to customise the service sequence to suit their needs, they feel in control of their experience. Guest perception of self-control is directly correlated with guest satisfaction.

The SDS must be structured enough to guide the server who enters the realm of “control” role-play. In allowing the guest to assume control – make choices “outside the box” – and actively seeking to anticipate their needs in order to exceed expectations, the server needs the security of brand boundaries. The server only truly retains control when he fully understands how far he can go – and this must be known in advance, through training. Such an accommodating and confidence-building approach to service can only succeed if underpinned by the bedrock of service continuity.

Continuity

Both server and guest will gain confidence through continuity of service – and this state of mind is best achieved by building a relationship with a single server. This becomes the basis for a reciprocal understanding between server and guest: the guest knows who and where their server is and feels reassured. The server, working within the structure of the SDS and using his own insight into the needs of each individual table, is aware of their position during each stage of the service cycle and makes

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decisions accordingly. If the server is seen to be available by the guest and can also prioritise tasks with the bigger picture in mind (the section as a whole and the performance of other departments, for example) he or she can maintain control. In this way, service continuity will allow the server to provide anticipatory service and an element of subtle surprise.

To dilute this relationship (by using separate order takers, or an over-reliance on “runners for everything”), confuses and upsets the status quo. Consequently, the security and assumption of control experienced by both parties is undermined. Additionally, continuity of service coverage has its

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own physical limitations, and is only assured when, for example, the capacity to offer service has been measured and understood.

Capacity

Measurement of service capacity is based on service style, the steps involved and duration of the service cycle. Having undertaken hundreds of such studies, we note that service capacity is frequently misjudged and is often the root cause of service failure.

With accurate measurements in hand, however, the operator is armed with the knowledge and confidence that helps to define a brand’s full potential. This is important for planning the physical dimensions of service areas: number of tables per section for full service, number of point-of-sale channels for quick service, and both tables and channels for fast-casual. This knowledge can be used to clarify realistic boundaries for servers and guests, and becomes a valuable tool with which to not only meet, but exceed expectations.

It is crucial to avoid the temptation to over-promise and under-deliver. Rewards gained from understanding service capacity can only be reaped if the guest receives a consistent performance.

Consistency

In order to consolidate the relationship between server and guest, consistency in role responsibilities and service method is paramount. Every performance must be as good as the last – and set the standard for the next. The server has the knowledge, capacity and support to tailor the experience according to guest requirements, understanding exactly what role to play within the framework of the SDS. Control for the server is therefore assured, based on his confidence in the consistency of other team members and the structure within which they play. The result is a relaxed, intuitive performance, enabling the server to focus on exceeding expectations.

Meanwhile, the guest feels confident that any given service occasion will be executed consistently, and feels in control of their experience. Consistency and choice are enabled through a set of prescribed service steps, with clearly defined boundaries communicated within and between every department.

Communication

The power of communication cannot be underestimated. Without it, the success of the guest experience hangs precariously on a knife-edge, no matter how superb the performance of an individual. Communication between departments oils the cogs – with the host, where time spent waiting for a table is crucial; with the bar, where it may be vital to know whether a tab exists; and with the kitchen, where order timing can be customised to reflect the guest’s time restrictions, anxiety levels or requests.

One-to-one communication between the guest and his or her nominated server builds their

relationship: the server, as a player within a well designed and measured service system, is able to build time to solicit guest feedback. The guest is confident and, bolstered by the level of communication established, can be reassured – particularly when a problem arises. Service recovery in this case is straightforward – the server has the information and the status, in the eyes of the guest, who trusts the server, to transform the situation. Communication can also be improved with ongoing feedback outside the “real time” service cycle, gained from structured exit interviews and “mystery shopping” by off-duty staff.

Compensation

Gratuities provide financial compensation and incentive. Rewards also take the form of the guest’s request for a specific server and a repeat performance, a letter of praise or a glowing review.

Celebrating

These golden rules, along with the sharing of sales success stemming from server sales contests, such as bingo cards or a leader board, and other motivational programmes, form the basis for celebrating service success. Acknowledgement of success is vital to its longevity. Exceptional performance should be used as an example, creating healthy competition between team members: a successful workplace is one where team spirit thrives on pride in a job well done and high standards become the norm.

Celebrate success – then build on it. Without the best people to deliver – and the acknowledgement and development of their ability – the Ten Commandments can only offer a blueprint.

Success, and its celebration, represents the culmination of the 10 commandments, highlighting that the key player on stage – with all the required tools at his or her disposal – is the server. The 10 commandments work if they evolve, influenced by new developments in areas such as technology and trends and capitalise on well-earned triumphs – but most importantly, carried forward by motivated and celebrated servers within a tried and tested brand-fit Service Delivery System.

From our vantage point on the dining-room floor and quick-serve order counter, we could argue that proliferation of fast-casual restaurants is partly due to decline in service quality at quick-serve and casual-dining operations. Operators in all categories need to have access to a service support structure that does not over-promise and under-deliver.

Careful implementation of Deterministics’ 10 commandments of service design will assure that a service system is in place that delivers as promised and exceeds guests’ expectations every time.

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Its clients include Greene King, Mitchells & Butlers, Pizza Express and Whitbread.