

RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

Just how friendly should your employees be?

Club managers are always on the lookout for those rare individuals with engaging personalities – those people who are naturally outgoing and friendly and who can connect effortlessly with members and guests. And while we all would agree that such employees make service and service delivery a snap, it is also important to recognize that some employees need coaching on boundaries and the appropriateness of overly friendly service.

While many members appreciate and enjoy their interactions with service staff, even engaging in playful banter, chit-chat, and teasing with their favorite employees, there are also those members who expect a more formal and detached level of service. It is also often the case where the member who likes to “play” with employees when in the bar after a round of golf, does not want the same level of engagement at Sunday brunch when family and friends are present.

The challenge then for any employee is to assess each service situation and gauge the member’s mood and interest in engagement. Here are some of the factors involved:

Time of Day and Day of Week: The time of day can have a great deal to do with a member’s interest in engagement. Some members are not morning people and don’t appreciate noise, exuberance, or conversation early in the morning. If a member has his nose in the paper, he probably doesn’t want any more than polite and efficient service. On the other hand, Friday and Saturday night cocktail hour is a time of conviviality and sociability and an employee could expect a more playful interaction.

Occasion: Dr. and Mrs. Jones celebrating their anniversary will probably appreciate discreet service with as few interruptions as possible. Service should still be prompt and attentive, but servers should take their cue from the intensity and privacy of the couple’s conversation. Conversely, a group of ladies coming in for lunch after a morning of tennis are probably keyed up and looking forward to a fun time together. The same group while entertaining their gardening club with a number of guests would expect a more distant and detached approach. The businesswoman entertaining clients may want formal, correct, and efficient service with as few interruptions as possible so she can conduct her business in a manner that reflects well on herself and her club.

Members in the Party: The makeup of a member’s party will have a lot to do with the level of engagement. A group of members and guests just off the golf course are probably more ebullient, particularly if someone shot his low round, had an eagle, or sank a forty foot putt to win the match. On the other hand, a member hosting his aged parents for Mother’s Day Brunch is not there to “play” with employees. It is also possible that a member who comes in alone for a drink may interact with staff very differently than when he is with his wife and children.

Past Experience: There is no better predictor of the future than past experience. If a member has always been reserved and formal, with little or no personal engagement with staff, employees can expect that he will continue to be so. John, the single junior member, is casual, relaxed and always enjoys playful repartee with the bar staff. No doubt he will be that way when he stops in after work for a few drinks. However, should John arrive with a date, he may not want the same level of engagement from the bartender.

As can be deduced from these examples, there is no hard and fast way of knowing how a member will act, react, or interact with the friendly engagement of employees. Therefore, it’s up to the employee to assess the mood and manner of the member. Most people have a good sense of when someone wants to interact with them. Employees should always hold back until a member makes it clear by initiating a greater degree of contact. When in doubt, an employee should go no further than being courteous, polite, and friendly.

Ultimately, though, it’s up to managers to train their employees that, “No matter how friendly members may be with you on any or all occasions, they are not your friends; they are your employer.” Keeping this firmly in mind will help everybody from transgressing the Rules of Engagement.