

PROFESSIONAL CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED BY WAITERS IN RESTAURANTS OF STAR HOTELS IN TAMILNADU

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Paper Received On: 25 JAN 2022

Peer Reviewed On: 31 JAN 2022

Published On: 1 FEB 2022

Abstract

Waiters and waitress play a great role in customer service. Since they are the one who have direct contact with customers of diversified nature, everyday is a challenge for them in performing their job. The present study enquired about the challenges faced by the wait staff and tried to provide some implications. The researcher employed descriptive method of research and to collect data survey technique was used. There were 184 wait staff responded to this study. The sample was drawn through cluster sampling technique from 10 three star hotels in Tamilnadu. A Challenge Checklist with three alternatives was developed and validated. The findings reveal that majority of the waiters face moderate level of challenge in their profession, most of them face problem with running children, parents who don't care about their children's behaviour, lengthy working time, sore feet, Disruptive shift pattern, hands smelling condiments etc. The wait staffs significantly differ in facing challenges with regard to their age and the locality of the hotel. Implications were provided.

Key Terms: Professional Challenges, Waiters, Three-Star Hotels



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Introduction

“Challenges are opportunities in disguise.” Challenge is often viewed as a negative and rejecting word. But without challenges there will not be improvement in career. Wherever people strive for their professional career, they come across challenges in the workplace. Work place challenges are normal and that drives ahead in career development, provides opportunities to prove ones' talents and aptitude in the profession. Professional role of waiters and waitresses are not easy to perform perfectly in restaurants in India. Nowadays

hotels and restaurants have to face heavy competition in business, they try hard to provide excellent customer service. It is equally difficult to cater to the swelling demands and expectations of the customers. The management put the stress on the employees to cope up with the competition.

A waiter not only serves food and beverage, but plays an important part as a salesman of food and beverage through its accompanying service says Fuller J. (1992). A successful establishment with waiting service is one which guest wants to visit again and feel as comfortable as in their home Adelaide (Spio-Kwoffie, Rosemond Anyobodeh, 2016). This pleasant atmosphere is produced by friendly courtesy, a welcoming attitudes, well cooked food and efficient service. By this service both buyer and seller are satisfied and goodwill of the establishment is increased. Waiters and waitress are the main contact between the customer and the restaurant, and so it is their performance, which will have a major impact on the level of enjoyment (Adelaide Spio-Kwoffie, Rosemond Anyobodeh, 2016). According to Jones and Sasser (1995) achieving customer satisfaction is explicitly linked to the success of companies in the hotel, catering and tourism industries.

Background of the Study

The employees faced with the problems concerning customers such as demanding, messy, impatient and bossy customers that caused stress on the part of the employees (Gloryvi Marie. F., et al., 2013). Initial stages of a career are associated with certain inconveniences on young employees, reflected in the effectiveness and productiveness of their work and hence may be a burden for the organisation. This means feeling of being incompetent, the discrepancy of expectations, disillusionment with performed task, limited autonomy or too low a level of challenge (Aleksandra Peplinska., Zdzislaw Nieckarz, 2011). This is corroborated by Burke (2002), who suggests that access to education; training and development are some of the challenges to support women's advancement in organizations.

Wait staff routinely face situations, which require them to work around different obstacles such as reaching around individuals while serving, reaching across tables to place or pick up plates or glasses, or having to hold plates or glasses away from the body because multiple plates are staged on the server's arm (Angela C. Wills, 2013). These situations impact the moment arm, or horizontal distance from the low back to the object in the hand, a known risk factor in the development of musculoskeletal disorders, and have been causally observed to be highly variable in serving situations (Wills AC, Davis KG, Kotowski SE, 2016, Angela

Carroll Wills, 2013). Several previous studies focusing on material handling have found an increased risk of LBP as this horizontal distance increases (Myers et al., 1999, Marras et al., 1993, 1995). Gizachew Girma, Tadesse Moges (2015) accused that waiters are working for longer hours than what the law stipulates.

The waiters get the chance to meet interesting as well as rude customers (Andra Picincu, 2020). At times the work requires the servers to tolerate rude behaviour and insults by customers, it requires a smile when hurt or angry (Mike Rose, 2001). Poor mental health often interrupts people's regular activities making them unable to work effectively resulting in poor performance and high turnover intention reported Saah FI & et al. (2021). Professional demands as challenges can be important sources of professional development, as the gap between situational requirements and an individual's resources, if not too wide, fosters the acquisition of new skills and resources (Keller-Schneider et al., 2018). Working towards goals both professionally and personally is a great challenge at workplace (Dan Trommater, 2016) In the light of this above review of literature the researcher indented to enquire the professional challenges of waiters working in the restaurants of three star hotels in Tamilnadu

Statement of the problem

Challenges are common to all professionals in their work. When the waiters are directly in contact with customers of varied nature and backgrounds they encounter numerous challenges in their profession. Waiters are the face of a restaurant. Their interaction with the guests, their gestures, their behaviour will reflect on the restaurants. Wait staff should be courteous, welcoming, warm and should represent the brand above all else. Waiters play a key role in developing brand reputation. But the challenges they encounter in performing their job can't be ignored, should be well addressed and rectified. The paper analyses the challenges faced by wait staff in their professional activities in restaurants of three star hotels in Tamilnadu and to recommend implications too.

Research Questions

1. Do the waiters face challenges in their job?
2. How different they are in facing the challenges in their profession?
3. Is it possible to categorise the challenges?
4. What implications would be recommended?

Significance of the Study

If the problems in profession are stopping from functioning well or feeling good, professional help can make a big difference. Though the waiters face a number of problems they are hesitant to ask for help in fear of feeling or looking incompetent. Approximately

84% of professionals surveyed said they have needed help at some point in their career at time of challenging situations. Thirty five percent (35%) of the employees admitted they're afraid to ask for help at work, and as much as 60% of employees regret not asking for help at those times. The results of the research would help the human resource managers in star hotels to understand the challenges faced by wait staff in the restaurants and to help them to look for remedies.

Objectives of the Study

- To identify the challenges faced by Waiter in their job in restaurants.
- To categorise the challenges
- To find out the level of challenges faced by the wait staff in their profession
- To find remedial implications for the challenges

Methodology

The investigator had used descriptive method and survey as a technique to collect data from 184 waiters working in restaurants in star hotels in Tamilnadu. The sample had been drawn employing cluster sampling technique from 10 star hotels, five from rural and five from urban areas. A Challenge Checklist with 20 items was developed by B.Lenin Selvanayagam (2019) with three alternatives (Limited Level, Moderate Level and Greater Level) and validated. Content validity was affirmed by checking with items of the checklist with tenure waiters, human resource managers and other research experts in hospitality industry. The items were as follows

Table : 1 Challenges Faced by Waiters

Customer Related Challenges	Physical Challenges
1. Running Children	1. Working late, starting early
2. Playful children without Parent's control	2. Slippery floor
3. Starring	3. Hands smelling of Condiments
4. Customers who are sharing their personal life	4. Losing your voice
5. Customers with bad mood	5. Complicated orders
6. Customers with few words	6. Food allergies
7. Splitting the bill	7. Disruptive shift pattern.
8. Attention seeking customers	8. Sore feet
9. Customers aren't leaving after taking food	9. Having a bad backaches
10. Customers who test patience	10. Burns

The present research does not involve emotional challenges like stress, feeling sad, distrust, and dissatisfaction of the waiters. The investigator suggests that the emotional and mental health issues can be the area of future research.

The data was collected between October and December, 2019. The collected data was analysed using mean, SD, ‘t’ test, F test and Scheffe the post ANOVA.

Analysis of Data

Table: 2 Mean Value of Professional Challenges

Customer Related Challenges	Count	Mean
Running Children	184	0.86
Playful children without Parent’s control	184	0.73
Starring	184	0.54
Customers who are sharing their personal life	184	0.49
Customers with bad mood	184	0.11
Customers with few words	184	0.11
Splitting Bill	184	0.12
Attention seeking customers	184	0.65
When Customer aren’t leaving after taking food	184	0.73
Customers who test patience	184	0.33
Physical Challenges	Count	Mean
Working late, starting early	184	0.86
Slippery Floor	184	0.22
Hands smelling of Condiments	184	0.61
Losing your voice	184	0.78
Complicated orders	184	0.20
Food Allergies	184	0.44
Disruptive shift pattern	184	0.83
Sore feet	184	0.82
Having bad backaches	184	0.56
Burns	184	0.17

The above table is evident that the waiters working in restaurants of three star hotels encounter two types of challenges at their work place, one customer related challenges and the other physical challenges. Higher the mean value, greater the number of waiters facing the challenges. Most of the waiters reported that they find it difficult rather challenging situation when they are trying to carry three or more plates when children run around the tables in the restaurant and above all the parents don’t mind at all. Another frustrating problem when the customers aren’t showing any signs of leaving the restaurant even after closing time. Starring at the waiters or the doors of the kitchen is identified as a challenge faced by the waiters

With regard to the physical challenges most of the waiters encounter the problems of lengthy working hours, continued shifts, sore feet, losing voice and backache. The table gives a picture that almost all the challenges are faced by the waiters.

Table : 3 Level of Challenges faced by Waiters in Restaurants in Three Star Hotels

Background variables	Variable	Limited Level		moderate Level		High Level	
		No	%	No	%	No	%
Gender	Female	12	19.4	40	64.5	10	16.1
	Male	20	16.4	88	72.1	14	11.5
Age	25 & below	9	14.8	40	65.6	12	19.7
	26 to 30	10	17.5	38	66.7	9	15.8
	31 & above	15	22.7	41	62.1	10	15.2
Experience	10 & below	22	19.6	70	62.5	20	17.9
	11-20 years	13	23.2	33	58.9	10	17.9
	21 & above	2	12.5	13	81.3	1	6.3
Locality of Hotel	Urban	21	18.6	70	61.9	22	19.5
	Rural	12	16.9	49	69.0	10	14.1

From the above table it is clear that the majority of the waiters face the professional challenges at moderate level. Among them 64.5% of female and 72.1% of male reported to have moderate level of challenges in their profession. Among the senior waiters who are 31 and above age 22.7% face limited level, 62.1% moderate level and 15.2% greater challenges in their profession. Among the well experienced wait staff 12.5% limited, 81.3% moderate and 6.3% reported greater level of challenges. Comparing the waiters from urban rural locality 19.5% of waiters from hotels of urban areas against 14,1% waiters from rural areas face greater challenges respectively.

Table : 4 Significant difference between Waiters in facing Challenges

Background variables	Categories	Count	Mean	Standard Deviation	t-Value	Remarks
Gender	Female	62	20.55	4.299	1.867	NS
	Male	122	21.80	4.244		
Locality of Hotel	Urban	73	22.33	4.365	2.986	S
	Rural	65	20.09	4.415		

(At 5% level of significance the table value of 't' is 1.96)

The above table infers that there is no significant difference between waiters in facing challenges with respect to gender. Either male or female the challenge is a challenge. But there is significant difference between waiters in facing challenges with respect to the locale

of the hotel. The waiters from hotels of urban locality face greater challenges than their counterparts.

Table: 5 Significant difference among Waiters in facing Challenges

Dimensions	Categories	Count	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean scores	Calculated 'F' value	Remarks	Scheffe
Age	25 & below	61	177.461	2	22.33	5.029	S	1&2-
	26-30 years	57	3193.664	181	20.09			
	31 & above	66	3371.125	183	21.67			
Experience	10& below	112	2.571	2	21.29	0.069	NS	-
	11-20 years	56	3368.554	181	21.55			
	21 & above	16	3371.125	183	21.31			

(At 5% level of significance the table value of F is 3.03)

The table is evident that there is significant difference among the waiters in facing challenges with respect to their age. The Scheffe test proves that the waiters who are 25 & below face greater challenges than the waiters who are between 26 and 30 years. Experience doesn't play a role or doesn't make any difference among waiters in encountering challenges in their profession.

Discussions

The job of waiters and waitresses requires organization skills, strong interpersonal communication abilities and the deftness to handle many demands at once. It is very important for a restaurant to have good waitresses and waiters, as these are often the only people with whom diners interact and their behaviour alone can ruin an otherwise good meal. The demands of customers, being on the feet the entire shift and little base pay make waiting a difficult job. Although an experienced waiter understands how to deal with frustration due to the behaviour of customers and the physical problems they face at their work spot. Being a waiter puts a lot of stress on their body. So many times, the wait staffs who have been working for years will feel the effects of carrying heavy plates and constantly being on their feet. Back problems and knee problems are common with the waiters.

Being a waiter is a very physical job and an important quality is to have a lot of stamina. Waiters are on their feet for their entire shift, and nearly never stop walking. In addition to this, they sometimes carry heavy trays, lug around highchairs and help out in the

back room to move product (worldsciencejobs.com). Although they may feel like losing the will to live, they remember these experiences are making them into stronger human beings. All of these situations help to craft them into strong and independent individuals. Waiters should participate in required training to ensure they demonstrate current knowledge regarding menu offerings and restaurant policies. They should make up their mind that they will always remain professional with their customers.

Organisational Implications

From this current study the researchers list out the implications to be put into practice in the restaurants in three star hotels in Tamilnadu.

- Train the waiters in a way that they should know how to handle the challenging situations in the restaurants, what pleases the customers and how to provide excellent restaurant experience.
- Keep the customers entertained either children or adults. Arranging live music or some game on the table may help the customers entertained.
- The wait staffs must be trained in communication skills to speak appropriately and training in assertiveness too to handle the tuff customers in the restaurant without damaging the reputation of the restaurant.
- Waiters should be encouraged to use technology devices for taking up orders and taking useful and honest feedback from the customers and let the customer know that their words are taken care of.
- Ensure accurate wait timings to the customers so that they aren't anxious of their waiting.
- There managers must provide good leadership, help and support the waiters when they face challenging situations at the restaurant. They should provide realistic workload.
- Management should care of the physical and emotional wellness of the waiters.

Conclusion

When the customer leaves the restaurant completely satisfied it is understood that the establishment served perfectly. Wait staff are the face of a restaurant they should understand, appreciate and act on the commitment of the customers. There are unavoidable complications that come with working as a waiter or waitress, and as restaurant owners, need to understand these elements. Common problems often include working early and late hours, changing

menus, and the guest's response to changes, splitting bills, and even just customers who've had a bad day. Professionalism is shown on the dining room floor while dealing with customers, making guests feel important and giving smooth service should be the aim of waiters.

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