

Creating a Fine Dental Experience

Christopher Ramsey, DMD



Have you ever anticipated a relaxing evening at a five-star restaurant, only to be disappointed by inefficient service or a mediocre meal? Most likely, you did not return. The next time you had a really satisfying dining experience, did you take notice of what made it special? Was it the ambiance, the cuisine, the service, or the entire occasion?

A fine dental experience is similar to that of a fine dining one. Through my own experience and training as a waiter in a fine dining establishment, I learned the fine art of communication and how to provide patrons with a rewarding and satisfying experience. Some of these same lessons (numbered 1 through 5 in the following discussion) are applied now in my daily communications with patients and have greatly benefited my dental staff, patients, and practice.

Similarities

Appointments at the dental office, as with reservations at a restaurant, are often scheduled several weeks in advance. Upon arrival, the patient is greeted by the receptionist and asked to wait until his or her name is called. A restaurant patron is welcomed by the hostess, who copies the name onto a waiting list for a table.

Upon seating in the dental chair, the patient is draped to avoid spillage and is made comfortable by the dental assistant (Figure 1); a bib is placed by the waiter to protect the restaurant patron's clothing (Figure 2). When the restaurant table is ready, the guest is guided to it by the hostess to settle in before the waiter arrives. A place setting in each scenario contains all the required condiments and utensils (Figures 3 and 4). The waiter arrives at the table and details the evening's specials, whereas the clinician enters the treatment room and the patient provides any complaints and/or requests.

1. Make the "Specials" Special

In the restaurant business, it is no surprise that the specials of the day are written and delivered in such an enticing manner that the unsuspecting guest is attracted to the choice(s). A description

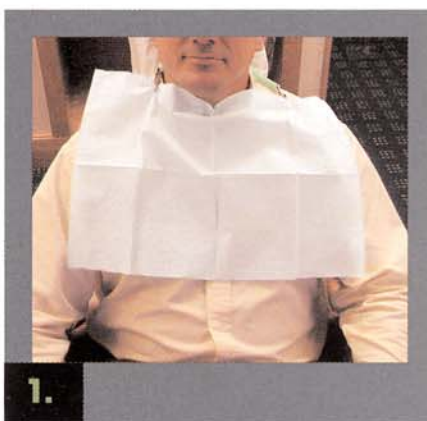
such as, "Tonight we are serving a 10 oz pistachio-encrusted grouper, pan-seared to perfection. The grouper is laid over a medley of sautéed vegetables and tiger shrimp and topped with our signature coconut shallot sauce," (Figure 8) makes it difficult to resist ordering. The same approach should be utilized in dentistry. Services provided by the dental office should be distinguished as unique or special, with each procedure described in a simple "appetizing" manner to the patient. In the restaurant business, specific trade names are used in the menu description only when there is the perception that the quality is beyond the standard and that the consumer has some understanding of the differences. For example, Kobe® beef—an expensive prime-grade beef considered a delicacy—would be identified to the customer. In my dental practice, the use of the term

IPS Empress® (Ivoclar Vivadent, Inc, Amherst, NY) is used in much the same way.

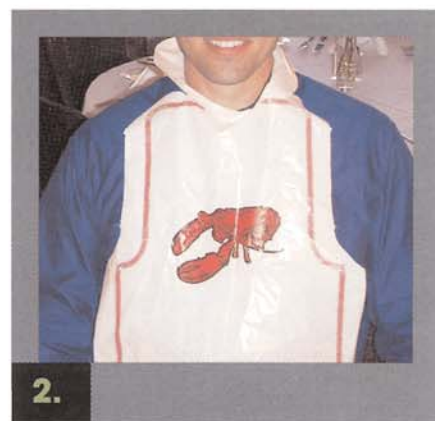
Once the patient or patron has accepted the treatment plan or menu selection, the dentist and waiter will typically write up a "work authorization"—a tab for the waiter, a prescription for the dentist. In each case, details are written in their respective language to specify temperature (shade), side orders (characterizations), or other special requests.

2. Communicate Clearly

A detailed prescription is essential for the ultimate satisfaction of the patient. Color mapping of the restoration is critical and should include photographs to clearly communicate the request to the dental laboratory. In the restaurant business, the lack of or improper documentation on



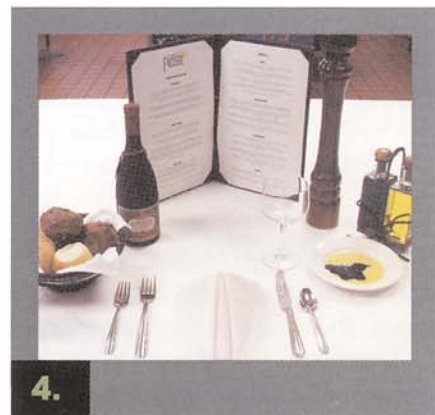
1.



2.



3.



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the order sheet is the primary reason meals are returned to the kitchen. Were all of the diner's preferences listed? Were all of the patient's requests considered?

Appetizers occupy the time until the patron's main entrée arrives. The same is true with provisional restorations that "fill-in" until the final restoration is prepared. Special care should be employed for the provisionals, as they are essential to the pending entrée. These may also provide patients with their "first taste" of your practice and dental proficiency.

Compare the laboratory and the kitchen. Both create a product to the specifications listed on the work authorization. Both diners and patients prefer the highest quality ingredients or materials (Figures 5 and 6)—never substitute lower quality materials that will adversely affect their total experience. The chef and the laboratory technician have their own method to create a masterpiece by following recipes or instructions for use and combining the appropriate materials for the best result. The fabrication process then requires mixing or blending and, often, the "firing" of the final restoration or dish.

In most restaurants and dental practices, it is the waiter and the dentist, respectively, that receive the majority of the credit for success when it is also the skill of the chef and the laboratory technician that helps to create the total

experience. In the top restaurants and dental practices, the role of the chef and the technician is acknowledged to the patrons. The chef may be complimented directly, either tableside or in the kitchen. For the laboratory technician, it may not be often enough that the patient acknowledges or is made aware of the technician's contribution to the complete experience.

3. Emphasize Teamwork

A fine dining experience requires teamwork, with everyone competently performing their assigned tasks in the proper sequence. Hence, it is essential to maintain a properly trained team. At the restaurant where I was employed, weekly updates and programs were conducted to ensure that the staff was familiar with a specific wine family, a cut of beef, or the meticulous selection of salad ingredients. The same is true in dentistry. The entire staff should be updated on all new services, products, and cosmetic procedures (ie, bleaching, bonding). Is the staff proficient enough so they are confident when questioned by a patient? The manufacturer's vendors can also educate the office personnel on each product's contribution to the total dental experience.

4. Focus on the Patron

Life can be hectic, and some days are better than others. As a waiter, it was stressed that the

couple at table #6 does not want to hear about your problems or issues at home or at work. The same is true for the dental patient who should not be subjected to your personal trials and tribulations or those of your staff. Focus on each patient as if he or she is the only patron in the office. Focus on each diner—avoid running to "other tables" when he or she is placing the order or asking questions.

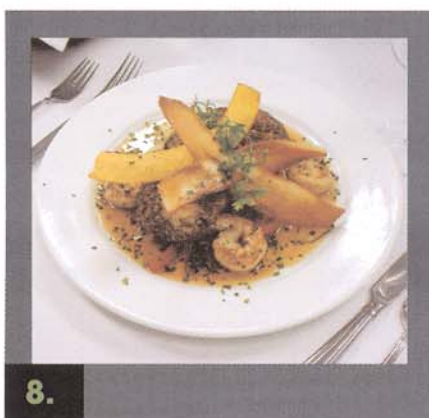
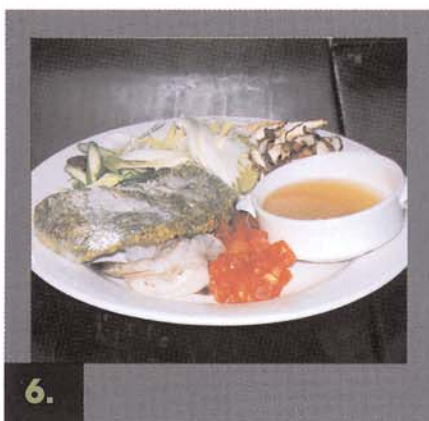
5. Presentation is Everything

The final result should be presented to the patient and diner in much the same way (Figures 7 and 8). Make each a celebration. While the other diners ogle your order as it is brought from the kitchen, the dental staff should compliment the skill and artwork that contributed to the final restoration. Each results in satisfied diners and satisfied patients, with smiles on their faces and referrals on their minds.

Next time you experience an evening of fine dining, observe what is special about the occasion. It is not just the prices or the food; it is the entire ambiance and service provided. The similarities to a fine dental experience are incredible, with each providing a smile to satisfied patrons who recommend your services to others!

Bon Appetiteeth!

For the fabrication of the dental restoration in Figure 7, go to www.signatureon-line.com/dentalrecipe. For the recipe and step-by-step instructions for the masterpiece in Figure 8, go to www.signatureon-line.com/recipe. Recipe and dining photographs courtesy of Café Protégé at the Florida Culinary Institute, West Palm Beach, Florida (www.cafeprotege.com).



Christopher Ramsey, DMD

Christopher Ramsey, DMD, is an associate at the Studio of Esthetic Dentistry, Palm Beach Gardens, Florida, specializing in comprehensive aesthetic care. He has also served as a waiter at the acclaimed Philadelphia restaurant, Kansas City Prime.