2100 Restaurants Have Guests Not Customers

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Language matters. I've been saying this for decades: restaurants have Guests. Walmart has Guests.

A Guest completes a transaction. They walk in, exchange money for goods, and leave. The relationship is purely transactional. A Guest is someone you've invited into your home. When someone comes to your house for dinner, you don't hand them a menu and make them wait. You greet them at the door. You know what they like to drink. You've thought about the evening from their perspective. You care about their experience because it's personal.

This isn't semantic. It's structural. The word you use to describe the person sitting at your table determines how your team thinks about their job. "Guest" frames the interaction as a transaction to complete. "Guest" frames it as an experience to host. Every piece of your operation — hiring, training, coaching, measurement — flows from which frame you've adopted.

You have to personalize each Guest experience enough that Guests believe and trust in you to the point of entrusting their happiness to you. That's a staggering level of trust, and it's earned over time through thousands of small moments where you demonstrated that you see them as more than a transaction.

Stop negotiating with your Guests. A Guest shouldn't have to negotiate to receive great hospitality. They don't care that you're short-handed or that the kitchen manager just quit. Are you open for business? Then act accordingly. The moment a Guest has to work to get what they came for, you've already lost the hospitality argument.