2340 Host Is a Verb

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If the people in your restaurant are Guests, then the people serving them are hosts. Not in the job title sense — — not the person standing at a podium with a stack of menus. In the truest sense of the word: someone who takes responsibility for another person's experience.

Host is a verb. It's something you do. It's an active, intentional, ongoing act of making someone feel welcome, seen, and cared for. And it belongs to everyone in the building — — the cast member, the kitchen manager, the busser, the manager, the operator. The moment someone walks through your door, every person in that building becomes their host. Not their order-taker. Not their transaction processor. Their host.

The Platinum Rule

Every Guest who walks through your door is a stranger who hasn't become a regular yet. That is the only way to see them that matters.

The cast member who has been told to treat every Guest like their grandmother is performing a rule. The problem is that not everyone wants to be treated like a grandmother. Some Guests want efficiency. Some want to be left alone. Some want conversation. Some want to be recognized. Some want to disappear into the room and feel nothing except that everything was exactly right. The rule cannot read the room. Only the cast member can.

What every Guest wants — regardless of who they are, why they came, or how they arrived — is to feel like they matter specifically. Not generically well-served. Specifically seen. The cast member's job is not to apply a standard uniformly. It is to read the person in front of them and determine what it would take to make them come back, bring someone, and call this place theirs.

That is not a policy. It is a skill. And it is the difference between a cast member who delivers service and one who produces hospitality.

The Golden Rule doesn't apply here. Treat others the way you want to be treated assumes your preference is the right template. In hospitality it never is. The cast member who treats every Guest the way they personally want to be treated is centering themselves, not the Guest. That is

service delivered from the inside out — and the Guest feels the difference.

The standard in this dining room is the Platinum Rule: treat others the way they want to be treated. Which means reading them first. The Guest who wants to be left alone and the Guest who wants conversation are both right. The cast member's job is to know which one is sitting in front of them — and respond to that person, not to a rule.

What was any regular before they were a regular? A stranger who felt something worth coming back for. Your cast creates that feeling — or doesn't — one Guest at a time.

Most restaurants have one person with the title of Host. The great ones have a building full of them.

When you shift the language from service to hosting — — when you start asking your cast not "did you take good care of your tables?" but "did you host your Guests?" — — the frame of the job changes. Service is procedural. Hosting is personal. Service says "I completed the steps." Hosting says "I was responsible for your experience."

The hoststand is the physical embodiment of everything wrong with how most restaurants think about hospitality. It's a piece of furniture that says: one person is responsible for welcoming you, and everyone else is off the hook until you reach their station. It creates a chokepoint at the one moment in the Guest experience where you have the greatest opportunity — — the arrival. The first fifteen seconds inside your door are the most powerful emotional real estate in the entire visit. That's when the Guest decides whether they feel welcome or processed. And most operators hand that moment to whoever drew the short straw on the schedule and put them behind a wooden box.

Blow it up. Not literally — — though sometimes it feels justified. Conceptually. Operationally. The goal is a stage where every person who makes eye contact with an arriving Guest takes ownership of that moment.

The hoststand as a physical object trains your cast to believe that greeting Guests is someone else's job. Remove the object and you remove the excuse. Now it belongs to everyone.

The best-run restaurants don't have a hoststand. They have a culture of arrival. Every Guest is acknowledged within seconds — — not because someone is assigned to do it, but because the cast understands that the moment a Guest crosses the threshold, the experience has already started. You don't get a second chance at a first impression. Don't waste it on a podium.

The waiting list is not a problem to be solved. It is the asset.

The operator who sees a waiting list and immediately starts thinking about adding tables, expanding the dining room, or turning tables faster has misread the situation entirely. A waiting list means demand exceeds supply. That is the most valuable position a restaurant can occupy — and the moment you eliminate the wait by expanding capacity, you have traded your pricing power for covers.

The Guest who waits twenty minutes for your table has already told you something important: you are worth it. That perception validates every price on your menu. It makes price increases easier to absorb. It makes discounting unnecessary. It makes you resistant to the competitive pressure that forces every other operator in your market to run specials and cut margins just to fill seats.

Manage the wait. Make it part of the experience. Give waiting Guests a drink, a story, a reason to feel good about the decision they made to come here instead of going somewhere they could get in immediately. The wait is not the problem. Wasting the wait is.