2355 Leading the Experience Through the Menu

Product Book · https://kb.jeffreysummers.com/docs/2355-leading-the-experience-through-the-menu/

The server who recites the menu is performing a transaction. The server who leads the Guest through it is practicing hospitality.

The distinction is not subtle. One is reading a list. The other is having a conversation — finding out who is at the table, what kind of evening this is, what they're in the mood for, and then guiding them toward the thing that will make this meal memorable. The server who opens with "what are we celebrating tonight?" before a single menu word is spoken has already changed the shape of the experience.

Forget about upselling. The word itself is wrong — it puts the server's agenda at the center of the interaction rather than the Guest's experience. A server who is trying to upsell is trying to increase the check. A server who is leading the experience is trying to make the Guest's evening better. Those are different postures, and Guests feel the difference immediately.

What you are building is a cast of menu ambassadors — people who have tasted the food, know the stories behind the dishes, understand which items pair with which occasions, and genuinely want to guide the Guest toward the best version of their evening. That person doesn't need a script. They need knowledge, care, and the freedom to act on both.

If your server can tell a Guest about only the three most expensive items on the menu, you have trained a salesperson. If your server can tell a Guest about the dish the kitchen manager is most proud of this week, the item that pairs perfectly with what they just ordered, and the dessert that two of your regulars came back specifically for — that server is leading the experience.

The menu is the instrument. The cast member is the musician. Training them to play it well is not a selling skill. It is a hospitality skill — and it is the one that compounds.