



**SONOMA COUNTY**  
HOSPITALITY ASSOCIATION

## **SCHA Service Recommendations for Great Hospitality during Challenging Times**

**Santa Rosa, CA, August 7, 2020** – As anyone working on the front lines of hospitality will agree, these are challenging times for delivering great customer service. Employees and guests are stressed, there are varying levels of comfort with conforming to the latest rules and guidelines, and tempers are short.

To support the region’s hospitality and tourism industry with guidance, the Sonoma County Hospitality Association (SCHA) recently presented a workshop by Thomas C. Padron, Ph.D., hospitality professor at CSU, East Bay, in which he addressed the service challenges of our ‘current normal’.

“Our environment has changed, but our focus should always be on our guests and customers. Safety is the #1 priority,” said Padron. “I am finding that using our emotional intelligence and ability to read people well – key hospitality skills -- are more important than ever.”

“It’s imperative that we remember our guests are experiencing the same range of emotions that we are. Like us, guests want to feel safe and valued and are yearning for more contact. There are opportunities to deliver more personalized service and convey a level of care that they are seeking.”

Here are some tips and suggestions from Dr. Padron to use and share with staff for delivering great service right now:

### **1. Remember that guests are looking for guidance:**

- Be Knowledgeable: Know your Health and Safety regulations – local, state, and national
- Stay Informed: Know your company policies so that you can confidently convey them to guests
- Be Resourceful: Bring your best empathy and problem solving to the job every day
- Be Self-aware: Great service starts with you first! Show kindness, care, and compassion in every interaction. Make it your goal to be respectful, patient, and aware of your guest’s needs

### **2. Deliver great service from behind the mask**

“YOU HAVE TO SMILE!!! The crinkly eyes and vibe show through the mask,” says Padron. “Bring your energy and personality to it and deliver what I call ESP: Energy, Smile, and Personality.”

### **3. Remember that Communication is more important than ever**

Verbal communication – Sincerity is paramount! Don’t forget to account for the mask by making sure you enunciate, articulate, and repeat yourself if necessary. Make great eye contact and maintain the proper, professional tone. Remember that it’s not what you say, it’s how you say it, especially in these times.

Non-verbal communication – Think about your body language and make conscious, extra clear movements to compensate for the mask. Also, check your posture, use clear hand gestures, and authentic movements to make sure your message is accurately conveyed.

#### **4. Build trust with your Customer/Guest**

- Train, educate, and inform. Kindly alert guests/customers to posted signs and information
- Make them aware and remind them. Remember, people have very short memories, especially when stressed
- Ask them questions and then really listen. We should listen three ways: With our eyes, with our mind, and very importantly with our heart (emotional intelligence, empathy)
- Help them learn about you and the company
- Offer authentic service that results in them knowing “how you provide excellent customer service and how you made them feel”

“It’s important to remember that great service will make guests feel comfortable, cared for, truly welcomed, and at home,” Padron says. “Ask yourself if you are covering all four of these in your interactions.”

#### **NEGATIVE SITUATIONS**

With rules changing regionally and issues arising around mask requirements and other regulations, negative situations and encounters are more common than ever.

Dr. Padron offers the following tips for handling challenging customers:

- Approach the customer with kindness and compassion
- Have a statement prepared (but DO NOT sound scripted or robotic, remember: authentic)  
Example: “I/We recognize that this is not easy/comfortable, I/we sympathize and I/we ask for your cooperation for the safety of yourself and others.”

For customer interactions involving upset guests, these are Dr. Padron’s guidelines:

- Stay calm
- Let them vent (and do not interrupt)
- Actively listen (nodding head and/or leaning in)
- Apologize sincerely
- Deal with the emotion first (I would be upset too...)
- Avoid emotional trigger words (Can’t, Sorry, Policy)
- Take responsibility for fixing the problem
- Involve the customer
- Follow up with the customer
- Lastly, remember that “Thank you”, “You are welcome”, and “My pleasure” still apply.

“I am gratified to share these suggestions and ideas in hopes they make future guest interactions easier,” said Dr. Padron. “These are challenging times for everyone, so any time we can improve a situation with great service, I consider it a win for the staff and the guest.”

To learn more about Sonoma County Hospitality Association and upcoming training and education programs, visit [www.SonomaCountyHospitality.org](http://www.SonomaCountyHospitality.org).

#### **About Sonoma County Hospitality Association**

The mission of the Sonoma County Hospitality Association (SCHA) is to represent the interests of the hospitality and tourism industries through advocacy, education, and partnerships within the community. The SCHA focuses on initiatives that make it easier to thrive in the hospitality industry and initiate a vibrant exchange of ideas to ensure tourism’s positive impact within Sonoma County. To learn more, visit [www.sonomacountyhospitality.org](http://www.sonomacountyhospitality.org)

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