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Empty Tables

By John Eliason

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Ever notice that some restaurants are never full, even though they have some of the best food in town?

It's a real problem for the restaurant owner. But what if there were a way to very inexpensively prime the pump and then keep them coming in, how would that change life and business?

Here's what we've seen work. Yes, there's effort involved, but the cost is low, think sweat equity. There's basically no risk and the upside can be life changing. There are two steps:

1 You might think this is silly and old fashioned and "Why would I do this when I can just advertise," but people love the honesty of this approach – it's pure, simple and it works. Here's what you do: You go put on your chef outfit or if you wear a shirt with the restaurant name on it that's fine too and you go out and face-to-face and meet 100 of your neighbors. Invite them in and give them a special deal.

Before Chipotle was bought and sold and went public this is what they did. They had coupons printed up like playing cards, I think they were all Jacks or Kings, but they said Chipotle and they were good for one free burrito. They handed them out by the 1000's, they'd even hire people to walk in parades and had them to everyone on the street. Pretty soon they had a line 20 deep at lunch time and the rest is history. Not a bad little recipe.

Now, before you "yeah-butt" this deal because you have a swankier places than Chipotle (most do), still do a variation on the theme. You will get better faster results with a personal introduction, a handshake and a little sharing of your passion (it will pour from you if you're truly passionate and people will eat it up).

People love passionate people. They will come and check you out and when they do, make it worth their time. Provide what you said you would. You don't have to be the cheapest, you don't have to be the best, you just have to provide what you said you would. Then surprise them with just a bit more than you promised. People love a pleasant surprise. This does not have to be a discount or anything price related. It's better if it's just a better experience or a better selection or better food or a wine, whisky, whatever selection that was just a bit cooler than what they expected.

2 Once people get in your door, now your marketing *really* begins. You have them, they're captive, treat them better than they'd expect, but never assume that's all that it takes. It's not if you want to develop a following. Step two is big and is pure marketing. There's a bit more you need to do, but it's worth it.

The next step is to build a database of all your clients; their like, loves, preferences. You want to know if they like seafood, beef, poultry, vegan, wine preferences, beer preferences, or if they don't drink at all. Then you use that data to build create new dishes, invite them in when you have something they'll like or when what they like is on

special or you get a new barrel of cabernet that your cabernet lovers would love to try – it gets custom, it gets exclusive, it gets fun, it gets people talking about you and it gets your tables filled.

How do you know what they like? They probably just ordered it, but rather than wonder you ask. Explain what you're doing and tell them there's only a limited number of people who get to be on this list. Construct a simple sheet or card with categories, again, like wine types, meat preferences, particular dishes you ask about, then simply enter these into your database and keep in savvy* contact with email.

**Savvy means be respectful with the number of emails you send, be clever, brief and allow them to reserve by calling or responding to the email so that the exclusivity you mentioned to them follows through to their visit. MAKE YOUR LIST MEMEBERS FEEL LOVED AND EXCLUSIVE AND MAKE SURE TO MAKE ROOM FOR THEM WHEN YOU'RE BUSY EVERY NIGHT.*

Give massive value, treat people right and well, through in a dash of exclusivity; build it and they will come.

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P.S. You can set this up and run it with most any CRM with attached marketing capacity. If you'd like a see one we use follow this link.

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John Eliason is a rebel entrepreneur who teaches other entrepreneurs shortcuts that speed results. You can find more of his rebellions ideas in his business lab

www.rewirelab.org

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