



Small Moves. Big Impact.

by Phyllis Ann Marshall

In our circle, relevance is the buzz of the moment. Being relevant means that everything about your restaurant works in today's demanding market. Standards remain but are met in ways that satisfy today's customers and staff; and therefore, your bottom-line. Here are some timely ideas to keep your business fresh and appealing. (Some new, others classically reconfigured to work now.)

1. VALUE ADDED IS GOSPEL IN OUR INDUSTRY. Give customers more than they bargained for. Value added doesn't mean more quantity. Give more quality — the extra touch or nuance that adds distinction to menu or décor. It can be something as seemingly simple as the salt on your tables, which can say more about relevance than you think. Remember filling your table shakers with Morton's iodized? "When it rains it pours". Discerning diners today will quickly "read" the "tablescape" (tabletop details) at **Gulfsteam** in Newport Beach, and notice a small, cardboard canister of Sel Marin Natural Atlantic Sea Salt. The presence of "natural sea salt" signifies an upgrade that signals to the customer, "We are aware of the times, of our customer's

evolving standards, and we're committed to meeting your discerning tastes with the best products." When diners see quality from the moment they arrive at the table (or better yet, before that moment) the bill at the end has much less shock effect.

2. THE NAPKIN OR WATER GOBLET SWITCH. An upgrade that makes guests feel special occurs when the server changes the guests' napkin from white to black preventing white lint on dark slacks and simultaneously gives the server a chance to demonstrate their attention to detail. **Taléo Mexican Grill** in Irvine does this very graciously, starting the meal off on a very impressive note. Another memorable evening was a magic night at **Ralph's on the Park**, a Ralph Brennan restaurant in New Orleans, which I'm happy to say, is still intact. At an elegant, multi-course dinner the water goblets were replaced with fresh glasses half way through the meal. This was unobtrusive but much touted among the observant guests. Small moves with a big impact.

3. THE UNIFORM LOOK. A challenge today is how to dress the servers professionally while accounting for their occasional misplaced iron or lack of laundry

quarters. We've made the top work with various styles of tees, golf shirts, and dress shirts tied to the appropriate check average and affixed with your restaurant's logo, but the bottom often remains an eye sore. Best bet is a long, to the floor, black Parisian style apron that hides jeans, wrinkled pants and a multitude of sins. They work.

4. YOU AND YOUR CONTAINERS ARE ONE. The right bag, box, and cup with tight fitting lids and closures stamped with your best and brightest logo or stickers scream that the departing customer belongs to your "club" and digs your culture. **In-N-Out Burger** even provides a storied lap mat while the **Holiday Inn** breakfast service provides a full pot of hot coffee with both a china cup and saucer and a paper to-go cup in case you should choose to take some on the road as you leave.

5. FORMAL IS OUT. **Aire**, the new restaurant in **The Camp** across from **The Lab** on Bristol in Costa Mesa used the tagline, Global Cuisine. The menu is filled with small plates, tapas or as Chef Troy Furuta calls them, "share friendly" items. Without skipping a beat or a bite, the menu items are whimsical to read and delicious to eat. You Make Me Melt is a Kobe Patty melting with Brigante cheese, spiced-up aioli, and Maui onion marmalade. **KC & the Sunshine Strip** is a Kansas City steak with truffle demi-glace. There was a time when we thought fancy food had to be formal, remember? They may "take themselves lightly" but we still take them very seriously.

6. WAITING IS OUT. It's an electronic, cell phone, Blackberry world where everything is edited into sound bites to meet the demands of our time-poor culture. Any solution to make things faster and more efficient magnifies success. **Claim Jumper** has initiated a popular but simple "Telephone for a Table" system. They recommend calling when on the way and they will put your name on their waitlist. **The Marriott Hotel** is developing a new menu called "5, 10 or 15". There are 5

Lido Veal & Lamb has been committed to quality

Lamb & Veal for over 25 years.

Raised for quality and consistency, and processed in

*Southern California to insure that you receive the
freshest product available.*

USDA
CHOICE
OR HIGHER
ALL
AMERICAN
VEAL & LAMB

FOR MORE INFORMATION
CALL US AT 800-543-5602

L I D O
Exquisite Quality
VEAL & LAMB

items that take 5 minutes, 10 that take 10 minutes and 15 that take 15 minutes for business executives and travelers on the run.

7. TAKE-OUT TASTES HAVE GONE UP-SCALE. Fast food restaurants have served us from their drive-thru window, now casual dining restaurants have created “Curbside Service” to keep us in our cars as well. **Mimi’s Café** and **Dave’s Barbecue** have responded to this fast growing segment and make it as easy as 1,2,3. First, call ahead or go online to place your order using your credit card. Then pull up to the designated parking spot at the restaurant and a runner will come to the car with your order and the credit card voucher. Finally, tip well, sign your name and drive off into the sunset. Remember carhops? I once saw an operation in Brazil where the carhops were on roller skates making it easy for customers to buy. A smart move.

8. CREATE AND MAINTAIN THE BUZZ. No one likes to be in a restaurant that is empty. Talk about not being relevant! Down with low energy. Try creating a special early “Tapas Hour” of small plates or small portions that sample some of your best entrée selections. This is a great energy boost that fills the bar early with serious diners that wish to try your fare, as well as those who want to eat lightly or quickly. Both types will pair their small plates with good glasses of wine. **Bayside** and **WildFish** in Newport Beach do this exceptionally well. To maintain the buzz past the normal dinner hour, add some appropriate music mid-evening. Start with a slow mellow tempo and volume in respect for finishing diners. Gradually accelerate the tempo and volume to extend the stay and attract a second wave.

9. FAST FRONTAL FACELIFT. Do guests call on their cell phones because they can’t find you while driving right by or act surprised when they hear about your restaurant? Is there anything more discouraging when faced with stiff sign ordinances? Well, here’s some instant “Eye Candy” for your drive-by. Add foliage, trees and flowers in pots with wheels in front of the entrance by day with masses of tiny lights for nighttime effect. Wheel them in at night. **Eva’s Caribbean Kitchen** in South Laguna gets the award for an amazing light show in the palm trees while faced with patio seating and parking issues.

Whether an independent venture, or a regional or national chain, all restaurants can stay relevant by making small, smart moves to create a memorable experience for their guests. ☒

THE SPICE RACK



Curing Salts

with Chef
Gabriel Caliendo



Many foods undergo a curing process, including: vegetables, game, beef, and seafood, but the “king of cure” goes hands down to our curly-tailed friend and this issue’s focus: Pork!

Sodium nitrite, sodium nitrate, and salt are the primary components in curing salts.

Sodium Nitrite is used to prevent the growth of botulism, retard spoilage, and to preserve the red color of cured meat that would otherwise turn an unappetizing grayish color during cooking or smoking. Sodium Nitrate is used for its time releasing capabilities, ensuring that the curing process is lengthened enough to complete the cure and reduce the chance of bacterial growth.

Salt inhibits the growth of bacterial agents through its hygroscopic properties; or the ability to absorb moisture and dry out meat. Salt also adds flavor to the curing process.

All curing salts have red food coloring added so they will not be confused with regular table salt, hence the term: Pink Salt. Curing salt is so strong it only takes one ounce or about five Tablespoons of curing salt to cure twenty-five pounds of meat and two Tablespoons is enough for ten pounds. House-made salumi and charcuterie plates are currently enjoying a renaissance in restaurants around the country and are a worthwhile addition to any restaurant’s menu or chef’s repertoire.

Strategies for Growth

FoodPower, Inc. is a restaurant consulting firm that coaches industry leaders to leverage their strengths.

Let FoodPower identify opportunities to increase sales by capitalizing on the changes in today’s dining out patterns.

Phyllis Ann Marshall, FCSI is the President of FoodPower as well as the founding partner of Mr. Stox Restaurant.

FoodPower is the secret ingredient for many great restaurant success stories.

FoodPower • 949-646-3206 • www.FoodPower.com