

# Winning Strategies

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## *The Ticking Clock Syndrome*

### ‘Train the Sense of Urgency’



Think about setting the alarm on your clock. It ticks down until the time and then goes off loudly. This concept of alarms is another way of understanding expectations. Each one of us has expectations regarding time. These expectations carry over to every part of our lives and are especially crucial in the service industry. We have to recognize them and manage our clubs to this concept.



Remember our terrible 9/11 experience. The first responders were rushing into the towers to help save people. They would get people out and then run back in to do it again. They kept working nonstop until there was no one left to save because the towers came down. They certainly had a sense of urgency that day.

We all know people who we think are impatient. Some of us show our impatience more than others. Normally we can be critical of those we think are too impatient as they appear to set unreasonable expectations on other people. However, we have to understand that in each of us there are time clocks that we set based on what we believe is a fair amount of time to complete a task. This is especially important in the club industry as we have set our clubs up to be special places that provide a higher level of service than retail establishments. At least they are supposed to.

Let me tell you a story that hits at the heart of the matter. Recently many of us have gone out to dinner. We will pretend that we went to Outback Steakhouse. A man and his wife open the door and immediately a clock begins to tick in their head. How long will it take to be greeted? Once greeted the hostess tells you that it will be probably 20 minutes until a table is available. So you have a choice of waiting in the seats in the waiting area or going to the bar. You sit down. About 15 minutes into the wait, you start looking at your watch. The hostess has set the expectation of time for you. If she calls you before 20 minutes you are happy. If she calls you even a couple of minutes after the 20 you are unhappy. It is better to tell the customer in this instance that it may be 25 – 30 minutes and beat the expectation than making the time too short for you to meet the expectation.

The minute you are seated a new clock starts as to when the waitress will bring the menus and take the drink order. Once the service person has taken your drink order, a new clock starts as how long it will take to get your drink. Once you get your drink a new clock starts on how long it will be before they take your order. Clocks are going on and off as to when you get your salad, when you get your entrée, when are your drinks refilled, when do you get your check?

Now understand that these expectations of time are different for everyone depending on if they are dining alone (short clock), with a spouse (don't know), a girlfriend (longer clocks), your three children (very short clock) or a large group of adults (normally a longer clock). So if a server has 20 people in their station, you have so many clocks going on and off. Each is an opportunity to make the customer happy or irritated.

Once a server on a busy night gets all their entrées out of the kitchen, they have a tendency to let their guard down. They don't realize that there may be a clock going off somewhere in the minds of the 20 guests in their station. The same thing happens on a slow evening when servers just don't think they have much to do so they don't concentrate as hard.

We have all had bad experiences. There was a time when it took 45 minutes to get your entrée. The time the waitress was missing for 15 minutes when you wanted another glass of wine, or the time it took 20 minutes to get your check at the end of the night. These things have happened to all of us. However, in a club those stories become legion in the men's grill or the ladies bridge club. So why not try to prevent as many problems as you can?

Every wait staff training program should concentrate on teaching the sense of urgency with the example of ticking clocks. Make sure they understand they are being timed somewhere. They need to be observant and stay in sight of their customers as much as possible. I know the first responders' job was life and death. But in the club business member opinions of your service can also be life and death to your image, financial success, membership growth and retention, and

your performance rating. This type of training should carry over from not only food service but all areas of the club where employees come in contact with members.

It is really simple. Don't procrastinate. Don't be like the little boy who tells his father he doesn't want to do something because if he waits to the last minute he will only have to use a minute.



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