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Lori Wright

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Yes, You Can Earn $150,000 A Year Waiting Tables
UNH Professor's New Book Details How To Make It Big In The Hospitality Industry

Contact: Lori Wright
603-862-0574
UNH Media Relations
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DURHAM, N.H. -- Think you can’t get rich as a waiter? Think again. According to a new book The Wealthy Waiter by Joe Durocher, associate professor of hospitality management at the University of New Hampshire, waiters and waitresses can easily pull down $150,000 a year as long as they do two things – act like entrepreneurs and think of their tables as a franchise.

“In the restaurant business, the true differentiation between success and failure comes down to service. You can have a gorgeous restaurant with the most fantastic décor and great food, but if you have terrible service, you will fail,” says Durocher, who co-authored the book with Gary Armitage, director of sales and marketing with The Balsams Grand Resort Hotel in Dixville Notch, NH.

The book details every aspect of a career as a server: how to select where to work, how much income is generated based on the type of restaurant, how to make positive first impressions; how to do small things that pay off at tip time, and how to avoid the traditional pitfalls of the often transient lives of waiters and waitresses. There’s also chapter about how to build wealth, and advice on the expenses associated with opening and operating a restaurant.

“Waiters and waitresses have a chance to manage their own business with the capital investment paid by someone else. They never have to pay employees a salary; they never have to make repairs when the equipment breaks down. And if the business fails, they won’t lose a penny,” Armitage says. “This book is written for every waiter and waitress who wants to increase the restaurant’s bottom line while they build the capital to make their own dreams come true.”

So what’s a top no-no that will virtually guarantee a meager tip and cause your customers to wish they had gone somewhere else? “Don’t make your dramas my traumas. If you are hung over, I don’t care,” Durocher says. “If I ask, ‘How are you?’ your response should be ‘I’m fine, thank you.’ ”

And if a regular customer comes in with a woman, Durocher warns not to assume she is the man’s wife. “If a guest comes in and you recognize the guy, don’t say ‘Welcome back Mr. and Mrs. Smith’ because that just may not be Mrs. Smith. Only address the couple if you recognize both people.”

Here are tips from The Wealthy Waiter:

- Take Charge. Offer indecisive customers recommendations or have the chef prepare a special tasting menu. If the restaurant serves large portions, let new customers know,
particularly if they are not headed home after the meal. If a customer looks like they are in a hurry, ask them when they need to leave and suggest menu items that take a shorter amount of time to come out of the kitchen.

- Make Your Customers Look Good. Praise the customers’ choice of entrée or wine. Refer to a repeat customer by name and ask if they will be having their traditional drink that evening, particularly if they are entertaining guests.

- Drive Your Tip Percentage. Provide extra service, such as providing the customer extra towelettes when the management isn’t looking. If a menu item isn’t up to par, caution customers and explain why you’d recommend they select a different item. Let the customer know when they can pay less by ordering items packaged together. Connect with the children of customers.

- Build Repeat Business. Memorize the favorite menu items of regular customers and ask them if they will be having their regular dish when they return. Go the extra mile – if it’s hot outside, offer your customers a complimentary glass of iced tea to go. Give customers a business card with your hours so when they return, they will ask for you.

The authors also provide additional training information online at www.thewealthywaiter.com, covering how to greet the table, present the menu, take the order, serve beverages and food, clear plates, handle the check, reset the table, and decant the wine. The website also provides a review of wine, a tip calculator and sales ratio calculator.

“Restaurants can use our online program as their sole source for training servers. We see the site as a jumpstart for those who have little or no service experience and want to learn some basic information before applying for their first service job,” Durocher says.

Durocher is an associate professor of hospitality and beverage management at the UNH Whittemore School of Business and Economics. He received his Ph.D. in hotel administration from Cornell, and cut his teeth in the hospitality industry at his parent’s hotel in New Hampshire’s White Mountains. He is the co-author of Successful Restaurant Design, and has written for restaurant industry publications for 20 years.

Armitage is director of sales and marketing at The Balsams Grand Resort Hotel in Dixville Notch, NH, and has been an adjunct professor in UNH’s Hospitality Management Department. He has worked for major hotel and hospitality organizations, including Marriott, Sheraton, Aramark and Harrison Conference Center, and founded Aladdin Food Service.

For more information about The Wealthy Waiter, visit www.thewealthywaiter.com.

EDITORS AND REPORTERS: Durocher can be reached at 603-862-3387 and jdj@cisunix.unh.edu. Armitage can be reached at thewealthywaiter@aol.com.