Why aren’t waiters given the respect – or salary – they deserve?

1 Warmer

Put these in order from 1 (your favourite) to 5 (your least favourite).

1. ____________________________   a. eating at home
2. ____________________________   b. eating in a fast-food restaurant
3. ____________________________   c. eating in a formal restaurant
4. ____________________________   d. eating takeaway food
5. ____________________________   e. eating at a street-food stall

2 Key words

Fill the gaps in the sentences using these key words from the text. The paragraph numbers will help you.

1. A ____________________________ is the person in a restaurant who is in charge of the waiters. (para 1)
2. The ____________________________ industry looks after guests in hotels, restaurants etc. (para 3)
3. ____________________________ is a strong feeling of not liking someone or something. (para 3)
4. A ____________________________ is someone who enjoys eating different types of food and who talks a lot about food. (para 4)
5. If a person is ____________________________, people do not recognize how important that person is. (para 5)

6. ____________________________ is the rate at which people leave their jobs and are replaced by new staff. (para 5)
7. If you ____________________________, you leave a job permanently. (para 5)
8. If you have an ____________________________ job, you have to work at unusual times of the day so that you do not have much time to spend with your family or friends. (para 5)
9. Your ____________________________ are your chances of success in a job or career. (para 5)
10. A ____________________________ person takes action and makes changes before they need to be made. They don’t just wait until problems develop. (para 8)

3 Find the information

Find the following information in the text as quickly as possible.

1. Which four European capital cities are mentioned in the text?
2. What is the annual percentage of staff turnover in the UK?
3. What are the three main reasons that people leave their jobs in hospitality in the UK?
4. Which country is described as having ‘famously friendly service’?
5. How many new UK workers will the hospitality industry need to recruit?
6. How much does Corbin & King restaurant group pay its senior waiters as a starting salary?
Why aren’t waiters given the respect – or salary – they deserve?

Clare Finney
15 January, 2020

1 Most British people know the names of successful chefs but find it very difficult to name a successful maître d’ or waiter. Many Brits still think of any restaurant job that involves dealing with customers as either temporary or the worst kind of job.

2 In continental Europe, waiting is a respected job, says restaurant manager Tom Slegg. “You see 60-, 70-year-olds waiting in Madrid, Paris and Vienna, and they do it with skill and knowledge.” Slegg himself has managed a top-class restaurant and now manages a four-star hotel – but “99 out of 100 people look disappointed when they ask what I do in restaurants and I tell them I work on the floor.”

3 This attitude starts at a young age. The British Hospitality Association says there is “an antipathy towards the sector from parents, careers advisers and teachers”. “At school, the idea of hospitality as a job is not even thought of,” says George Hersey, general manager of a restaurant in London. “You are told to get a degree, and in the meantime get a job in a pub or restaurant.”

4 Few British families can afford to show their kids a good waiter or maître d’ at work; and we don’t see much of this as adults, in a culture that thinks speed is more important than service. Many of us say we are foodies, but the pressures of time and money mean that foodies often choose street food rather than top restaurants. “People want to be fed,” Hersey says, “and they don’t want conversation.”

5 Of course, one reason the image in the UK of service as undervalued, low-paid work is mainly that it’s true. “The working conditions are pretty bad, and the money isn’t great,” Slegg says. According to a 2019 study, staff turnover in hospitality is 30% a year – twice the UK average. The three main reasons for quitting are unsociable working hours, low pay and lack of prospects.

6 You could say the tipping culture in the US that fuels the famously friendly service there is a good thing. But it can sometimes seem too friendly and fake.

7 In the UK, something needs to change and it needs to change fast. Brexit is here, and already the European staff the industry largely depends on are leaving the country. A report for the British Hospitality Association concluded that, “with free movement ending and no new immigration into the sector, the industry needs an extra 62,000 UK workers each year” – a goal it thinks is completely unrealistic.

8 “You can sit around and complain, or you can be proactive,” says Zuleika Fennell, the managing director of Corbin & King, a restaurant group that is trying to change the hospitality sector. “We have to capture kids’ imaginations and keep staff.” Corbin & King has school programmes, a £30,000 starting salary for senior waiters and regular “rewards for excellence” for employees.

9 As Hillary Reinsberg, the editor-in-chief of a restaurant guide, says: “Service these days isn’t about the formality of a meal – it’s about paying attention to what people actually want and making them feel welcome. When you get it right, it’s like giving a dinner party every night, without cooking.”

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Comprehension check

Match the beginnings and endings to make statements about the text.

1. Many people in the UK believe working as a waiter in a restaurant …
2. Service in the US is often friendly because …
3. Not many careers advisers, teachers or parents …
4. As a result of Brexit, …
5. This means that the hospitality sector …
6. Successful maitre d’s and good waiters …

Two-word phrases

Match the words in the left-hand column with the words in the right-hand column to make expressions from the text.

1. low a. service
2. unsociable b. salary
3. starting c. pay
4. working d. turnover
5. friendly e. hours
6. staff f. conditions

Expressions with prepositions

Fill the gaps in the phrases from the text using these prepositions.

for of with to in towards

1. dealing ____________ customers
2. an antipathy ____________ someone or something
3. ____________ the meantime
4. rewards ____________ excellence
5. paying attention ____________ someone or something
6. lack ____________ prospects
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Level 1 • Pre-intermediate / Intermediate

7 Word-building
Complete the table using words from the text.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>verb</th>
<th>noun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. move</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. imagine</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. advise</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. direct</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>adjective</th>
<th>noun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5. formal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. excellent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8 Discussion

- Would you like to work in a restaurant? Why? Why not?
- What’s the best restaurant you have ever been to? Why is it so good?
KEY

2 Key words
1. maitre d'
2. hospitality
3. antipathy
4. foodie
5. undervalued
6. turnover
7. quit
8. unsociable
9. prospects
10. proactive

3 Find the information
2. 30%
3. unsociable working hours, low pay, lack of prospects
4. the US
5. 62,000
6. £30,000

4 Comprehension check
1. d
2. f
3. a
4. e
5. b
6. c

5 Two-word phrases
1. c
2. e
3. b
4. f
5. a
6. d

6 Expressions with prepositions
1. with
2. towards
3. in
4. for
5. to
6. of

7 Word-building
1. movement
2. imagination
3. adviser
4. director
5. formality
6. excellence