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

Level 2 • Upper intermediate

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 are given to help you.

antipathy  maitre d'  foodie  implausible  stigma  vibe  unsociable  menial  hospitality  arrogant

1. A ____________________________ is the person in a restaurant who is in charge of the waiters. (para 1)
2. A ____________________________ is a feeling that something is wrong or embarrassing in some way. (para 3)
3. The ____________________________ industry looks after guests in hotels, restaurants etc. (para 3)
4. ____________________________ is a strong feeling of not liking someone or something. (para 3)
5. A ____________________________ is someone who enjoys eating different types of food and who talks a lot about food. (para 4)
6. A ____________________________ is a general feeling you get from a person or a place. (para 5)
7. A ____________________________ job is boring or dirty and is considered to be of low status. (para 6)
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 6)
9. An ____________________________ statement is difficult to accept as true. (para 8)
10. An ____________________________ person is someone who thinks they are better or more important than other people. (para 10)

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 (people leaving their job and being replaced by new staff) in the UK?
3. Which country is described as having ‘famously friendly service’?
4. What are the three main reasons that people leave their jobs in hospitality in the UK?
5. How many new UK workers will the hospitality industry need to recruit?
6. Which country sees serving in a restaurant as ‘a poor person’s job’?

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

Clare Finney
15 January, 2020

1 Most British people could name a successful chef but would find it very difficult to name a successful maitre d’ or waiter. Despite all the celebrity chefs and our love of food, most 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 profession: many kids grow up in their parents’ restaurants and see no shame in following in their footsteps. In Madrid, Paris or Vienna, says restaurant manager Tom Slegg, “you see 60-, 70-year-olds waiting, doing it with skill and knowledge.” Slegg himself has managed a Michelin-starred restaurant, started two of his own and now manages a four-star hotel – but “99 out of 100 people will look disappointed when they ask what I do in restaurants and I tell them I work on the floor.”

3 This stigma starts at a young age. The British Hospitality Association says there is “a deeply held antipathy towards the sector from too many parents, careers advisers and teachers”. “At school, the idea of hospitality as a profession 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 maitre d’ at work; nor is it something we see much of as adults, in a culture that prioritizes speed over service. Many of us say we are foodies, but the pressures of time and money mean that foodies often choose street food or no-reservations places rather than top restaurants. “People want to be fed,” Hersey says, “and they don’t want conversation.”

5 Good service is a joy for everyone concerned, says Hersey. “The guests get into your vibe and then you have a better time because of it.” It's also inspiring: “One of my most motivating experiences when I was younger was going to the Waterside Inn in Bray, where Diego Masciaga was general manager for 30 years, and being completely blown away by Diego’s presence.” As his boss, the chef Adam Handling, puts it: “It’s about the showmanship, the interaction. A restaurant is one big theatre, and if we want kids interested in this as a career, we need to show them that.”

6 Of course, one reason we have the image in the UK of service as undervalued, low-paid menial work is mostly because 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 – with unsociable working hours, low pay and lack of prospects the top three reasons for quitting.

7 You could say the tipping culture in the US that fuels the famously friendly service there is a good thing. However, it can sometimes seem too friendly and therefore fake. But without the tips, the wages of most waiting staff there are very low.

8 In the UK, something needs to change and 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 allowed, the industry will need to recruit an additional 62,000 UK workers each year” – a goal it thinks is “deeply implausible”.

9 “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 sector. “We have to capture kids’ imaginations and keep staff.” With school programmes, a £30,000 starting salary for senior waiters and regular “rewards for excellence” for employees, Corbin & King pays its money where its mouth is.

10 Handling, too, is optimistic – but believes we need to celebrate a British style of hospitality. We’re a “young cuisine” and “an arrogant people, who see serving as a poor person’s job,” he says, but at its best, “British food is about personality, rather than discipline. It’s exciting, it can be spectacular, but it’s relaxed: there’s no looking down on people.”

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

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Comprehension check

Are these statements true (T) or false (F) according to the text?

1. People in the UK generally think working as a waiter in a restaurant is low-paid menial work.
   - True (T)

2. Careers advisers and teachers often recommend hospitality as a profession.
   - False (F)

3. The famously friendly service in the US can be fake because the waiting staff just want you to leave them a tip.
   - False (F)

4. Waiters in the US are well paid.
   - True (T)

5. The managing director of Corbin & King recommends better training, higher salaries and regular rewards for excellence.
   - True (T)

6. Hillary Reinsberg wants restaurants to be more formal.
   - True (T)

Find the word

Find the following words and phrases in the text.

1. a four-word verb phrase meaning do the same work or achieve the same success as someone before you (para 2)
   - Work hard to achieve

2. a verb meaning treat a particular issue as more important than any others (para 4)
   - Treat this issue as

3. a two-word adjectival phrase meaning very impressed or excited (para 5)
   - Very impressed

4. a noun meaning the ability to do things in a lively and enthusiastic way that attracts attention (para 5)
   - The ability to

5. a two-word phrasal verb meaning spend time doing nothing (para 9)
   - Spend time doing

6. an adjective meaning taking action and making changes before they need to be made rather than waiting until problems develop (para 9)
   - Taking action

7. a seven-word verb phrase meaning do something to show that you mean what you say instead of just talking about it (para 9)
   - Do something to show

8. a three-word phrasal verb meaning think that you are better or more important than someone else (para 10)
   - Think that you are

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. working a. manager
2. staff b. food
3. general c. service
4. starting d. conditions
5. friendly e. turnover
6. street f. salary
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7 Word-building

Complete the table using words from the text.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>noun</th>
<th>adjective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>addition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>success</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>respect</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>optimist</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>spectacle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>arrogance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8 Discussion

Discuss the statements.

• Waiters are important people. What’s the point of good food if the service is bad?
• It’s better to eat at home.
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### KEY

#### 2 Key words

1. maitre d’
2. stigma
3. hospitality
4. antipathy
5. foodie
6. vibe
7. menial
8. unsociable
9. implausible
10. arrogant

#### 3 Find the information

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

#### 4 Comprehension check

1. T
2. F
3. T
4. F
5. T
6. F

#### 5 Find the word

1. follow in someone’s footsteps
2. prioritize
3. blown away
4. showmanship
5. sit around
6. proactive
7. put your money where your mouth is
8. look down on

#### 6 Two-word phrases

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

#### 7 Word-building

1. additional
2. successful
3. respected
4. optimistic
5. spectacular
6. arrogant