

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

Level 3 • Advanced

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.

menial
maitre d'

stop-gap
implausible

foodie
scenario

hospitality
intangible

stigma
vocation

1. A _____ is the person in a restaurant who is in charge of the waiters.
2. A _____ job is one that is only temporary.
3. A _____ is a job that you do because you feel it is your purpose in life and for which you have special skills.
4. A _____ is a feeling that something is wrong or embarrassing in some way.
5. The _____ industry is one that looks after guests in hotels, restaurants etc.
6. A _____ is someone who enjoys eating different types of food and who talks a lot about food.
7. A _____ job is boring or dirty and is considered to be of low status.
8. A _____ is a situation that could possibly happen.
9. If something is described as _____, it is difficult to accept as true.
10. Something _____ cannot be measured and is difficult to describe or explain.

3 Find the information

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

1. What is the annual percentage of staff turnover (people leaving their job and being replaced by new staff) in the UK?
2. Which country is described as having 'famously friendly service'?
3. Which country sees serving in a restaurant as 'a poor person's job'?
4. What are the three main reasons that people leave their jobs in hospitality in the UK?
5. What is Corbin & King?
6. What is *The Infatuation*?

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

Level 3 • Advanced

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

The waiting staff in a restaurant can make or break a meal just as much as the people in the kitchen. Yet they are rarely celebrated – and quite often maligned

Clare Finney

15 January, 2020

- 1 Name a successful chef. That wasn't hard, was it? Now name a successful maitre d' or waiter or anyone else who works front of house in a restaurant. If you're struggling, you're not alone. Despite all our celebrity chefs and our obsession with food, most Brits still consider any restaurant job that involves dealing with customers as at best stop-gap and at worst a last resort.
- 2 In continental Europe, waiting is a respected vocation: 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 working the floor, doing it with skill, grace and knowledge." Slegg himself has managed a Michelin-starred restaurant, co-founded two of his own and now manages a four-star hotel, the Angel, in Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk – yet "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." It took Hersey years to commit to his dream of a hospitality career and his friends even longer to stop questioning when he would grow out of it. "They were always supportive, but I knew they were really wondering when I'd get a proper job. Then they came here and saw me running my team and they got it, slowly but surely."
- 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 claim to be foodies, yet the pressures of time and money mean that foodies often choose street-food stalls or no-reservations places rather than high-end restaurants. "People want to be fed," Hersey says, "and they don't want conversation." "We're food-focused, but we want the food quickly," agrees Caroline, a teacher from London. "Yet at the best restaurant I've ever been to, L'Enclume in Cumbria, it's the service I remember best."
- 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 and the way he moved around that restaurant." As his boss, the chef Adam Handling, puts it: "It is not about turning up and polishing glasses; 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 the image of service as undervalued, low-paid menial work persists in the UK is largely that it's true. "The working conditions are pretty shocking, and the money isn't great," Slegg says. "You're going to be put off before you've even considered it." 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 cited as the top three reasons for quitting.
- 7 You could make a case for the tipping culture that fuels the famously friendly service in the US, "but it's quite over the top," Caroline observes, "and the tipping can make it seem fake." Not least because without the tips, the wages of most waiting staff there are very low. The solution, Handling urges, is to pay staff properly, remove the kitchen/front-of-house divide and for every member of staff to have "a set goal, an ambition".
- 8 Something needs to change and fast. Brexit is here, and already the European staff upon whom the industry largely depends are leaving the country. A report for the British Hospitality Association concluded that, "in a scenario of free movement ending and no new immigration into the sector being allowed, the industry would need to recruit an additional 62,000 UK workers each year" – a goal it deems "deeply implausible".

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

Level 3 • Advanced

- 9 “You can sit around and moan, or you can be proactive,” says Zuleika Fennell, the managing director of Corbin & King, a restaurant group that, like Handling’s, is pioneering change in the sector. “We have to capture kids’ imaginations and retain staff.” With school programmes, a £30,000 starting salary for senior waiters and regular “rewards for excellence” for employees on both sides of the pass, Corbin & King puts its money where its mouth is.
- 10 Handling, too, is optimistic – but believes we need to let go of our excessive respect for French service and 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 As Hillary Reinsberg, the editor-in-chief of the New York-based restaurant guide *The Infatuation*, puts it: “Service these days isn’t about the silverware or the formality of a meal – it’s about paying attention to what diners actually want and making them feel welcome.” Such intangible skills are hard to articulate, says Slegg, “but when you get it right, it’s like hosting a dinner party every night, without cooking.”

© Guardian News and Media 2020
First published in *The Guardian*, 15/01/20

4 Comprehension check

Choose the best answer according to the text.

- In the UK, what is the general feeling about working as a waiter in a restaurant?
 - It is generally regarded as undervalued, low-paid menial work.
 - It is a respected vocation.
 - It is recommended by careers advisers to students who can’t get a degree.
- Why do few British people see a good waiter or maitre d’ at work?
 - because they generally want their food quickly
 - because they don’t like having conversations when they are eating
 - because it is very expensive to eat in restaurants where such people work
- What is the problem with the famously friendly service in the US?
 - It is sometimes too fast, and you are under pressure to finish your meal quickly.
 - It can be fake because the waiting staff just want you to leave them a tip.
 - You have to leave a tip, so eating out is very expensive.
- What solution does the editor-in-chief of *The Infatuation* recommend?
 - celebrating a British style of hospitality rather than a French one
 - better training, higher salaries and regular rewards for excellence
 - paying attention to what diners really want and making them feel welcome

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

Level 3 • Advanced

5 Find the word

Find the following words and phrases in the text.

1. a two-word noun phrase meaning *the final possibility after you have tried everything else to solve a problem* (para 1)
2. a four-word verb phrase meaning *do the same work or achieve the same success as someone before you* (para 2)
3. a noun meaning *a strong feeling of not liking someone or something* (para 3)
4. a noun meaning *a general feeling you get from a person or a place* (para 5)
5. a two-word adjectival phrase meaning *very impressed or excited* (para 5)
6. a noun meaning *the ability to do things in a lively and enthusiastic way that attracts attention* (para 5)
7. a two-word phrasal verb meaning *spend time doing nothing* (para 9)
8. a verb meaning *complain* (para 9)
9. a seven-word verb phrase meaning *do something to show that you mean what you say instead of just talking about it* (para 9)
10. a three-word phrasal verb meaning *think that you are better or more important than someone else* (para 10)

6 Phrases

Complete the phrases from the text using these words.

get

grow

proper

make

unsociable

over

1. _____ working hours
2. _____ a case for
3. _____ out of something
4. _____ the top
5. _____ something right
6. a _____ job

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

Level 3 • Advanced

7 Word-building

Complete the sentences using the correct form of the word in brackets at the end of each sentence.

1. George Hersey's friends were always _____. [SUPPORT]
2. People are food-_____ but want the food quickly. [FOCUS]
3. Service has an image as being _____, low-paid menial work. [VALUE]
4. The hospitality sector may need to recruit an _____ 62,000 UK workers a year. [ADD]
5. In continental Europe, waiting is a _____ profession. [RESPECT]
6. People can sit around and moan, or they can be _____. [ACT]

8 Discussion

Discuss the statements.

- Waiters are important people. What's the point of good food if the service is bad?
- Formal restaurants are awful.
- It's better to eat at home.

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

Level 3 • Advanced

KEY

2 Key words

1. maitre d'
2. stop-gap
3. vocation
4. stigma
5. hospitality
6. foodie
7. menial
8. scenario
9. implausible
10. intangible

3 Find the information

1. 30%
2. the US
3. the UK
4. unsociable working hours, low pay, lack of prospects
5. a restaurant group
6. a New York-based restaurant guide

4 Comprehension check

1. a
2. c
3. b
4. b

5 Find the word

1. last resort
2. follow in someone's footsteps
3. antipathy
4. vibe
5. blown away
6. showmanship
7. sit around
8. moan
9. put your money where your mouth is
10. look down on

6 Phrases

1. unsociable
2. make
3. grow
4. over
5. get
6. proper

7 Word-building

1. supportive
2. focused
3. undervalued
4. additional
5. respected
6. proactive