

Increase Your Average Check With One Cup of Joe?

The biggest challenge restauranters face is what I like to refer to as the "Double Whammy". In today's economy, people are not only eating out less but are eating less when they do elect to dine out. People are skipping appetizers, skipping dessert, and splitting meals. How is a restaurant owner to survive under these circumstances?

This solution actually begins at the end - the end of the meal that is. One of my biggest pet peeves in life is after having enjoyed a great meal; I am asked if I want dessert. Worse yet, when the server says "you are probably all too full for dessert, huh"? This is tantamount to a sales person saying "you wouldn't want to buy anything from me today, would you"? What this says to me is that the server is more interested in turning the table than on increasing the size of his or her gratuity through increased sales.

What if I told you that you could increase your average check by \$10 - \$20 by merely selling one extra cup of coffee? Would you be interested? I would bet that you would.

Here is how it works:

At the end of the meal, the server is trained to approach the table with a smile and an enthusiastic "Can I interest you in a great tasting cup of our freshly roasted coffee"? His or her head is nodding at the same time.

Experience tells me that if someone at the table orders a cup of coffee, at least one other will follow suit. It almost always happens that way. If you have enjoyed a nice dinner, and you order a cup of coffee, dessert is sure to follow. Let's say each cup of coffee sells between \$2.50 and \$3.00.

We have all seen the "Can I bring one dessert and several forks?" approach. Here is my favorite:

The server approaches the table with a small 5" plate with a small piece of three or four desserts on the plate. Each dessert has a frill pick in it. The tag line is "Here are a couple of our great tasting desserts. Now which one can I bring you?" The server is smiling and nodding the entire conversation. If the group has ordered a couple of cups of coffee, at least 1-2 desserts will be sold. Desserts easily sell between \$4 and \$6.

If the server is really good, there is an opportunity for an after dinner drink. After dinner drinks can easily sell for \$8 - \$10.

Ok, let's do the math. 2 cups of coffee = \$5.00. Two desserts = \$10. One after dinner drink = \$9. Conservatively speaking, we have just increased the average check by \$24 by just selling one more cup of coffee. If you were just able to accomplish this at 10 tables per night, revenues could increase by \$240 per night, \$1680 per week, \$6,720 per month, and so on.

Our job is not done, however. The real work to be done is in the training of the wait staff. They honestly do not care about average check or selling more unless they can see a direct correlation to their pocket book. On that extra \$24 check, they would receive an additional \$4.80 in gratuity if the rate were 20%. At 10 tables per night, they would take home an additional \$48 and \$240 per week if they worked a 5 day shift. That's a lot of cash to bring in for just selling one cup of coffee.

To get this rolling, I recommend starting with an incentive for the wait staff. Hit your foodservice distributor up for a case of coffee or dessert to kick this off to cover costs. If the server sells one cup of coffee, they get 25 cents. If they sell one dessert, they get 25 cents. If they sell both, they get \$1.00. Give prizes for the top performers. I don't think you'll have a problem with coffee sales with a promotion like this.

There is one other thing, however. Enjoy the additional profitability of your restaurant!

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