

HOSPITALITY IS A TEAM SPORT

By: Pasquale Martinelli

always thought being a chef strictly meant residing in the kitchen for 60+ hours creating new recipes, training staff members, monitoring food & labor cost, and keeping the menu relevant to the season.

Over time, as I interacted more with departments within the hospitality environment, such as the dining room bar, concierge, reception, bell service, among others, I realized the importance of keeping all operators closely aligned.

When everyone is involved and working in concert, the final goal of providing hospitality is attained. Though it's only achieved by operating as one team and oftentimes the chef sets the tone.

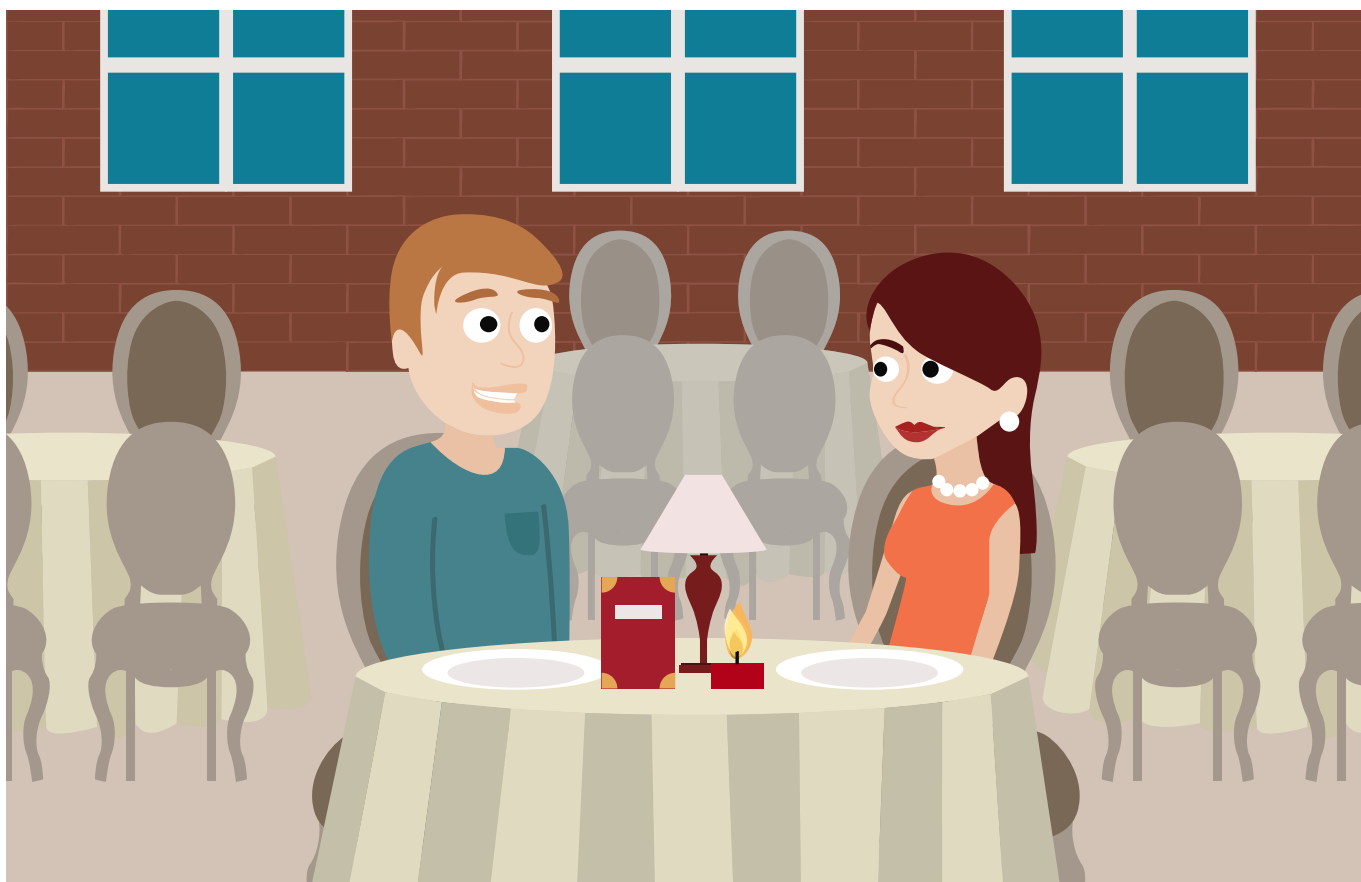
Very often, chefs make the mistake of creating an environment where an imaginary wall exists between the kitchen and other departments. It's this barrier that prevents us from moving toward the final goal as it blocks the rhythm.

With these imaginary walls, not only do the team members suffer, but more important the guests suffer. And believe me, guests can “feel” the disconnect.

For example, I remember an instance when my wife and I set out to have dinner at a well-known restaurant in Brooklyn, my hometown. We were anticipating a “great” experience from this particular place.

The experience began when I called the restaurant for directions, but they were unsure of where they were located – no cross street references. I could let that slide, but that immediately began negatively impacting the experience. After arriving, the wait staff were clearly not working in tandem. It was apparent their rhythm was off and the vibe of the restaurant wasn't comfortable.

The dinner portion was actually pretty enjoyable as the chef did a good job, but the





establishment as a whole failed to deliver a great experience – a hospitable one. And the sad part is experiences like these happen every day, but they should not.

When I create a new dish or design a menu, I always see it as one piece of the larger puzzle – the hospitality puzzle. I put a lot of effort in making sure the freshest ingredients are used to create a balance in flavors and colors, I'm very aware of food and labor costs, and I have a system to bring all operators together. Such a system ensures the front of the house has the proper descriptions to sell and deliver the dish with the same level of passion used to create it.

Just as it takes layers to create a dish, there are layers in the restaurant. As a chef, it's important to help everyone – cooks, servers, bartenders, hostesses, etc – to feel equally part of the team. Doing so improves their commitment to the final goal of providing a hospitable environment and delivering the product in the proper way.

In my view, it's the chef's responsibility to build an environment of harmony and serenity because our guests, who are ultimately our

customers, have the expectation of feeling welcomed and being restored. After all, the word restaurant means “to be restored.” Guests come to celebrate, not just to “eat,” and the environment should support their expectations.

When we act and operate with our guests in mind, specifically their desire to be “restored,” and all team members are working together to provide this type of environment, we provide the one thing that matters – hospitality.



Chef Pasquale Martinelli is

the owner of a private chef service called WarmPalate and proudly serves as the Corporate Executive Chef of Divella. Chef Martinelli was recognized by the American/Italian Chamber of Commerce for promoting the benefits of the Mediterranean diet and offering his cooking excellence by preparing delicious, healthy food.