

by Peter Cafaro



Reimagining Club Dining

A FRESH PERSPECTIVE ON FOOD AND BEVERAGE

For the past 25 years of my professional career and far longer back into the careers of some of you reading this article, the age-old question has been posed over and over again: Why does private club food and beverage lose money?

I have heard members make statements like, “Golf is the only thing that makes money,” “Food and beverage is the largest line item on our income statement, and it’s a loser,” and “Restaurants make money; why can’t we?”

Well, we all know that if clubs had a potential market of thousands of patrons, could require reservations, didn’t have to stay open and staffed regardless of the number of diners, and could have more than a single seating, and if staff were tipped, and on and on... the situation might be different.

Let’s look at this from a different angle.

We all know golf is the biggest loser at most clubs, meaning it takes up a significant amount of the annual operating budget when considering materials, maintenance and staffing. The dilemma is that members perceive that dues (the most extensive line item on the income statement) pay for golf but not anything else. Perhaps the reason for members’ confusion is because we charge for food and beverage.

What if we changed the model?

Make food and beverage a bit more like golf:

- Menu item prices include food and preparation costs (back of house) for only the members and are priced to cover the annual budget.
- Menu item prices for guests carry a “guest fee.”
- Servers are paid for by dining members for themselves and their guests as an extra service like carts or caddies. Members can walk to the kitchen to pick up their food if they choose to.
- Servers are tipped for their service and advice on menu selections, like caddies.
- Diners must reserve their “dine times” two weeks in advance and for no more than four in a group.
- Members and guests stagger arrival and ordering times so there is no “slow play.” Dining times are spread throughout the day to avoid overcrowding the restaurant, allowing staffing for the exact number of people eating at specific times.
- Diners pay close attention to the “conditions” in the dining room and are eager to make regular improvements to the facility, willingly paying for those upgrades.

We all know that none of this will ever happen, nor should it. But perhaps if this analogy is presented to those members who are regularly “advising their club professionals on how the club should be run,” we may be able to open some eyes and calm some angst. Dining, like golf, the pool, racquets, and fitness, is an amenity. Dues pay for amenities—dining is no exception. **BR**

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