

# Ideas to help with the hardest things...

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In this fast paced world, it becomes more important than ever to avoid overwhelming your customers by offering too many choices on your menu. Silence is golden... White space is good... You need to view your menu page as valuable real estate. Items that aren't earning their keep (contributing toward your bottom line) need to be very carefully considered.

## What are the two hardest things for an independent restaurateur to do?

# 1 - TAKE ITEMS OFF THE MENU

# 2 - RAISE MENU PRICES

Why is it so hard to take as many items off your menu as you add to it? You've put faces to each of those menu items, haven't you? Even though you don't sell many of those items or you don't make much money on them, it is still sometimes difficult to take a hard line and remove them. You have a sweetheart of a person, "Millie", that just loves this item. There is the nice man "Joe" that comes in every lunch hour and always orders that item.... You couldn't possibly take them off the menu.

Well, Millie or Joe will get over it. If you must keep those items on hand, at least get credit for it, saying they are available "just for them". That is what you are doing now, but you don't get the credit AND it clutters up your menu. That clutter makes it more difficult to market your higher profit items - which keep you in business and prospering. If sales of a particular menu item represents less than 3% of your volume, you need to decide whether you should keep that menu item around or not. (Probably not!)

Start with the end in mind. Think about building a house. You have looked through piles of magazines, visited the parade of homes and looked through any other resources you might find. Before you build your home, you will typically go to an architect and lay out the structural plan. You decide how many bedrooms and bathrooms you'll have, decide if it is one floor or two. You choose if you will have a fireplace or a basement. You've created a floor plan.

Once the house is built, you move in. Surprise! You have too much furniture... You wouldn't (I hope) cram it all into the new space. Some pieces work. Some will be sold at a garage sale or donated to Goodwill. In order to make your new layout work, you will make decisions about whether each piece stays or goes. A great living room set becomes clutter if it is wedged between too many other pieces and there is no room to "live".

Before doing your next menu revision, try the following exercise. Lay out your menu architecture. How many categories? How many items in each category? If 30% of your menu items are pruned, leaving your best items both in quality and profitability, the additional white space will help promote those items you truly want to sell. Just like your new home, lay out your plan and work backwards. All too often, it is easy to take what you currently serve, add a few new items and then wonder why you aren't more profitable. An overcrowded, cluttered menu just feels like "too much work" to try to decide what to order, don't you think?

Peace and Quiet - while you increase your profits.

**NEXT MONTH...**  
How to Raise Prices  
Without Causing a Riot

