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In Your Face

Dealing with Guest Incivility and Outbursts

By Howard Riell

If you are anxious over what to do if an angry guest erupts in your restaurant, you are not alone. It is one of the most disturbing events facing operators. Here are some suggestions on how to manage these incidents

I Hear You

“Acknowledge the guest’s complaint or issue causing the behavior.” recommends veteran restaurateur and consultant Arlene Spiegel, president of Arlene Spiegel & Associates in New York City. “Apologize for the mistake or inconvenience. Offer to solve the problem, within reason. For example, replace food or drink, change the table or server, or comp dessert and coffee.” She feels managers and servers should both be

empowered to make these accommodations. When all else fails and it becomes clear that the guest cannot be satisfied, the manager should once again apologize and pick up the check, Spiegel says. “A follow-up phone call to the unhappy guest from the owner or GM the next day may put some salve on the wound.”

Ejecting a Guest

When the determination is made that a guest needs to be shown the door, Spiegel recommends this approach: “Say, ‘I am so sorry we are not able to make you happy. However, we also have a responsibility to our other guests that are being disturbed. I suggest you leave now.’” What not to do, she adds, is “ignore them or give them dirty looks.” RS&G