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Sommelier

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THE SOMMELIER

Material docente de uso interno en centros de enseñanza

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1. Sommelier: humaneness and professional competence

The Sommelier should be a person able to propose himself with the utmost politeness and kindness; these qualities should be supported by a good way with words and, in particular, by a clearness in speaking. Then, the right gestures, the correct manner of talking and the measured elegance in the movements, without any kind of theatrics, are the behavioral models planned to build up the modern profession of the Sommelier.

The knowledge of the languages is very important when a sommelier is working in high-level restaurants or hotels, and also for foreign contacts as visiting wineries, establishing work contacts and even to attend international meetings about food-and-wine connoisseurship.

The Sommelier is spending most of his time dealing with the public, so he should know how to cope with every kind of person, starting from the very relaxed client and finishing with the most demanding customer. All in all, a good psychological intuition allows the Sommelier to create a special feeling with the client, even with the guest very hard to please.

2. Sommelier: general knowledge and technique

A good general knowledge is at the root of every profession, in particular for a Sommelier who is working, fairly often, in high-level restaurants or hotels in which he is going to deal with people of all cultural levels. Working in the hospitality sector, the basic and specific knowledge should be about food-and-wine connoisseurship.

The Sommelier should know very well the fundamental concepts about viticulture, enology, winemaking system of distinct typologies of wines (sparkling, white, red, sweet, and fortified), spirits, harmony between foods and wines, and wine service technique.

Scrupulous punctuality and self-control are priceless qualities, underlining, once more time, the importance of the diplomacy, the autonomy, and the capacity to delegate, in certain cases, his powers to the collaborators. Everything must be made in accordance with the roles, the hierarchy of the workplace and following the more common rules of the professional ethics.

3. Sommelier: planning a new wine cellar

In this case, the essential knowledge of the wines must be partnered with several competences in the economic, organizational, and managerial sectors.

First, the Sommelier should supervise the room and verify the existence of the fundamental requirements for ageing bottles of wine.

Second, he should establish that there are not bad conditions, such as the closeness to the underground – in big cities – which would cause dangerous vibrations for the wines.

Third, once determined the ideal conditions of the cellar, the Sommelier will work out the economic plan based on the market and the clients, keeping in mind the level of the workplace and the type of expected services. At the end of the research, he will decide the marketing strategy for the realization of the plan.

4. Sommelier: wine cellar management, purchase, and stock-in-trade

The salient points on which organizing the purchase and management of the wine cellar are the following:

- Typologies of clients
- Spending power of the customers
- Market trends
- Sale's potentials
- Store of wines
- Wine list Menu

The purchase of beverages, in particular wines and spirits, entails enormous expenses; therefore, it is a very delicate operation in the management of the wine cellar.

During the selection of the labels, the Sommelier needs to taste the wines, to evaluate the qualities and their price-quality relation. As regards the organization of the wine cellar, the Sommelier should perfectly manage the control and rotation of the stock. The bottles must be divided as concerns country, region, and typology of the wines.

5. Sommelier and customer

After working in the backstage of the establishment, in the office and in the wine cellar, the Sommelier will enter the dining room where he will deal with the clients by showing most of his skills.

One of the main functions of the Sommelier is to be on the same wavelength as the customer, just to be able to meet his requirements.

The sommelier should know all the details about communication and sale; he will have to improve his professional competence either by attending refresher courses or with work experience.

The last important requirement for a professional Sommelier is to perfectly know the situation of the bottles stock in the wine cellar.

6. Sommelier: the customer is always right

The sommelier could be in an awkward position, and he needs to be able to come off well.

The first case can be the one in which the client has chosen a particular menu and the Sommelier has suggested the wines to combine with foods to optimize the gustative-olfactory sensations of the products. But the client does not want anything to do with these wines and he is ordering wines of completely distinct typology. The sommelier, after kindly explaining the reasons of his suggestions, will accept the client request.

Another situation, which can create some misunderstandings, is when the client has complained of a defect in the wine, but as a matter of fact it is one of its olfactory or gustative peculiarity. The Sommelier will try to explain the thing, but even this time, he will have to take note of the situation and change the bottle.

The Sommelier will have to do the same thing in the case in which the client, even admitting that the wine does not have any defects, affirms that he does not like the wine, maybe for some perfume or special taste typical of raisin wines or wines aged in barrels.

Never forget that the client is the most important fortune of every commercial business, because at the end he is the person who is going to pay the bill.

7. Sommelier in the wine-bar

In a wine-bar, people are tasting wines in an informal environment and this fact permits to the Sommelier a much more relaxed and confidential contact with the clients. In this background, the attitude and the requirements are different compared to a high-level restaurant.

In a restaurant a wine could be, sometimes, a pretext to combine with food, whereas in a wine-bar is the opposite: a simple gastronomic suggestion like fingers food is the opportunity to taste wine.

The Sommelier, who is working in a wine-bar, should be professionally competent, but in the same time he can be more cheerful and helpful, much more direct to suggest the clients and also much quicker with the wine service.

8. Sommelier in wine shop

The wine shop is getting, more and more, the ideal place to buy a bottle of wine, because the client can fulfill the whole information about the products to buy. The profession of Sommelier can be developed efficiently in the catering service, but nowadays the Sommelier, with his own fund of knowledge, can also work in a wine shop.

The Sommelier in a wine shop must listen to the client much more carefully because he has requested to suggest, if necessary, a fine wine, that's to say a very expensive product. Logically, the Sommelier must recommend several other options to compare to the expensive wine.

If the Sommelier is not present in the moment in which the bottle will be uncorked and tasted, he should give information about wine service temperature, the more suitable glass, the ideal recipe to pair to the wine, etc. Obviously, all these information must be given with tact and without appearing as a wiseacre person.

9. Sommelier in supermarket

The data of the sale of the wines in bottle tell us that, either in Europe or America (Canada, United States and Latin America), 45% of bottled wine is sold on the shelves of shopping malls (supermarket, hypermarket, etc.). They can offer wines at lower prices, partly because they propose the self-service.

When the Sommelier is a sales executive, he should apply to the best the sales techniques, but generally this kind of job is almost the same as for the wine shop.

The Sommelier is also the responsible for the so-called lay-out of the bottles of wines, more specifically when a winery is paying extra-money to sponsor their own products. He also can decide with the manager of the winery what is the best way to attain good goals in this period.

10. Sommelier and public relations

In the modern wine world, the Sommelier is not only the clever “*cupbearer*” or “*bottlebearer*” of centuries ago, who was capable of perceiving scents and flavors in the wines that were unknown to the common people.

Nowadays, more and more frequently the Sommelier is also working out of the restaurants and wine shops; he is joining meeting in which is invited to express his own opinion, he is attending television or radio programs where he is helping to spread the concepts of food-and-wine connoisseurship, and still, he can write on reviews or journals.

His professional competence is requiring further studies and research just to extend with work experience and meetings. Starting from the winemaker, passing through the kitchen, and arriving at a publisher, the professional Sommelier must plan to keep contact with all the people belonging to the food-and-wine connoisseurship department.



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