



HAPPY NEW YEAR!

THE CLAIRE DIARIES

4TH QUARTER 2007

Hi All,

Things I have learned 4Q of 2007: For those of you who didn't read the body of the email. I thought it would be fun to include some of my client's children dressed up for Halloween as part of pictures of the quarter. These sweetie pies are all so precious that I hope you enjoy what Halloween meant to them.

Water bottle sponsorships—I worked an event where water bottles were sold as a sponsorship. Part of the sponsorship is to display the water throughout for attendees to consume. No big deal, right? Wrong, and here is where it went wrong. The sponsor chose a clear bottle for their water along with a big white label. What happened is nobody saw the water. The bottle presentation was so monochromatic that it didn't catch peoples' attention. The upset sponsor felt his water didn't get the visual attention it deserved. Based on this experience, make sure the water has a colored label or bottle to make it stand out.

While working a Christmas party last month I ordered a crostini-style passed hor's d. This particular crostini had shaved beef on it. The chef sent out crostini (no food cost) with the smallest, and I do mean ssmmmaalllll, sliver of beef on it. So when you took a bite, all you tasted was crostini. Make sure when you order any type of crostini that you mention you want the toppings to be in proportion to the bread as this happens more often than you think.

While I am on the subject of proportion we are going to discuss silverware. While I was eating with one of my better known foodie friends we were tasting sorbet in a dessert restaurant. They gave us this beautiful scoop of grapefruit sorbet in a small little dish WITH A FULL SIZE SPOON. This looked very awkward - the big spoon with this small dessert. Silverware size should be in proportion with the foods you are serving. This is actually happening everywhere across the board.

Last diaries I wrote about small dessert shots and I do believe they are here to stay. Personally, I am a touch over them, but I understand their place in the culinary world. Because they are trendy, chefs are wanting to do them. This is fine, but tell your catering manager you want a mixture of dessert shots ALONG WITH some other fuller-looking desserts (for example cakes) to make the station stand out more and give it texture. A dessert station should make you feel like a kid in a candy store—you won't get that feeling if everything is one dimensional or one size.

BARS: I know that I have crabbed a lot about bars this year but only because I am seeing a lot of wrong with execution. I have inventoried over 25 events worth of bars this year and have spent an equal amount of time talking to beverage manager and bartenders at various hotel chains. Below is the BEST, and I promise you, the BEST and most efficient method to get an accurate count on bars.

1. Every bar will have its own inventory sheet. Not just one for the entire evening of bars.
2. During the event, the bartender saves all beer caps and wine corks from his bar. Just give the bartender 2 containers—one for domestic and one for imported beer caps.
3. Replenishments needed during the event would go on the bartender's individual inventory sheet.

4. End of the evening is easy—just count beer caps; wine corks and inventory the liquor on their individual sheet. Bartenders then have to give their sheet to the person who is restocking the alcohol so they can count the booze against the sheet when they restock. The person doing inventory has another sheet in which there are several lines to put down the bartender's name and inventory. He will have all bars on one sheet at the end of the night, and the individual bartender can take his sheet back and give it to the person restocking liquor to make sure nothing got lost along the way.
5. Negotiate up front how to handle soft drinks and water. I prefer to have a glass of soda poured and then hand the rest of the can to the guest to enjoy. How about sodas used for mixed drinks? Many times you are being charged for them, so discuss that you will pay for 20% of the soda cans used and the rest of the cans of sodas aren't charged as we are assuming they are used for mixed drinks.

This, my friend, is THE MOST ACCURATE way of doing inventory.

The folks at Aerion—my super sonic biz jet customers—are partnering with another company to sell their aircraft overseas. We have a large model that was in London and needed to go to Moscow with a 5-day turn around period. It didn't go to Moscow. You know why? Because in order to clear Russian customs you need to have a minimum of 2 to 3 weeks. Even if you offer to pay "rush" charges, it isn't happening.

Thanks to my dear customers at Honeywell, Kim Johnsen and Kathy Phoenix, I had the opportunity to work in Prague, Czech the last week in November. This is what I learned:

- The style is SKINNY, and I don't mean skinny like we see over here. I mean skinny as you need to be greased up to even get these pants ON! Women all wear their skinny jeans tucked into stylish boots and everyone looks great. No big butts strutting around in their skinny jeans, those women who are wearing them have the right to do so. For me, personally? I wouldn't fit in the category on my best day.
- You will see very few people walking around Prague sporting iPod or MP3 players. Apple is pretty much non-existent over there. People just don't have the money.
- Conversion of money—folks, this is important as I have never had this happen to me while working in a foreign country. All the paperwork and contracts were done in Euros—ok, fine by me, but Czech IS NOT PART of the Euro-taking world. They have their own currency...so what did they do when it is time to sign off on banquet checks? Have it all in Czech koruna, a.k.a. their currency. This threw me for a loop, so I got out xe.com and converted it to Euro. Well, it is quite a bit higher because the conversions are being done off the HOTEL's conversion rate and not the national exchange, resulting in the hotel making money off the conversion. For example, if I were a guest going to the front desk to convert money I'd never get a great conversion because the hotel makes money by offering this service. It is one thing for an individual guest and another thing to do it for an entire meeting invoice. This could have ended up costing my client an additional \$5000 USD

on their bill in conversions alone. I firmly explained to the hotel I would pay in the Czech currency but it would have to equal to what we agreed to in Euros. PLUS—big plus here—that is what was agreed to via the contracts. I am proud to say I left their lovely country with a clean invoice.

- Cell phones are popular and lots of people have them in Europe, but they are used more for texting, not for calling. If we think we text a lot in America, it is nothing compared to the Europeans. Calling is just too expensive.

For the first time ever, I am doing a best 2007. I was too chicken to put my “Needs Improvements” list in my diaries, but it is available on my blog rxforcatering.com/blog.

Congrats to those making my best of 2007 list:

Best Banquet Menus Off Premise—Tony Conway Legendary Events. Pay particular attention to his salad selections. NBAA Honeywell Press Conference.

Most Creative Florals—J Patrick Designs.

Best Banquet Menus Hotel—Honestly, I have to tell you this is a big fat no one! 99% of the banquet menus I get are redundant, not thoughtful, boring and you all should be ashamed of yourselves.

Most Creative Food—Whirled Peas out of Denver. Taking a marble, heating it up and then cooking fish with a blow torch. Spring convention CoreNet Global Association.

Best Pastry Chef—George from South Pointe Mountain Resort in Phx Arizona; this guy does amazing creative, beautiful chocolates. Winter events Honeywell Aerospace.

This is shared with Aaron and Nick—Pastry chefs from The Chocolate Bar in Decatur, Georgia. You want over the top with creativity and interesting flavor palettes? These two are your guys.

Best Banquet Staff—Banquet staff at South Pointe Mountain Resort, take a bow. Winter events Honeywell Aerospace.

Best Team Experience—Working with the culinary and banquet team to give the client a great visual and taste weekend; Four Seasons Hotel, Atlanta. The Coca-Cola Company for Final 4.

Funniest Chefs to work with—The two sous chefs from Inn at Palmetto Bluff. These guys are great and food was awesome. HCC Life Benefits Corporation.

Best Looking and most THOUGHTFUL Buffet Sets—Banquet Team at Four Seasons Hotel, Atlanta. Coca-Cola Final 4. This one deserves some extra stars, as we just don't see this like we should.

Most Creative Mixed Drink Menu—Beverage Team. Four Seasons Hotel, Atlanta. Coca-Cola Final 4.

Best Design Experience—Ian Lea Designs. 2007 Paris Airshow, chalet design. You can see this at rxforcatering.com/paris .

Best Creative Culinary Design Experience—Aaron from The Chocolate Bar in Decatur. PGA Tour of Champions for The Coca-Cola Company.

Most Comprehensive Catering Proposal—Affairs to Remember Atlanta, *This needs an honorable mention as this was the most comprehensive menu proposal I have seen in years.

Best Restaurant Meal(s) I had this year—Le Table at Joel Rubichons in Paris & The Gibson Inn in Apalachicola, Florida.

Most Fun While on a Site Inspection of 2007—Universal Studios Orlando. This was so much fun, and New York; New York is a wonderful networking space to host a party. Plus, they have a couple of new attractions in this space that makes this a sure-fire event space on every level.

Extra credit—actually goes to my high school English teacher, Irene Lorigan. As many of you know, my grammar is awful. No one knows better than Mrs. Lorigan as she gave me a “D” in 11th grade English, although she will tell you I earned that D. I still visit her when I go to Western PA. It is at the very active age of 86 that I walked into her home this past holiday and asked her to correct this version of the diaries for me. She gave me a big smile and ran for the dreaded red pen. Readers, I have to tell you my very wise English teacher still has it.

Folks, as we are at the top of a new year I want to thank you all for your support in 2007. I will leave you with one quote. I was working with Angela Roberts from the Omni and telling her about someone who upset me. She told me “When people show you who they are...believe them.” I thought this was really good and helped me see through my experience. Angela, I say thank you.

Top of 2008 to everyone.

With Appreciation,

Claire R. Gould

Owner

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