Author: **WhiteEagle, Summer D.**

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STUDENT:

NAME: Summer WhiteEagle **DATE: May 15, 2014**

ADVISOR: (Committee Chair if MS Plan A or EdS Thesis or Field Project/Problem):

NAME: Wendy Dittmann **DATE: May 18, 2014**

This section to be completed by the Graduate School
This final research report has been approved by the Graduate School.

Director, Office of Graduate Studies: **DATE:**

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Abstract

This research study was intended to determine the state of the FOH staff training in the restaurant industry and any perceived value or relationship this training has on influencing consumer wine choices in restaurants. A literature review was conducted to determine the state of the FOH staff training from the restaurant industry perspective. A semi-structured survey was created to interview FOH staff from the restaurant industry to research further the perceived value or relationship wine training has on influencing consumer choices in restaurants. As a result of this research there are some very positive indicators that the FOH staff training does in fact influence consumer wine choices. However, the research also points to a need for modification in how the restaurant industry values FOH staff training and its structure. Further research is recommended to quantify the perceptions that FOH staff hold towards their perceived influence on consumer wine choices, as a result of wine training.

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I would like to acknowledge my father, and his belief that education is the catalyst to success. Without his influence at a young age to attend college, I would not be the professional person I am today in a career that I enjoy. I would also like to acknowledge my mother, who at different times in my life asked me simple questions that steered my path towards starting my education in hospitality and furthering my development through a master's program. Their support and influence has made it possible for me to find my current state of happiness and professional success.

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Chapter I: Introduction

After the economic crash in the United States in 2008, the landscape of how Americans spent their disposable income changed. Although analysts consider the economy to be in recovery mode, disposable income spending has not returned to the days before the 2008 recession. This continued reduction in disposable income spend has impacted the restaurant industry by limited increase and its overall recovery to pre-recession growth. During difficult economic times, luxuries such as dining in restaurants and enjoying a glass of wine are considered non-essentials and are the first items to be cut from a household budget.

The $683.4 billion restaurant industry which employs 13.5 million individuals that rely on this disposable income spend, has felt the impact of the change in economy (NRA, 2014). For Americans, "the key factor," according to the National Restaurant Association's Sales and Economic Forecast Report of 2014, "holding them back is the lack of confidence in their financial situations" (NRA, 2014, p.1). Americans, according to the NRA Report, will gain confidence, and thus increase spending when they see an increase in the availability and security of jobs (NRA, 2014). This does not mean though, that the restaurant industry has not seen some incremental growth. However, a "large portion of growth is driven by cash on hand, steady gains in disposable personal income," which are essential to boosting restaurant growth (NRA, 2014, p. 9) which has not returned to pre-crash levels.

Although the state of the restaurant industry is relatively flat in the United States, there was an increase of households with incomes greater than $75,000, up 3.0 percent in 2011, which marked the largest increase since 1999 and the first gain since 2007. Higher income households represent a key demographic of wine consumers and 57 percent of the restaurant industry spending (NRA, 2014). An increase in their numbers means an increase in restaurant spend and

subsequently increased wine sales in restaurants (NRA, 2014). With such incremental growth, the competition for these dollars that have entered the restaurant industry is fierce. Consumers have not completely freed themselves from their "recession rut" which directly impacts their willingness to spend (NRA, 2014, p.2). The dollar spent away from household necessities is carefully guarded and must return a greater value back to the consumer than it did prior to the recession. Why? During the recession, households returned back to the roots of their existence within the home when they curbed spending. When the home is threatened and could be lost due to a reduction in household income, spending on non-essentials is drastically reduced. This could be seen in the 2009 negative spend in the restaurant industry that had not occurred at such a level in the 44 years of Restaurant Industry analysis done by the NRA (NRA, 2014). We see residual effects of this threat on the home, in the locally sourced food movement, and the increase in consumer food and beverage knowledge from self-education.

With competition for the consumer dollar in this industry an ongoing challenge, restaurants must turn inward to find ways to influence consumers to spend their dollar within their establishment. Not only does a consumer need to choose the restaurant to patron. They also must be influenced to maximize their available spend. Today's wine consumer has an increased need for value, but also has evolved in their base demographics and holds an escalated knowledge base that was not present before the economic downturn. The front-of-the-house (FOH) staff, who has the most direct contact with the consumer, is key to influencing the changed landscape of the wine consumer.

Within this study, the focus is to determine the current state of the FOH staff training in the restaurant industry and the perceived value or relationship this training has on influencing consumer wine choices in restaurants.

Statement of the Problem

With the dollar still preciously guarded and growth in the industry relatively flat for increased spend; the restaurants within this industry must look for new ways to grow. With a limited amount of new dollars entering the industry, restaurants in essence need to steal an existing dollar away from competition or increase consumer confidence that their choice to increase their spend in a restaurant is valid. Either way, consumer confidence in a restaurant and their subsequent staff will be key to individual restaurant growth.

This study will help determine the state of the FOH staff training in the restaurant industry and any perceived value or relationship this training has on influencing consumer wine choices in restaurants. If FOH staff are able to influence consumer wine choices through increased training, they can impact restaurant revenues and growth during these economic times when growth is relatively stagnate. Restaurants that continue to increase revenues and grow will continue to remain in business and survive in this industry that is very important to the United States economy.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine the state of the FOH staff training that exists currently in the industry, and any perceived value or relationship this training has on influencing consumer wine choices in restaurants. This study will look closely at the types of current FOH staff training being offered, and how this training can influence consumer wine choices in restaurants. The study will also offer suggestions for FOH staff training improvement or methods that can have an impact on consumer wine choices in restaurants.

Assumptions of the Study

The general assumption is that with increased confidence due to training, staff will be able to influence consumers to increase their restaurant spend and contribute in a positive manner to the experience that the guest has within the dining experience. With a positive dining experience from knowledgeable staff or through a positive wine and food pairing, guests will have a positive view of their overall experience and return as guests to a particular restaurant. These guests who have a positive experience, will increase their personal spend and will influence others to patron a particular restaurant where they had a positive dining experience. Thus increasing restaurant revenues on a continuous basis and providing growth within the industry that has remained relatively stagnate.

Limitations of the Study

This study is focused on wine training specifically offered to FOH staff and does not consider other training offered on other subjects to these employees. The study is from the perspective of FOH staff and those that received wine training at some point in their restaurant career path. It does not consider the actual consumer response with a survey of the consumer perception of trained and untrained staff. Rather it is focused on the perceptions of FOH staff and their reflection on training they received and its influence on the wine consumer.

This study is also focused on subjective observations and perceptions, and does not offer actual metrics on increased spend by consumers as the result of wine training. The scope of this study does not encompass an analysis of restaurant financials, pre- and post-wine training to prove or disprove FOH staff increased knowledge, skills or abilities. The study is focused on the relationship between training and its impact on consumer wine choices in restaurants.

Methodology

In the subsequent Chapters, a literature review will be conducted to determine the generalized position within the restaurant industry on the perceived value of training's influence on wine choice by consumers. This review will also discuss the types of training that is prevalent in the industry and how management plays a role in driving FOH staff training. In addition, research will be conducted in the form of semi-structured interviews with individuals that have experienced or administered training in restaurants to further analyze training's impact on consumer wine choices in restaurants. Results of these interviews will be discussed, as well as limitations of this study and recommendations for subsequent research will be offered.

Chapter II: Literature Review

This study was intended to determine the state of the FOH staff training in the restaurant industry and any perceived value or relationship this training has on influencing consumer wine choices in restaurants. A literature review was conducted to determine the state of the FOH staff training from the restaurant industry perspective. This review sought to determine the current wine consumer in restaurants, the state of the training offered to FOH staff and how it was structured, as well as the perceived benefits of the FOH staff training and influence on consumer wine choices.

The Restaurant Wine Consumer of Today

The landscape of consumer spend has changed in recent years due to economic hardship felt in almost every household. "Consumers are still wary of economic conditions, but it seems that they're tired of feeling poor" (Guenther, 2013, para. 7). Although growth in the restaurant industry has remained flat, there is hope that the industry will rebound and find ways to grow, as consumer confidence returns (NRA, 2014). When it comes to the wine consumer of today, it is a general understanding that there is an increase in wine knowledge among restaurant guests. "Customers are smarter and so much more well informed that they were five years ago about wine – you cannot pull the wool over their eyes with something of poor quality at a higher price" (Stagg, 2013, p. 33). With a consumer that seeks value in these challenging economic times and a more educated palate to please, restaurants must seek ways to remain competitive and continue to grow their individual establishment revenues.

In addition to a more educated and value driven consumer, the classic restaurant wine consumer has evolved in its base demographics. Traditionally, the Baby Boomer (ages 49-67) have driven the wine consumer market, yet research is showing that Millennials (ages 19-36) are

becoming the largest and most frequent buyers of wine (Guenther, 2013). The Millennials are finding non-traditional venues and more occasions to drink wine, which has caused the wine industry to grow into segments of uncharted waters like ball games and concerts (Guenther, 2013; Newman 2013). A Silicon Valley Bank report indicates that "your Millennial customers will embrace less expensive labels from less-traditional regions and countries" ("U.S. 2014 Wine Forecast," 2014, para 9). According to John Gillespie, President of the Wine Market Council, the new wine consumers, "are drinking wine much more frequently" and due to the demands of the Millennial and Generation Xer's, "wine is finding its way into places and times we thought were previously unavailable" (Newman, 2013, para 3).

With this shift in who is consuming wine, the more educated and value conscience wine consumer doesn't "just want a drink, they want an experience" (John, 2011, p. 43). With the average wine consumer unwilling to risk not receiving value for their dollar spent on wine, restaurants have the prime opportunity to help consumers choose wines while dining out (John, 2011). With this opportunity still available amongst a more educated consumer base, the need for an analysis of the state of the FOH staff training that can impact consumer wine choices in restaurants is required.

The State of the Front-of-the-House Staff Training in Restaurants

The restaurant industry spends more on new hires than the average across other industries and faces employee turn-over that is almost double the national average (Naylor, 2013). A common concern amongst operators is that training costs money and time, and is wasteful in the long run (John, 2011). They feel with this large expense already required for basic operational sustainability, investing more in wine training is wasteful when employees leave without returning the dollars spent on training into actual increased revenues (Naylor, 2013). However,

another argument is that by investing in staff, they are more likely to feel valued and stay with a restaurant when they are being developed and have a career path ahead of them.

In addition, some see that the FOH staff wine training as a circle with components that influence each other so dramatically that all need to be considered when developing a wine training program and that task can seem overwhelming for restaurant leadership. These components start with management support, involve the staff being trained, the guests themselves and support tools that bring the efforts together.

The first focus begins with management. "From poorly written wine lists to an inadequately trained service staff, management's lack of commitment to selling wine comes back to haunt them" (Alleruzzo, 2003, p. 26). Management does not commit to selling wines and thus staff do not take the initiative to educate themselves, as a result staff are tentative and afraid to suggest wine out of fear that they may not have an answer to subsequent questions or are not competent enough to demonstrate proper wine service etiquette (Alleruzzo, 2003). In turn, many potential wine consumers are novices and afraid to "sound foolish in the presence of a staff member who they expect to be knowledgeable. That fear causes guests to skip what might be a perfect glass or bottle of wine to complement their meal and order another beverage or none at all" (Alleruzzo, 2003, p. 26). Training must also be focused not only on wine fundamentals, but also on interpersonal skills involved in proper service (Strenk, 2012). With the beverage revolution upon us, trainings for staff must be adapted to respond to industry trends and demands, along with the methods of instruction that will reach trainees of different levels.

The support tools must be present as well, in a wine training program. Technology can be utilized along with the different methods and mediums for training, but a focus should always be placed on service. Accountability is also part of the support toolbox. When staff are held

accountable for the knowledge received through wine training, by having homework and quizzes that correspond with their training, as well as being asked to demonstrate proper wine service and knowledge back on the job, they take a more serious approach to training (Strenk, 2013).

With the trend towards simpler food menus, wine lists can correspondingly become more simple and limited in their offerings, thus reducing what staff needs to be trained on. When wine lists are guaranteed to offer wines that pair with the food menu, and the FOH staff is able to tell an engaging story about a particular wine from training, the combined appeal can significantly impact the success of influencing efforts by staff (Sims, 2007). Finding and creating "factual stories about characters" involved with the wine, enhance the entertainment and the overall wine experience for guests (Stagg, 2013, p. 34)

"As consumers become more sophisticated in their tastes and demands for service, those restaurants that neglect investments in their workforce may find themselves less able to compete in the current economy" (Batt, Lee & Lakhani, 2014, p. 20). A requirement to connecting through training with their workforce is by offering FOH wine training that addresses some of the challenges and barriers in training. One challenge is training staff that are not 21 years old or do not drink wine, to illustrate the wine components found in aroma and taste, as well as the effectiveness of food pairings. Some wine training programs have adapted and use online programs that offer visuals and graphics to help trainees grasp complex subjects (Berta, 2008). In addition, the frequency of trainings has been seen as adding value to wine training programs. Weekly yet brief staff trainings pre-shift that include tastings, reinforce knowledge obtained during longer and more formal training sessions (Weinberg, 2011).

Although some have argued that it is impossible to know what you are getting when it comes to wine until had, the general understanding of wine is that its complimentary components

are ideal to enhancing a food item (Hammond, Barber & Almanza, 2009). It is impossible for a consumer to know exactly what a wine will be like from packaging or menu descriptors. Thus consumers rely on staff to help them process information from their own wine knowledge, preferences and usage experience to make a wine choice (Hammond et al., 2009). This reliance creates the opportunity for well-trained FOH staff to influence consumer wine choices.

The Structure of Front-of-the-House Staff Training

Management has a duty to describe the outcomes and benefits that reflect the rewards of participation in FOH staff training. In order to meet the needs of the evolving wine consumer, management also must change its staff training programs to the target market and remain focused on the competitive advantage they are aiming for in regards to their training programs. "Training and development isn't just about recruitment and retention it also drives sales. Employees resent training which doesn't feedback immediately into an employee's role" (Naylor, 2013, p. 86). Thus management is tasked with outlining the rewards of participating in wine training, including demonstrating from the onset of training that by influencing consumers to purchase wine they are in control of their personal income. When average guest checks increase, the corresponding customary tip also increases and rewards the employee for their efforts to influence consumer wine purchases.

Some suggestions to create and structure a success wine training programs starts with the wine lists themselves. They should be easy to read and understand, and verbiage coupled with professional wine service techniques must be explained and practiced to build confidence (Alleruzzo, 2003). Wine and food pairing methods must be taught to enhance the guest experience and staff must "personally witness the synergy between fork and cork" (Magyarics, 2012, p. 43).

In addition, beyond wine fundamentals, wine service etiquette, wine and food pairings suggestions, the story of the wine has been a key component in successful wine training programs. Not only do the staff need the confidence to sell a particular wine, informative tid-bits about wine that tell a story or bring a personality that is related to the consumer is a driving factor in consumer wine choice (Sims, 2007).

"Customers have already researched the brand, the latest product and all of its features," in turn management needs, "to keep their employees educated to the same level of knowledge" (Krell, 2013, p. 58) to have an influence on consumer wine choices. Trainings have to be adapted to the target consumer market and be paced to the level of the trainee. Various mediums can be utilized to accomplish training outcomes from PowerPoint presentations, flash cards, lecture, demonstrations, field trips, discussions and online tools that can be used as a references back on the job and at leisure to enhance the educational process (McClaskey, 2013). When training is considered an investment and not an expense, they can contribute to a culture of sustainable and reliable high performance guest service.

The Benefits of Front-of-the-House Staff Training

The restaurant industry faces employee turn-over that is almost double the national average, yet a benefit of training has been seen as a solution to decreasing the expensive costs of new hires (Naylor, 2013). The restaurant industry spends more on new hires than the average across other industries and is focused on restaurant procedure compliance and food hygiene (Naylor). However, studies show that, "businesses that have carried out training in the past year are 20-30% more likely to have increased year-on-year sales," and find that business success is directly linked to the investment in training (Naylor, 2013, p. 86).

In addition, when staff are trained properly and is confident "they spend less time at tables because they know what they need to do and they have everything they need when they get there" (Tanyeri, 2010, p. 109). When staff are able to conduct their duties in less time, they are able to spend extra time on up-selling, building rapport with guests or servicing more guests per shift. All positioning them to further influence consumer wine choices for increased revenues.

FOH staff that "complete more training tend to receive more promotions and wage increases, because the training helps them sell more as measured by sales per hour, units per transaction and average ticket sales" (Krell, 2013, p. 57). Taking the bottom-line profits into consideration, with increased menu and wine pairing sales the average guest check increases (Harrington, 2005). "Professionalism in service provided can create greater gastronomic satisfaction through complementing food and wine sensations. This higher guest satisfaction should result in more return business and positive world-of-mouth advertising" (Harrington, p. 103) This benefit to training demonstrates the two fold benefit of increased guest satisfaction and the influence training has on influencing wine consumer choices that result in increased revenues for restaurants.

The Influence of Front-of-the-House Staff Training on Consumer Wine Choices

Nothing sells a wine more easily than a confident enthusiastic recommendation from a FOH staff member (Sims, 2004a). Staff must have the confidence in selling and recommending wines that they are serving. As employees gain knowledge and confidence increases, they feel good about what that they know and what they are talking about (Shakespeare, 2008). When confident staff offer reassuring information, it helps consumers experiment with their choices. As wine programs are developed within a restaurant and consumers are able to ask questions,

and build trust in the staff's expertise, the more they will spend. Trust is a prime influencing factor in consumer wine choice (Sims, 2004a).

With a properly structured wine program, staff continuously develops to fulfill the intended training outcomes that management has outlined. They begin to branch out by sharing their own experiences with particular wines with guests, and are able to become confident in creating customized descriptors that meet the needs of their guests (Sherman, 2012). When FOH staff are able to provide base knowledge while enhancing the dining experience through increased trust, they create a perfect storm to influence consumer wine choices. FOH staff have the greatest opportunity to influence consumers, because they have direct contact with the consumer. They have the opportunity to engage for longer periods of time, and build the rapport necessary to influence consumer wine choices.

Chapter III: Methodology

The purpose of this study was to determine the state of the FOH wine training and its perceived influence on consumer wine purchases. A qualitative research method was used in the form of semi-structured interviews to ensure that information relative to the study or that questions not thought of by the researcher could be addressed and elaborated upon during data collection (Gill, Stewart, Treasure & Chadwick, 2008). These semi-structured interviews were conducted with FOH staff to further research the perceived influence of wine training on consumer wine purchases.

Subject Selection and Description

The subjects were selected from FOH restaurant professionals in the Midwest United States and were known associates of the researcher. These participants resided and hold positions of employment in the states of Minnesota, Wisconsin and Illinois. Participants noted that they had experience as FOH staff or in FOH management, with only one participant indicating they had recently departed from the restaurant industry at the time of this study.

Instrumentation

A semi-structured interview question instrument was selected to focus on "several key questions that help to define the areas to be explored, but also allows the interviewer or interviewee to diverge in order to pursue an idea or respond in more detail" (Gill et al., 2008, p. 291). The semi-structured interviews were verbally administered from a predetermined list of questions. In addition to the 11 predetermined questions, there was opportunity to elaborate or ask subsequent questions of the participants to garnish more detail from their initial responses. These additional questions were based on the initial response and offered only to guide the participant to give a more detailed response. This method was also chosen to not limit discovery

or restrict interviewees responding with pertinent information to this study because the predetermined questions were too focused or were not thought of by the researcher (Gill et al., 2008). The following questions were the structured questions used during the interview process:

1. Tell me about the trainings you received in these positions?
2. Of the training that you described, were any of the trainings specific to increasing your knowledge, skills and/or abilities when it came to wine?
3. In as much detail as you can recall, how was the wine training conducted and what was the focus?
4. Tell me about the expertise and influence of the trainer(s)?
5. Tell me about the training accountability factor(s)?
6. Tell me about the training outcomes?
7. Tell me about training incentives and recognition?
8. Tell me about your overall reflection upon the training?
9. Tell me about the wine consumers in restaurants and their choices based on your experience?
10. Anything else you would like to add in regards to the nature of this study?

The research method of semi-structured interviews was selected as the preferred method of data collection, because this allowed for a deeper reflection and analysis of the perception a FOH staff member had towards wine training outcomes.

Data Collection Procedures

The 11 semi-structured question interview sessions was conducted over the phone. An implied consent form was sent and signed prior to the interview session. The average interview took approximately 25 minutes and was audio recorded to capture all details in the responses.

The interviewees voluntarily gave their responses and often elaborated to give more detail on their responses to the researcher.

Data Analysis

The data obtained from the interviews was summarized when noted similarities in responses were evident. The audio recordings were reviewed and data was extracted from the recordings and the interviewer's personal notes to summarize the general understanding of the interviewees, noting where responses were different than the general perception of the group. There were many market similarities among the interview responses, but also other perceived differences and reflections that brought out additional points about the nature of this study.

The data was then processed in general themes that corresponded with the 11 semi-structured questions that were part of the original interview sessions. These themes covered the background of the FOH staff member's positions within restaurants, their participation in wine trainings, details on the delivery, frequency, trainer credentials, training accountability, incentives and recognition for participating in trainings and the general wine training outcomes that they perceived. In addition, the data analyzed the interviewees overall reflection upon the training and their perception of how this FOH staff training influences consumer wine choices.

Limitations

The small sample size of regionally restricted participants is a limit of this study. Another marked limitation of this study is that it is subjective, as perception is one's own personal interpretation and feelings about a particular subject. The data collected is hard to quantify which could be perceived as another limiting factor, but it does no less give a sense of a generalized perception on FOH staff trainings from the perspective of the training participants. This study does not ask consumers directly, about their perceptions of staff wine trainings on

their restaurant experiences and wine choices. This study is focused exclusively on FOH staff perceptions and reflections from their experience and viewpoint.

This study is also limited because it did not seek to further explore actual guest satisfaction by increased or more frequent visits to restaurants. This study does not offer numerical results that would indicate increased revenues as a result of FOH staff trainings influencing consumer wine choices. Both of these limiting factors, would be options for further exploration on FOH staff trainings and their influence on consumer wine choices.

Summary

The methodology of this study of semi-structured interview questions, met the scope of this research in that it provided data from interviewees on the perceived value and relationship training has on influencing consumer wine choices. The data was also able to yield suggestions for FOH staff training modifications and its structure.

In the following chapters, the results of the data collected through this semi-structured interview method and the subsequent conclusions will be discussed. In addition, recommendations for further research will be offered based on the outcomes of this research study.

Chapter IV: Results

This study was intended to determine the state of the FOH staff training in the restaurant industry and any perceived value or relationship this training has on influencing consumer wine choices in restaurants. A literature review was conducted to determine the state of the FOH staff training from the restaurant industry perspective. A semi-structured survey was created and administered to interview FOH staff from the restaurant industry to research further the perceived value or relationship wine training has on influencing consumer choices in restaurants.

The Interview Results

The participants in these interviews validated some of the assumptions that were made on the perceived value and relationship FOH staff training has on influencing consumer wine choices. As a group, the responses were similar in nature and the viewpoint of the interviewees followed a positive view of FOH staff training throughout the sessions. The following discussion will also address where responses were notably different than the general viewpoint held among interviewees.

The participants were a mix of ages and genders, and averaged 11 years of FOH experience in restaurants that served wine. On average the participants held four different FOH restaurant positions and without exception each of their first positions held began as front-line or entry level staff positions that moved into FOH roles of leadership or management.

The participants indicated that all of the wine trainings offered to them as FOH staff members were voluntary and only in one case was a wine training mandatory. In this case, the interviewee was an employee of a national chain of restaurants and the wine training was a corporate requirement for FOH staff before being able to service tables. In most cases, the wine training was strongly encouraged, yet they were usually not required to attend and there were no

direct consequences for lack of participation. The frequency of these trainings were in general sporadic and occurred on average of twice a year, unless the interviewee was giving a staff training or the wine training was part of a corporate mandated training program. In the cases of regular, non-corporate mandated trainings, the interviewee was in a position of leadership within the restaurant and conducted these brief 15-20 minutes trainings at pre-shift meetings with other FOH staff. When the interviewee was in charge of these trainings, they occurred on a more regular basis and in most cases on a weekly basis. These more frequent trainings were very specific in nature and focused on a particular wine that was being featured in the restaurant during that given time period.

The participants of these wine trainings were almost exclusively FOH staff, with one interviewee indicating that at times the back-of-the-house (BOH) staff were invited. The invite was extended to the BOH staff to allow them to receive knowledge about wine in general and the current wine list being offered, in the hope that they would incorporate wine selections and pairing suggestions in their menu development. In the case of the BOH staff attending the training, the interviewee indicated that the intended outcome did not occur and the BOH did not customize menus for the restaurant's wine offerings.

The majority of staff trainings were conducted at the restaurant during off-peak times when the restaurant was closed, with only two interviewees indicating that the wine trainings occurred off-site at wineries in a field trip type setting. These trainings stood alone in their curriculum, and were not part of a series or built on each other when more than one training was offered to the FOH staff in a specific time frame. The pace of the training was moderate, providing a basic level of training that was presumed to fit the needs of new or novice employees as well as senior staff members. The interviewees when asked, did not indicate that there was an

option for advance wine training and all interviewees indicated that they accepted all wine training offered to them.

The participants indicated as a whole that the training was conducted with a few delivery methods including lecture, and some participatory elements including discussion, wine tasting and field trips to wineries. They indicated that in all cases, they were given basic wine fundamental knowledge and that this was related back to them through examples given by the facilitator that were from their restaurant's wine list and wine samples they were able to taste. In some cases the trainees were given handouts or take-a-ways as supplements to the wine training presentations. In other cases, the trainer gave wine pairing suggestions and focused on wine service etiquette. In no case, were the credentials or the professional resume of the trainer called into question or offered to the trainees by the facilitator. The expertise of the trainer was not given as a reason to participate or respect the trainer as an authority on the subject of wine.

It was presumed that if a trainer was presenting wine training that they had enough knowledge and expertise to deliver the training. In all cases, the trainer was from a wine supplier to the restaurant and was only an in-house trainer when the interviewee was in a position of leadership and actually delivered the training. Interviewees indicated that they felt in most cases that the wine supplier was offering the trainings to influence staff to sell the particular wines that they supplied to the restaurant, but all indicated that the trainings benefited their knowledge base as a whole towards all wines that the restaurant served. The interviewees indicated that a specific focus on brands offered by suppliers did assist them in suggesting these particular wines to guests.

It is specific to note, that although most of the participants had held a position in leadership within the restaurant, the wine training was only offered to them when they were a

front-line or entry level staff members. Specific trainings for management or wine trainings that had an outcome of training others were not offered to management even though in all of the participant's management positions they had the opportunity to influence consumer wine choices.

In all but one case, there was a marked lack of training accountability. At no time was a participant in the training required to demonstrate the knowledge, skills or abilities acquired in the training on the job. The only exception was the case of the corporate training program that was mandated. In only one instance did an interviewee indicate that they had a small quiz to take after the training to reinforce the wine information given to them. It was presumed in most cases by management and the training facilitator that the outcomes of the training would influence consumer choice, but it was not tested nor surveyed or monitored by management after the trainings except in the one case. Although the interviewees, indicated that they perceived the trainings influenced their wine sales and guest satisfaction in a positive manner there was not a metric or measurement of that influence. They were not aware if the restaurant measured an increase in guest satisfaction or that revenues were truly impacted by these FOH staff trainings. All interviewees were confident to the point of enthusiasm that the wine trainings had this direct effect, but none of the interviewees could quantify their response with actual facts and figures.

Of the training outcomes, it was indicated by all participants that they appreciated the wine trainings and that they felt a greater level of confidence from their participation in the trainings. In all cases, the trainings were a catalyst amongst FOH staff members to continue their professional development and knowledge in regards to wine. In several cases, the FOH staff had subsequent informal discussions and offered support to each other when it came to questions or

increased learning about wine, as it related back to benefiting their ability to service restaurant guests.

The interviewees also indicated that after the trainings they were able to speak more to the benefits of wine and food pairing synergy and describe the restaurant's wine selections in more detail. They all indicated they felt more confident when approaching the table, and of the interviewees the biggest confidence builder came from wine service etiquette. They indicated that when they felt more confident about opening a bottle of wine at the table, and were able to give a proper presentation of the wine to the consumer they gained additional confidence in describing the types of wines that were available. They indicated that they were able to speak to why these wines would be a good match for the consumer's menu selections. It is interesting to note that the etiquette of wine service had such a strong influence on staff confidence. The interviewees indicated that they felt that the consumer had more confidence in their knowledge, when they were able to properly handle and open a bottle of wine, whether or not they had any increased knowledge of wine fundamentals or varietals.

The FOH staff were not offered formal incentives, less the opportunity to increase their knowledge, skills and abilities. The perceived benefit of participation was that the staff could taste and consume wine for free in an educational setting, and that the information would be beneficial to them by increasing their income through larger tips on higher guest check averages that resulted from increased wine sales. Although incentives and recognition were not offered to interviewees for participating in staff training, they did in some cases have the opportunity to participate in wine sales contests in an unstructured and sporadic time table when it was determined by management that certain wines needed to be featured to reduce inventory levels.

These incentives and subsequent contest winner recognition influenced wine sales, but did not influence whether a FOH staff member participated in wine trainings or not.

In the overall reflection of interviewees, they felt in general that the in most cases the staff trainings were sufficient for them to perform their jobs effectively. They felt a greater sense of value as an employee that their restaurant offered trainings, but at no time did the interviewees indicate that this greater sense of value they felt from their employer influenced them to stay longer in their respective positions and thus influence employee turn-over levels. They perceived on behalf of management and the restaurant, that a return on investment was evident. They all indicated that the trainings resulted in a more confident staff that could influence wine consumer choices. The interviewees indicated that another outcome of the training was to meet the needs of higher guest expectations and knowledge that have grown over the past 5 years. The interviewees also indicated that they felt that not only were the staff trainings confidence builders, but that it help empower them to create their own raises through larger tips on increased guest check averages.

Overall, the interviewees indicated that the FOH staff training in the restaurant industry has a perceived value and relationship to influencing consumer wine choices in restaurants. They indicated in all cases that the staff training resulted in a higher level of guest satisfaction with their service and an increase in restaurant revenues. They all believed that investing in FOH staff training produced a noted return on investment, although they could not quantify that return in actual dollars. Their perception was that their influence on consumer wine choices increased and had many positive residual benefits, as a result of the FOH staff training they received.

In the following and final chapter of this study, the conclusions of the research and recommendations for further study will be discussed.

Chapter V: Discussion

This study was intended to determine the state of the FOH staff training in the restaurant industry and any perceived value or relationship this training has on influencing consumer wine choices in restaurants. A literature review was conducted to determine the state of the FOH staff training from the restaurant industry perspective. A semi-structured survey was created to interview FOH staff from the restaurant industry to research further the perceived value or relationship wine training has on influencing consumer choices in restaurants. As a result of this research there are some very positive indicators that the FOH staff training does in fact influence consumer wine choices. However, the research also points to a need for modification in how it values FOH staff training and its structure.

Discussion

This study helped determine the state of the FOH staff training in the restaurant industry and any perceived value or relationship this training has on influencing consumer wine choices in restaurants. If FOH staff are able to influence consumer wine choices through increased training, they can impact restaurant revenues and stimulate incremental growth during these economic times when increased revenues are relatively stagnate. Restaurants that continue to increase revenues and grow will continue to remain in business and survive in this industry that is a very important part of the United States economy.

The study looked closely at the state of the FOH staff training being offered, and how this training is structured and can benefit restaurants by allowing staff to influence consumer wine choices. The researched also looked to determine how FOH staff can influence consumer wine choice from the literature to the data collection, and analysis of the results.

The study also offered suggestions for FOH staff training improvement or methods that can have an impact on consumer wine choices in restaurants.

Conclusions

The research shows from the literature review to the data analysis that there is a perceived value and relationship between FOH staff who receive wine training and their influence on consumer wine choice. When staff are empowered with increased knowledge, skills and abilities about wine and motivated by increased personal income through larger tips on higher guest check averages, they can impact consumer wine choices and restaurant revenues. Wine consumers are either knowledgeable about what they wish to order, or are novices essentially looking for direction from what they hope to be knowledgeable staff. In either case, a more knowledgeable wine consumer can be influenced to try something out of their comfort zone with a confident and enthusiastic argument, and a novice wine consumer can feel confident if they trust in the recommendation by trained staff. In both cases, the recommendation made from knowledge obtained through training and knowing what might be a good fit for the consumer, increases consumer wine spend and thus impacts restaurant's revenue.

Other factors that can increase the effectiveness of the FOH staff wine trainings include customizing a program that fits the target consumer and the target trainees needs. Varied delivery methods and subject matter that is customized beyond general wine fundamentals can be more relatable to staff that need to buy into the purpose and outcomes of the training program. In addition, a focus on wine service etiquette boosts confidence not only staff, but also boosts the level of trust consumers have in staff. The perception that if a staff member can confidently present and provide proper wine service that they are experienced enough to offer suggestions and advice on wine choices.

Recommendations

A recommendation for further research would be to expand the sample size and the region where participants are gathered from. In addition, the semi-structured questions in this study could be reduced and modified based on the conclusions already gathered from this study. The perceptions offered by the interviewees could also be quantified and validated by patron counts and wine revenue comparisons over a given time period before and after FOH staff wine training is conducted.

Another recommendation would be analyze how much is spent on wine service training, and the correlations to the return of this investment on increased revenues. An in depth study could be conducted to determine which method of delivery and types of wine trainings are more effective to influencing consumer wine choices. This research could provide a suggested combination of training that would have the greatest impact on consumer revenues for the financial investment.

Further the wine consumer could be surveyed and data collected to confirm or disprove the perceptions FOH staff have on their influence on wine consumer choice. This perception from the consumer standpoint could be also quantified by reflection on recent visits and how the staff engagement influenced their wine choices.

The purpose of this study was to measure FOH staff training in the industry and its perceived value and relationship on the wine consumer. Although the study had its limitations, it did confirm that the staff training does in fact influence consumer choice and that the state of the industry is in need of further study and consideration. This further study would indicate that the investment in staff training is valid and beneficial for overall guest satisfaction and increased restaurant revenue.

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