



# The Host *Handbook*

*How to be the first face and the last face of Old Friend.  
The greeting, the book, the pace, the phone, and how to  
make every guest feel like an old friend before they  
even sit down.*

# Welcome, *friend*.

*You are about to do the most underrated job in this restaurant. Every guest who walks through the door — happy, anxious, late, tipsy, regular, first-timer, old friend — will form their first impression of Old Friend by looking at you. Every guest who leaves will form their last impression the same way. There is no job in this building with more leverage on what people remember about us. This book is how.*

#### WHAT THIS BOOK IS

## *The host role, written down.*

This is the third of our three internal handbooks — the Server Handbook covers the floor, the Kitchen Manual covers the line, and this one covers the door. Together they are how we run Old Friend.

Most restaurants treat hosting as a stepping-stone job — a year you do before becoming a server. We don't. Great hosts are professionals, paid like professionals, treated like professionals. If you want to make a career of this role, we will support that. If you want to use it as the path to a server position or a manager job later, we will support that too. Either way, this is not a "until something better comes along" position. It is the job that decides whether anyone comes back.

Read this book once before your first shift. Then read whichever chapter matches whatever felt hard the night before. The whole thing takes about forty-five minutes. It's written to be read, not filed.

#### THE TWO-LINE VERSION OF THE ENTIRE BOOK

Make every guest feel recognized — by name, by occasion, by preference. Pace the room so the kitchen never breaks. Everything else flows from those two.

#### HOW TO USE IT

## *Ten chapters. One pre-shift tradition.*

The book moves from the abstract to the operational. We start with what the role is and why it matters, then the room you'll work, then the tools — the reservation book, the phone, the greeting itself. Then pacing, which is the single most underrated skill a host can have. Then VIPs and special occasions. Then the phone. Then what to do when something goes sideways. Then the goodbye. Then operations.

Every Tuesday pre-shift, a different floor team member reads one passage from one of our three handbooks out loud. Hosts are part of that rotation. Two minutes, every week. It is how we keep the language in our mouths.

*The door is the brand. What we look like to the guest  
walking in is what we are in their mind.*

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# What this *role* is.

*Hosting is not a job description; it's a posture. Half of what makes a great host is invisible — the way you stand, the way you notice the door before it opens, the way you remember a name from three weeks ago. The other half can be taught from this book. Both halves are real work.*

## THE WORK

# *You are the first face. You are the last face.*

Every guest who walks through our door tonight will look at one person before anyone else: you. Every guest who leaves will look at one person on their way out: you. The food, the wine, the room, the music — all of it is downstream of those two looks. A great meal starts the second the host makes eye contact. A regular customer is built in the seven seconds you spend saying goodbye.

The role has three pieces that run in parallel through every shift:

- **The door** — greetings, walks to the table, goodbyes, the wait list when we have one.
- **The book** — the reservation system, the notes on each guest, the pacing of the floor.
- **The phone** — calls during service, questions, modifications, voicemails.

You'll do all three in the same minute, dozens of times a night. This book teaches each one separately so the muscle memory becomes a single fluent motion.

## THE VALUES

# *Five things that decide every close call.*

## **Recognize everyone. Remember the ones who come back.**

The first time a guest visits, treat them as if they could be a regular for the next decade — because they could be. The second and third times, start memorizing the name. By the fourth visit, the name should come to you before they say it. This is the single most powerful hospitality tool we have. There is no app and no technology that beats a host who says "welcome back, James."

## **The door is the brand.**

What the room looks and sounds like in the first five seconds after a guest walks in is what Old Friend is in their head, for the rest of the night and the rest of the year. Your posture, your voice, the cleanliness of the host stand, whether you make eye contact before they speak — every detail. The restaurant is not the chef and the wine list. The restaurant is what the guest experiences, and you are the first experience.

## **Pacing is craft.**

A host who seats eight tables at 7:30 PM has guaranteed a bad night for forty people. A host who staggers those eight tables across a forty-five-minute window has given the kitchen the rhythm it needs to send out forty plates of beautiful food. Pacing is invisible to the guest, but it is the difference between a great night and a broken one. Chapter Five is about this in detail.

## **The phone is the door, too.**

The person calling Old Friend has not yet decided to come in. The way you answer the phone decides whether they do. Same posture. Same warmth. Same care. We don't take phones like we're inconvenienced — we take them like the door just opened.

## **Nobody is "just" the host.**

You will sometimes hear this from outside the restaurant: from family who doesn't understand the work, from guests who haven't thought about it, occasionally from servers in worse restaurants than ours. Inside this restaurant, the host is the spine of the floor. Your job is essential, it is paid as such, and the cooks who walk past you when they come in for service know it. Carry yourself accordingly.

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*The recognition you build at the door is the loyalty we collect at the table.*

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# The *room*.

*You cannot seat a room you don't know. Before your first shift, walk every table. Sit in every seat. Look at the Jospers from each one, the door from each one, the bar from each one. The host's mental floor plan is the most detailed in the restaurant.*

## THE SHAPE

# 86 seats, six nights a week.

Old Friend has 86 seats total — 78 in the dining room and 8 at the bar. The room is built around the open kitchen with the Josper at its visible center. We serve Tuesday through Sunday, beginning at 5 PM, with the kitchen closing at 10 PM Tuesday, Wednesday, and Sunday and at 10:30 PM Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. The bar holds open another thirty minutes on weekend nights. We are closed Mondays.

Reservations are exclusively on Resy. We do not take OpenTable, and we do not take direct phone bookings except in narrow cases (covered in Chapter Three). Guests can walk in and try the bar; the bar is intentionally reserved for walk-ins and is the warmest place in the building to sit alone.

## THE SEATING LOGIC

# Not every seat is the same seat.

The dining room is intentionally varied — tops of two, four, and six, mixed across the space. Knowing what each table is for is half the job:

| TABLE TYPE                             | BEST FOR                                                                                 | WHAT TO WATCH                                                                           |
|----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Two-tops in the front</i>           | Couples on first dates, anniversaries, anyone wanting a quiet conversation               | Avoid placing here a guest who reserved a "Josper view" — they won't see it.            |
| <i>Two-tops along the kitchen line</i> | Guests who want the fire experience — solo diners, food-curious couples, industry guests | Slightly louder. Communicate that warmly: "you'll have a great view of the fire."       |
| <i>Four-tops in the middle</i>         | Two couples out together, small business dinners, family-of-four                         | The room's most flexible seats. Use them generously.                                    |
| <i>Six-tops (limited)</i>              | The occasional larger group — friends celebrating, an industry table, family of six      | Communicate to kitchen 30 minutes ahead; six covers at once is a big drop for our line. |
| <i>The bar (8 seats)</i>               | Walk-ins, regulars without a reservation, solo diners, late-night second-meal            | Treated as premium seating, not a waiting area. Full menu available.                    |

## *Each server owns a section.*

On most nights we have four to five servers on the floor, each running roughly seventeen covers — a section of three to five tables. The host runs a floor map at the stand showing which server has which section. Two principles when assigning tables:

- **Rotate fairly.** Each new four-top doesn't always go to the same server. We spread the night across the team — for the guests, for the kitchen, and for the tip pool.
- **Match the table to the server when it matters.** A regular who knows Maria gets Maria's section. A first-timer who's nervous gets the warmest server on tonight. A table that needs extra care gets our senior person. The GM and the host coordinate this in the pre-shift.

## *The least-glamorous and most-watched piece of furniture in the restaurant.*

The stand sits just inside the front door. It is in every guest's first photograph of the room. What lives on it:

- **The Resy tablet** — the live book, the night's reservations, the waitlist, the seating chart.
- **Tonight's printed Resy book and floor plan** — printed at pre-shift and marked up during service. If Resy or the wifi goes down, you seat from these.
- **A pen and a small notepad** — for messages, allergies confirmed at the door, the occasional handwritten note for the kitchen.
- **The phone** — kept ready, never face-down on a screen guests can see.
- **Menus and wine list** — fresh stock, replaced when food-stained.
- **Small mints** — for guests, for you, never for both.
- **Tonight's reservation cards** — the laminated card we hand to a server before they greet, with the table's notes.

What does NOT live on the stand: your personal phone (in your pocket or apron), your drink (in the back), food (ever), study materials, makeup, anything that says "this is mine" rather than "this is the door of Old Friend."

#### POSTURE AT THE STAND

Stand. Don't lean. Don't sit. Don't fold your arms. Eyes up — toward the door, every twenty seconds at minimum. Hands relaxed at the stand or behind your back. When the door opens, you don't have time to "snap to" — you are already there.

# The *book*.

*Every reservation we take, every walk-in we seat, every note we write about a guest — all of it lives in the book. Resy is our platform. The book is more than a list of names; it's the institutional memory of who comes to Old Friend.*

## THE PLATFORM

### *Resy, and only Resy.*

We are a Resy restaurant. Reservations come through resy.com and the Resy app. We do not list on OpenTable, and we do not take new reservations through Tock, Yelp, Google, or any other channel. If a guest tells you on the phone that they "saw the reservation on Google," walk them through booking it on Resy — that's the only way it ends up in our book.

The Resy host interface — what we call "the book" — lives on the tablet at the stand. It shows tonight's reservations, the floor map, the waitlist, the notes on every guest, and the message thread between us and any guest who has contacted the restaurant. You will be trained on the specific Resy buttons on day one; this chapter covers the principles that don't change when the buttons do.

## THE NOTES

### *What goes in the book about each guest.*

Every reservation has a notes field. Every guest has a profile that persists across visits. We use both, consistently, because the host who picks up the next reservation needs to know what the host who took the previous one knew. The seven things we always note:

| FIELD                      | WHAT TO CAPTURE                                                                                                          |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Allergies</i>           | Anything mentioned at booking. Even "she's gluten-free" goes in. The kitchen reads this before the guest arrives.        |
| <i>Dietary preferences</i> | Vegetarian, vegan, pescatarian, kosher, halal. Not allergies, but the chef adjusts the menu suggestion regardless.       |
| <i>Occasion</i>            | Birthday, anniversary, engagement, business close, retirement. Tag the type — never assume the guest wants it announced. |
| <i>Preferred table</i>     | If a regular has said "we love the corner two-top," that lives on their profile. We honor it when we can.                |
| <i>Industry / VIP</i>      | Fellow chefs, hospitality professionals, investors and partners. Tagged so we know to coordinate with the GM.            |
|                            | If a guest had a bad night and we comped something, that note follows them. The next visit is the recovery visit.        |

| FIELD                       | WHAT TO CAPTURE                                                                     |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Past comp / recovery</i> |                                                                                     |
| <i>First-timer flag</i>     | Self-explanatory. The first visit gets extra warmth, extra explanation, extra time. |

## TAGS

### *The shorthand we use across the team.*

Resy lets us tag profiles with short labels that show up immediately in the book. The tags we use:

- **REGULAR** — three or more visits in the last twelve months.
- **VIP** — owner-designated. Includes fellow industry chefs and operators, and partners we owe extra care.
- **FIRST** — first visit. Removed after their second visit.
- **BIRTHDAY / ANNIVERSARY / ENGAGEMENT** — the occasion tag for tonight's reservation only.
- **ALLERGY** — flagged in red. Kitchen sees this before the ticket prints.
- **VEGAN / VEGETARIAN / GF** — dietary, kitchen-relevant.
- **WATCH** — quiet flag. Past difficult guest. Not a refusal, but the GM gets a heads-up.

## CONFIRMATIONS AND REMINDERS

### *One message. Not a campaign.*

Resy auto-sends a confirmation when a booking is made and a single reminder roughly 24 hours before the reservation. We don't add to that. We don't call to confirm. We don't email "looking forward to seeing you." Our guests are sophisticated — confirming three times reads as needy. The 24-hour reminder is enough.

The exception is a large party (six or more) or any VIP reservation. The GM personally calls or emails the day of, partly to confirm, partly to ask if there's anything we should know.

## How we handle the math.

Some restaurants charge a no-show fee through Resy's credit card hold. We currently do not — but we track every no-show against the guest's profile. Two no-shows within a calendar year, and Resy flags the profile. Three, and the GM reviews whether to allow future bookings. We never call out a guest about a no-show on the phone or at the door; we let the system do its quiet work.

Late arrivals: we hold the table 15 minutes past the reservation time, then walk the floor and decide whether to re-seat. A guest who calls and tells us they're running late gets the full 15 minutes plus reasonable accommodation. A guest who simply doesn't show forfeits the table after 15 minutes; we offer them a seat when they arrive if we can.

**The four-minute rule:** *When a guest is more than ten minutes late and hasn't called, the host calls them — once. "Hi James, this is [name] from Old Friend, just checking in on your 7:30 reservation." Short, warm, no edge. The vast majority of late guests have just hit traffic and will be there in five minutes.*

## The bar is the answer most of the time.

Walk-ins are a gift — they tell us the restaurant has a draw. When someone walks in without a reservation:

1. **Check the bar.** If there's a bar seat, that's the answer. The bar is the same menu, same service, often the most fun seat in the building.
2. **Check the book for cancellations or late no-shows.** Sometimes a table opens up unexpectedly. If so, seat them.
3. **Offer the waitlist.** Resy has a wait list feature. We collect a phone number and a party size; we text when something opens.
4. **If we genuinely cannot seat them tonight, recommend something else nearby.** Suggest a sister Main Line restaurant, with warmth, not dismissal. Send them with a card. They'll remember the warmth and come back.

NEVER SAY "WE'RE FULLY BOOKED"

Say: "Let me see what we can do for you tonight." Then actually try. Even when the answer ends up being "I don't have a table tonight, but I can put you on the wait list," the guest experiences us as someone who tried, not someone who closed a door.

# The *greeting*.

*Ninety seconds. That's the entire window in which we make a first impression. The greeting is not a transaction; it's the opening sentence of the relationship. Get it right and the rest of the night is easier. Get it wrong and the server spends the meal recovering.*

## THE NINETY SECONDS

# *What happens from "the door opens" to "you're at your table."*

The greeting is a sequence — a series of small motions, each of which matters. Below is what it looks like, broken down:

|        |                                                                                                                                       |
|--------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 0 sec  | Door opens. Eyes meet. Half-smile, slight nod. Stop whatever you're doing at the stand.                                               |
| 3 sec  | The greet. "Welcome to Old Friend. Are you joining us tonight?"                                                                       |
| 10 sec | Name capture. "What name is the reservation under?" — repeat the name back as you find it.                                            |
| 20 sec | The book. Confirm the time, party size, any noted occasion. "Two of you tonight, 7 PM, celebrating an anniversary — congratulations." |
| 30 sec | Coats and belongings, if needed.                                                                                                      |
| 40 sec | The walk. Lead them. Pace matched to theirs.                                                                                          |
| 70 sec | The table. Gesture. "Here you are." Pull the chair if appropriate.                                                                    |
| 80 sec | Menus handed off. Server tagged with eye contact across the floor.                                                                    |
| 90 sec | Step away. "Maria will be right with you. Enjoy your evening."                                                                        |

## THE GREETING ITSELF

# *What we actually say.*

There is a single canonical greeting. We don't workshop variants. Consistency is the point:

YOU

*Welcome to Old Friend. Are you joining us tonight?*

Two reasons we phrase it this way. First, "welcome" is the warmest opening word in English; it is the single word our restaurant is built around. Second, "are you joining us" works whether the guest has a reservation, is a walk-in, is here to pick up a forgotten item, or is the produce delivery driver lost in the wrong door. It opens the conversation without presuming.

## The phrases that quietly close doors.

| DON'T SAY                            | SAY INSTEAD                                                 |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Do you have a reservation?</i>    | Are you joining us tonight?                                 |
| <i>We're fully booked.</i>           | Let me see what we can do for you tonight.                  |
| <i>Just a sec.</i>                   | I'll be right with you in just a moment.                    |
| <i>I don't have you in the book.</i> | Let me take a closer look — what name is the booking under? |
| <i>No problem.</i>                   | Of course. / Happy to. / My pleasure.                       |
| <i>You guys / you guys' table.</i>   | Your table. / The table is ready for you.                   |
| <i>Anything else?</i>                | Is there anything I can help you with?                      |

### NAMES

## The most powerful word in hospitality.

The moment you have a guest's name, use it — and keep using it. "Welcome, James." "Right this way, James." "Maria will be with you shortly, James." On their way out: "Goodnight, James." A guest who hears their name three times in a single visit feels recognized in a way no amount of free dessert can replicate.

If you didn't catch the name, ask again. "Sorry — could I get your name once more?" Better to ask twice than to fake it. Guests can tell.

**The hard names:** *Some last names are unusual. Don't guess; ask. "How do you pronounce that?" is a thousand times warmer than mispronouncing it. Then write it down phonetically in their profile so the next host gets it right.*

## COATS AND BELONGINGS

### *Brief, warm, never pushy.*

In cold months: "Can I take your coats?" Hang them properly on labeled hangers. Return them at goodbye without being asked. Umbrellas go in the stand near the door — not on the floor, not on a chair.

Never insist. Some guests prefer to keep their coat over the chair. A guest who declines once is not asked again that visit.

## THE WALK TO THE TABLE

### *Lead. Don't speed-walk.*

You walk slightly ahead. You match their pace, not yours. You glance back once during the walk to make sure they're with you. You walk past the open kitchen if their table is on that side — let them see the fire. You don't talk the whole way; a comfortable silence is fine.

At the table: pull out the chair if you can (especially for the guest who will sit facing the wall — the less prominent seat). Place menus on the table or hand them. Step back. Make eye contact with the assigned server across the room.

## THE SERVER HAND-OFF

### *The verbal pass to the floor.*

Before you walk away, you tag the server. This is a small ritual that lives at the heart of FOH coordination. You find the server, make eye contact, and pass the table verbally:

#### YOU

*James and Sarah on table 12, here for their fifth anniversary. Sarah is allergic to shellfish — already noted in the kitchen. They had the Burgundy last visit and loved it.*

#### SERVER

*Got it. Heading over now.*

This handoff takes ten seconds and saves the server five minutes of cold-start at the table. Without it, the server is reading the guest from scratch, and the guest can tell.

*The greeting is the host's only solo. Everything else is ensemble. Treat it accordingly.*

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# The *pace*.

*The most underrated skill in this entire restaurant lives in this chapter. A host who paces well is invisible — the kitchen runs smoothly, the servers stay on top of their tables, the room hums. A host who paces poorly causes hours of compound damage that nobody sees coming. Read this twice.*

## THE DEATH WAVE

# *What happens when you seat too many tables at once.*

Picture a Saturday night. The book shows eight reservations for 7:30 PM. The host, who hasn't read this chapter, seats all eight tables at 7:30 sharp. Twenty-five minutes later, all eight tables order at the same time. The kitchen, which has capacity to plate three or four tables simultaneously, suddenly has eight tickets dropping in a four-minute window.

What happens next: the first three tables get their food on time. Tables four through six wait fifteen minutes longer than they should. Tables seven and eight wait thirty minutes longer than they should. Servers can feel the wave but can't stop it. The kitchen rallies, but is exhausted by the end of the rush. By 9:00 PM, the entire floor is behind. Forty guests had an objectively worse meal than they paid for.

This is the death wave. It is caused entirely by the seating cadence — not the kitchen, not the servers, not the food. Just the order in which the front door opened and closed.

## THE CURE

# *Stagger by ten to fifteen minutes.*

The same eight reservations, seated across a forty-five-minute window — 7:00, 7:10, 7:15, 7:20, 7:25, 7:35, 7:40, 7:45 — produce a totally different kitchen experience. Tickets drop one at a time. The line cooks plate at a steady rhythm. Servers stay in flow. The same forty guests get the meal they paid for.

Resy gives us the booking times, but the host controls the seating times. A guest who arrives at 7:00 PM for a 7:00 PM reservation doesn't have to be at the table by 7:01. We can warmly hold them at the bar for a glass of Champagne for ten minutes if the kitchen needs the breathing room.

## THE MATH YOU KEEP IN YOUR HEAD

# *The numbers behind the pace.*

| METRIC | TARGET | WHY |
|--------|--------|-----|
|        | 3 max  |     |

| METRIC                                    | TARGET       | WHY                                                                                                |
|-------------------------------------------|--------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>New table drops per 15 min</i>         |              | The kitchen can absorb three new tables ordering at once without slipping. Four or more, it slips. |
| <i>Stagger between same-time bookings</i> | 5 – 10 min   | If three tables have 7:30 reservations, seat at 7:25, 7:32, 7:40 if possible.                      |
| <i>Cover count at peak (8 PM)</i>         | ≤ 60 of 78   | Holding ~15 seats for the 8:30–9 PM second seating gives the kitchen breathing room.               |
| <i>Two-course meal turn time</i>          | ~90 min      | Two-tops dining lightly. We seat the next reservation 90 min after the first.                      |
| <i>Three-course meal turn time</i>        | ~120 min     | The standard full Old Friend experience.                                                           |
| <i>Six-top minimum kitchen lead time</i>  | 30 min ahead | Tell the kitchen the six-top is coming in 30 min before they sit, so prep can stage.               |

#### COMMUNICATING WITH THE FLOOR AND KITCHEN

## *The host is the air traffic control.*

Pacing only works when the rest of the team knows what's coming. Three communications happen, every shift, every time:

### **The pre-shift pace brief**

At the 5:00 PM pre-shift, the host gives the GM and Chef Sam a one-minute rundown of tonight's book: cover count, peak times, any large parties, any VIPs, any allergies.

"Tonight we've got 64 covers booked, peak at 7:45 with twelve tables in a 15-minute window, one six-top at 8 PM celebrating a retirement, one VIP — a regular returning after a comp last visit." Forty-five seconds. The rest of the team builds the night around that.

### **The thirty-minute heads-up**

Thirty minutes before a large party (six or more) or a VIP arrives, you tell the kitchen and the GM. "Six-top arrives at 8 PM, table 9, retirement party." The kitchen pre-stages, the server cleans the table, the GM swings by when they're seated. No surprises.

## The push and the hold

During service, the GM or Chef Sam will sometimes pass a signal to the host: "Push the 7:45s — we're light" (seat them five minutes early to fill capacity) or "Hold the 7:45s — we're swimming" (delay the seating by ten minutes). The host adjusts the door without breaking the warmth of the greeting.

### WHEN A TABLE IS RUNNING LONG

If a 7 PM two-top is still at the table at 8:45 with a 9 PM reservation waiting on it, you do not rush them. You do not deliver subtle hints. You step to the GM and say, "Table 7 is still seated, the 9 PM is here, what would you like me to do?" The GM decides: hold the 9 PM at the bar with a drink on the house, or re-seat them at a different table. The guest currently dining never knows there was an issue. The waiting guest gets a generous experience while they wait. That is hospitality in motion.

### WALK-INS AS PACING TOOL

## *The bar lets you breathe.*

The eight bar seats are a release valve. On a slow night, walk-ins fill the bar and add revenue. On a busy night, walk-ins fill the bar and let you politely overflow the dining room without overflowing the kitchen. A guest who would otherwise be turned away gets the same food at the bar; the kitchen gets the same ticket count but spread across the night.

Use the bar deliberately. Suggest it warmly: "We don't have a dining room table at 7 PM tonight, but the bar is open right now if you'd like to sit and have a glass of wine — you can have the full menu there." Many guests prefer it once they're there.

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*A great host paces a room the way a great conductor paces a symphony. Quiet, constant, invisible — until you notice it's missing.*

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# VIPs, regulars & *special occasions.*

*The guests we treat as special on a Tuesday are the guests who come back on a Saturday. This chapter is about who they are, how we recognize them, and how we make their big nights — the anniversary, the proposal, the first visit — feel like ours too.*

## REGULARS

# *How we recognize the people who keep coming back.*

A regular at Old Friend is defined as a guest who has dined with us three or more times in the past twelve months. The Resy profile flags them automatically, and the host treats them accordingly:

- **Name on first sight.** Not after the greeting — during it. "Welcome back, James."
- **Table preference, if we have one on file.** If they always sit in the corner two-top, we honor it whenever we can.
- **Their server preference, if we have one on file.** If Maria knows them, Maria gets them.
- **A quiet word to the chef.** When a regular comes in, Chef Sam often comes out for a hello between plating. The host tags him at the right moment.

Regulars are not VIPs by default — most of them just want to be welcomed and left to enjoy their dinner. Don't over-perform. The recognition is the gift.

## VIPS

# *The tagged guests who get extra care.*

A VIP in our system is owner-designated. The list is short and includes:

- **Milestone guests** — the proposal, the retirement dinner, the first night out after something hard. Flagged by the GM from the reservation notes.
- **Neighbors and local partners** — the Lancaster Avenue businesses and community groups who send people our way.
- **Industry peers** — chefs and operators of restaurants we respect, especially Mid-Atlantic peers.
- **Investors and partners** — Free Hugs, LLC's principals and their guests.
- **Repeat guests at high frequency** — five or more visits in twelve months.

VIP reservations get a different protocol:

1. The GM is briefed in the pre-shift.

2. The senior server on tonight's floor is assigned the table.
3. The host coordinates a quiet table — the best two-top, the best four-top, depending on the party.
4. Chef Sam is told when they arrive. He decides whether to come out, send an amuse from the kitchen, or simply stay out of their way (some VIPs prefer the latter).
5. The check is not comped automatically. We treat every VIP like any other guest at the check unless ownership specifically directs otherwise.

#### THE SAME NIGHT FOR EVERYONE

## *Every guest gets our best.*

We do not save our best for anyone. A neighbor on a quiet Tuesday gets the same care as the most important guest we will ever seat.

1. You greet by name whenever you can — from the reservation profile, from their last visit, or from the server who knows them. If you don't know it yet, ask, and remember it for next time.
2. You greet warmly, with the same words you'd use for anyone. "Welcome to Old Friend. Are you joining us tonight?"
3. You pass along what matters — an occasion, an allergy, a first visit — quietly, so the GM and the server can prepare.
4. You seat them with care and without fanfare. No script, no performance, nothing that feels like a show.
5. You match the table to the server who fits it best.
6. You make sure the kitchen knows what matters about the table, so every plate lands right.
7. You stay present. You do not hover or rush. You give the rest of the room exactly the same attention.

#### THE CARDINAL RULE

Never fish for praise. Never ask for a review or say "we hope you enjoyed it" with extra weight. What guests remember is being cared for: the details right, the welcome real, the room warm.

## *The occasion tag, handled with care.*

### **Birthdays**

The default at Old Friend is a small candle in the dessert, no song. We do not lead the dining room in "Happy Birthday." A regular birthday treatment is: the server brings the dessert, asks if they'd like a candle, and lights it if yes. That's it. The guest who wants a bigger moment will tell us; the rest are spared.

### **Anniversaries**

A note on the menu printed for the table ("Congratulations on five years"), or a small written card on the dessert plate. The chef may send something extra. We do not announce.

### **Engagements**

This is the one we are most careful with. An engagement can be public or deeply private. If the reservation notes "potential engagement," we ask quietly when they arrive: "We're so glad you're here — is there anything special we should be aware of for the evening?" If they say yes, we coordinate quietly with the server (and possibly the kitchen for a moment of stage management). If they say nothing, we treat it as a regular meal. Many guests propose without telling the restaurant in advance, and the last thing they want is to be intercepted.

#### **NEVER ANNOUNCE AN ENGAGEMENT**

The moment is theirs, not ours. We do not clap. We do not gather the staff to cheer. We do not bring out sparklers. If the guest signals they'd like the restaurant to participate, we follow their lead — but we never lead.

#### **THE FIRST-TIMER**

## *The most important guest of the night, every night.*

A first-timer is the future regular. The first visit decides whether they come back. The host's role with a first-timer is two-part: a slightly warmer greeting, a small extra orientation. "Welcome — is this your first time at Old Friend? Wonderful. Let me walk you over; the kitchen is open, so you'll have a great view of the fire."

Tag them in their Resy profile so the server knows. The server will offer a slightly longer menu walk and may suggest the signature dishes if asked. The chef may send a small bite from the kitchen on a quiet night. The check is never comped — but the experience is unmistakably warmer.

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*Recognition is free. It is also the most valuable thing this restaurant gives a guest.*

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# The *phone*.

*Every phone call is a door opening. The person on the other end has not decided to come in yet. The way you answer the phone, the questions you ask, the questions you anticipate — all of it decides whether tonight has one more table than it would have had.*

## THE GREETING

# *Six words. Every time. With energy.*

Pick up by the third ring whenever you can. Pick up by the fifth always. The standard greeting:

YOU

*Old Friend, this is [name], how can I help you?*

"Old Friend" identifies the restaurant. Your name identifies the person. "How can I help you" opens the door without presuming what they want. The whole thing takes three seconds. Practice until your voice carries warmth even on the fortieth call of the night.

## THE QUESTIONS YOU'LL GET

# *Forty percent of all calls are the same five questions.*

### **"Do you have a reservation tonight?"**

Check the book. If yes, take the reservation through Resy or guide them to book online ("our reservations are on resy.com — if you can pull it up, you'll see exactly what's available, and you'll get a confirmation right away"). If no, offer the wait list or the bar.

### **"Is there a dress code?"**

"We don't have a formal dress code. Most of our guests come in business casual or smart casual — anything from a button-down to a nice sweater works perfectly. The room is upscale but never stiff."

### **"Do you have outdoor seating?"**

Answer honestly based on what we actually offer. If we don't, say so — "we don't have outdoor seating, but the dining room has an open kitchen with a beautiful view of the fire." Don't oversell.

## "Can we bring a cake?"

"Of course. We don't charge a cake fee. Let the server know when you arrive and they'll coordinate with the kitchen on when to bring it out." If the reservation is for a celebration, note the cake in the Resy notes.

## "Can you accommodate [dietary restriction]?"

"Yes — our chef accommodates all dietary needs. The best way to make sure is to note it in your Resy reservation, or I'll add it for you right now. What's the restriction?" Add the note before you hang up.

## "Do you have parking?"

Tell them about the small back lot, street parking on Louella Avenue, and the public garage on Bloomingdale. Be specific. Wayne can be confusing the first time.

## "What kind of food is it?"

"We're a charcoal-driven, seasonally-anchored restaurant. The kitchen is built around a Spanish charcoal oven called a Josper — most of the menu touches it. Mid-Atlantic ingredients, fire-forward cooking, an excellent wine list. Chef Sam Henzy runs the kitchen, with Chef Joe Monnich consulting."

## "Do you take walk-ins?"

"We have eight bar seats that are first-come, first-served — the full menu is available at the bar. The dining room is reservation-only on Resy, but we keep a waitlist for cancellations."

### CALLS WE TRANSFER

## *When to hand the phone to the GM.*

- **Press inquiries** — anyone calling about a story or interview. "Let me put you in touch with our general manager, who handles all press inquiries."
- **Buyout or private event inquiries** — full restaurant buyouts, large parties beyond our normal cap. "We handle private events through our GM — let me get her on the line."
- **Complaints from past visits** — anyone calling to express dissatisfaction about a meal they already had. The GM handles every complaint personally.

- **Vendor and supplier calls** — sales reps. "Our kitchen takes vendor calls before 4 PM during the day. Can I take your name and number?"
- **Anyone asking for the chef by name** — Chef Sam takes specific calls when he's available. Take a message; he'll call back.

#### VOICEMAILS

## *Listened to within an hour. Returned within the day.*

The host checks voicemail at the start of every shift and again at the 15-minute lull before peak (typically around 6 PM). Every voicemail gets a callback. Two windows:

- Voicemails received during open hours — returned within two hours of the message.
- Voicemails received after-hours — returned the next operating day before 11 AM.

A returned voicemail starts the same way the live call does: "Hi James, this is [name] from Old Friend, returning your call. How can I help you?"

#### THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT PHONE MOMENT

Smile while you talk. The smile is audible. Even on the fortieth call. Even when you're tired. The guest on the other end is making the decision to come in or not, and your tone is roughly half the data they have.

# When something *goes wrong.*

*A lost reservation. A long wait. A guest who arrives upset. A guest who arrives a glass too many in. How we handle the hard moments at the door defines us as much as how we handle the good ones. The framework is short. Use it without thinking.*

## THE FOUR-A FRAMEWORK

# *Acknowledge. Apologize. Act. Appreciate.*

This is the same framework the servers use, and for the same reason: it works. Every recovery moment at the door runs through it.

## **Acknowledge.**

Name what's happening, out loud, calmly. "I'm so sorry — I'm seeing your reservation was for last night, not tonight, and we don't have a table available right now." Do not pretend the issue isn't happening. Do not defend the system.

## **Apologize.**

Real apology. Not defensive. "I'm sorry" — without the word "but" after it. The guest needs to hear that we hear them before we do anything else.

## **Act.**

Do something now. Offer the bar. Offer the wait list with a glass of something on the house while they wait. Get the GM involved. Send the guest with a personal card and a follow-up call the next day if we genuinely cannot seat them. The action is what proves the apology was real.

## **Appreciate.**

Thank them. Sincerely. "Thank you for your patience — I really appreciate it." Most guests, handled this way, walk out impressed rather than angry. Some become regulars specifically because of the recovery.

## THE HARD SCENARIOS

# *How they actually play out.*

## **"I have a reservation," but the book doesn't show one**

GUEST

*We have a reservation at 7:30 for two.*

YOU

*Wonderful — what name is the reservation under?*

GUEST

Johnson.

YOU

*[Searching the book, including yesterday and tomorrow.] I'm not finding a Johnson for tonight — let me try a few spellings. Could it have been booked under a different name?*

Search hard. Try alternative spellings. Check yesterday and tomorrow (occasionally guests have the wrong night). Check Resy's confirmation emails on their phone if they have it. If you genuinely cannot find a booking and the dining room is full: "I'm so sorry — I can't find your reservation in our book tonight. Let me see what we can do." Offer the bar, the wait list, or escalation to the GM. Never accuse the guest of having booked elsewhere; they're sure they booked here, and they may well be right.

## The long wait

A 7 PM reservation is at the door at 7 PM. Their table is still occupied by the 5:30 PM that ran long. The wait will be 15 minutes.

YOU

*Welcome, Robert and Diane. I have your reservation, and your table is just being reset — we're about 15 minutes behind tonight. Can I walk you over to the bar for a drink while we get you settled? It's on us tonight as our apology for the wait.*

Two things matter: the honest number ("15 minutes," not "just a few minutes") and the action ("on us tonight"). Comping a single glass of Champagne or a cocktail is within the host's discretion for waits longer than ten minutes. The GM approves anything bigger.

## The over-served arrival

A guest arrives clearly impaired. This is uncommon at Old Friend, but it happens — usually a pre-meal cocktail or two that hit harder than expected. Two tests: can they walk to the table without assistance, and can they hold a conversation. If yes to both, seat them and inform the server; the server may pace the wine slowly. If no to either, bring in the GM. The GM may decide to delay seating with bread and water at the bar, or in rare cases to decline service. The host does not make the refusal decision alone.

## The angry guest

Someone arrives upset about something that happened on a previous visit, or about the wait, or about a misunderstanding. Stay calm. Listen all the way through without defending. "I hear you. Let me get the manager — she'll take care of this." Then walk, don't run, to find the GM. The GM handles the conversation. You go back to the door.

### THE 24-HOUR RULE

Whenever a guest leaves visibly unhappy from the door — turned away, frustrated by a mix-up, anything — the GM is told before the host leaves for the night. The GM follows up within 24 hours, usually with a personal email. We do not let an unresolved bad door experience sit overnight.

### WHEN TO BRING THE GM

## *The four conditions.*

- **Volume.** Anytime a guest raises their voice at the door, the GM steps in. The host does not absorb a loud confrontation alone.
- **Safety.** Any medical issue, allergic reaction, or visible distress — the GM and the kitchen need to know immediately.
- **Refusal of service.** Anytime we are about to decline to seat a guest for any reason, the GM makes the call.
- **Complaint about a past visit.** The GM owns all post-visit recovery.

# The *last impression*.

*The goodbye is the second-most-important moment in the entire visit, after the greeting. It is also the one most often phoned in. We don't phone it in. Stand up, walk over, hold the door, use the name, mean it.*

## THE GOODBYE

# *Every guest, every night.*

When a table finishes and walks toward the door, the host stops what they're doing. You step out from behind the stand. You make eye contact. If you have their name, you use it. If they brought a coat, you have it ready before they ask. You hold the door open.

### YOU

*Goodnight, James, Sarah. Thank you so much for joining us tonight. We hope to see you again, friend.*

The phrase "we hope to see you again, friend" is intentional. It is the closing bracket on the entire restaurant's name. Use it. Not every night with every guest — that would feel rehearsed — but with anyone who had a real evening, anyone who is a regular, anyone you sense will come back.

## THE LITTLE GOODBYE DETAILS

# *What separates good from great.*

- **Anticipate the coats.** If you know table 7 is approaching the door — the server told you they just paid — get the coats off the rack and hold them at the stand. The guest never waits.
- **Hold the door.** Physically. Not "wave them out." Step around and hold it open.
- **Use the weather.** "Drive safe — it's pouring out there." "Stay warm." A small acknowledgment that the world exists outside the restaurant is a tiny thing that lands big.
- **Recognize what happened tonight.** If they came in for an anniversary, "Happy anniversary again — congratulations." If they were a first-timer, "We hope you enjoyed your first visit." This recognition is what cements them as future regulars.
- **If they were unhappy, the apology one more time.** "Thank you for giving us a chance — and again, my apologies for the slow start. We'll do better next time." Then the GM follows up the next day.

## *Once they're gone, the next visit begins.*

After every table leaves, the host (or the GM) makes a quick mental or written note for the Resy profile. Anything notable: "Loved the corner two-top, asked about the Burgundy program." "Birthday went beautifully — said they'd come back for the anniversary in May." "Allergy went well, kitchen handled perfectly." These notes are what make the next visit warmer than the last.

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*A great greeting earns the meal. A great goodbye earns the next visit.*

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# The *operations*.

*Hours, dress, pay, breaks, calling out, the things you need to know once a month. Kept short on purpose. The role lives in the previous nine chapters; this one just covers the logistics around them.*

## HOURS

### *Tuesday through Sunday, closed Mondays.*

- **Arrive at 4:00 PM.** Service starts at 5:00 PM. The hour between is when the room gets set, the book gets read, and the pre-shift happens.
- **Pre-shift at 5:00 PM.** Fifteen minutes with the GM, Chef Sam, and the floor team. You contribute the pace brief (Chapter Five).
- **Stay until close.** The host is the last face guests see. That means the host stays until the last guest leaves — typically 10:30 PM on weeknights, 11:30 PM on weekends. The bar may run past you, but the door belongs to you until the last dining room table is out.

The schedule comes out Wednesdays. Ask the GM for time off two weeks ahead. Trade shifts in My Schedule by 3 PM the day before (Sunday for Tuesday shifts).

## DRESS

### *A half-step more formal than the rest of the floor.*

You are the first thing every guest sees. You dress accordingly:

- **Black or dark suit, dress, or tailored pants.** No jeans, no graphic tees.
- **Clean closed-toe black shoes.** You will stand for seven hours; choose comfort. But polished, not athletic.
- **Hair pulled back or neatly styled.**
- **Light, professional grooming.** Visible tattoos and small piercings are fine. No strong perfume or cologne — the fire is the only smell we want in this room.
- **The Old Friend pin.** Provided. Worn on the lapel or collar.

## THE PAY STRUCTURE

### *Hourly plus a share of the FOH tip pool.*

Hosts at Old Friend are paid hourly at competitive Main Line market rates. You also receive a share of the front-of-house tip pool, calculated by points-by-role — the same pool that includes servers, runners, bartenders, and the support team. The GM has the breakdown.

Pay runs bi-weekly, direct deposit. Stubs are emailed. Discrepancies go to the GM the next day; we fix them in the next pay cycle.

#### FAMILY MEAL

### *4:30 PM. You eat with the team.*

The kitchen feeds the floor before the floor opens. Real food, cooked by the cooks, often what they wanted to test that day. Sit down. Eat with the servers and the runners. Talk. This is how the team becomes a team — the host eats with the line cook, the bartender eats with the dishwasher, everyone eats the same meal. Don't skip it.

#### BREAKS

### *Short, taken when the floor allows.*

The host is not on the floor in the same way a line cook is, but the door is always open during service. The GM covers the stand for ten minutes when you need a break. Don't disappear without telling someone. A door without a host for ten minutes can mean two missed greetings — which is a worse experience for those two tables than any host wants to cause.

#### CALLING OUT

### *Call the GM, not text, at least three hours before service.*

- If you're sick, say so. We will cover.
- If you find your own coverage, offer the shift in My Schedule; the GM approves.
- Repeated unexplained absences become a problem; the GM will talk to you. We would rather have the conversation than lose you.

#### THE PATH FORWARD

### *What this role leads to, if you want it to.*

Many of our hosts become servers within six months to a year. Some become floor managers. A few have, at other restaurants in the Stove and Co. world, become GMs. The host role is one of the strongest training grounds in the entire restaurant — you see every guest, every server, every reservation, every conflict, every recovery. Few roles teach hospitality faster.

If you want to grow into a server role, tell the GM. We'll trail you behind a senior server during slow shifts and put you on the schedule for a section when you're ready. If you want to learn the back office — the booking system, the financials, the inventory — tell us. We have other restaurants. The path is real if you want it.

#### THE NUMBER THAT MATTERS MOST

Staff turnover. We target below 50% annualized for the entire team, hosts included. If something feels off — schedule, pay, treatment, the role itself — say so before you leave. We would much rather solve it than replace you.

#### REVIEWS AND FEEDBACK

### *Every six months. Both directions.*

The GM sits down with every host every six months for a twenty-minute review. They tell you what you're great at and what to keep working on. You tell them what's working, what isn't, and what would make this a better restaurant to work at. Bring honest feedback. The host's view of the floor is unique — you see things the GM doesn't from the floor and the chef doesn't from the line.

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# You are the *first* Old Friend.

*Between the two of us, we have stood at every station in a kitchen and at every table on a floor. The hardest job in any restaurant we've worked in was the host's. Not because the work itself is harder than washing dishes or running fire — it isn't. It's harder because the failure mode is invisible. A line cook who blows a steak knows immediately. A server who forgets a check gets a hint. A host who delivers a flat greeting at 6:47 PM on a Tuesday loses a future regular — and never knows it happened.*

*What you do at the door is the only moment our restaurant has to make a stranger feel like a friend. The food and the wine come later. The fire and the room come later. The first seven seconds belong to you, and there's nothing the kitchen can cook that will undo a bad seven seconds.*

*So we ask one thing of you. Take it seriously. Read this book. Stand at the stand. Make eye contact when the door opens. Use the name. And when you say "we hope to see you again, friend" at the end of the night — mean it. The guest can hear when you mean it. That's how we earn the second visit, and the third, and the year of visits after that.*

*Welcome to the door.*

*— Chef Sam Henzy & Chef Joe Monnich*