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Running a Restaurant...

A Tough Spot That's Fun

by Lema Weaver

I MANAGE a restaurant. I think it is one of the most interesting and profitable careers that is open to women today.

I would, however, like to dissipate the idea that so many people have—namely, “that anyone can manage a restaurant.” In addition to the fact that fifty percent fail in this business, here are some of the other reasons why it is not a “snap” job and no one should choose it lightly as a life work.

If you take in $100 a day in your restaurant not more than $50 can be spent for food; and just starting to buy food with that amount for several hundred hungry folks if you think it’s a snap. Potatoes may sound like a bargain at $2 per hundred pounds but wait until you discover that 20 pounds—and sometimes more—go into the garbage can in the form of peelings.

The veal legs that cost only 16 cents a pound soon show that for every 20 pounds purchased about 8 pounds are bone and waste. And when the 12 remaining pounds are roasted they shrink to 8. Now—and I won’t even ask you to count in the loss from the “leftover” part!—figure your cost per final pound.

A prime rib of beef weighs 25 pounds. Before cooking, about 6 pounds of short ribs, valued at about half as much per pound, must be removed for other uses. This leaves the standing rib roast weighing 19 pounds. After cooking, the roast weighs about 15 to 15 pounds, of which much is rib and back bones. Of the possible 8 pounds left, about twenty-five to twenty portions can be served. This shows that the original price per pound has been trebled, and yet when you set your price at a minimum that hardly covers cost, some of your customers are sure to protest that they do not “want to buy the whole cow.”

Now for the rest of your $100 income! Only $25 can be paid to the cooks, bakers, dishwashers, waitresses, bus boys and other employees who prepare and serve the food. You must include yourself too—unless you are a philanthropist and wish to donate your $12 to 18 hours a day services.

Another subtraction from the total income must be made for rent: about $10 dollars a day if you are lucky and have signed a long lease!

Each day that you serve, your dishes, equipment and linens are being broken or are wearing out. You have sales and other taxes to pay; also insurance. If you want to increase your business you will have to advertise. Now do a little mental arithmetic and see how much profit is left.

Now I’ll bet someone’s smiling. Why does anyone stay in such a “tough” spot? Lots of reasons—here are some of them.

FIRST, as I mentioned before, it pays well and second, the field is not as overcrowded as many others.

Third, some of the nicest, most interesting people in the world are engaged in restaurant work. This is especially true since the depression when a great many refined, educated people were forced to obtain work in restaurants and are remaining there because they like it. And I didn’t mean in the managerial field, either. I am thinking of a nurse who, after being out of work for almost a year, became a salad girl! Her displays are works of art, she thoroughly enjoys the work, and has no intention of ever going back to nursing.

An attractive young fellow who is getting his masters degree in commerce and economics, is washing dishes.

A middle aged woman who was in charge of a wardrobe department in a large theater for a number of years is peeling potatoes, but she doesn’t stop at peeling. She weighs the peeling to find how much is wasted in that way; she examines the potatoes carefully to see that they are suitable for mashing—some have starch cores that no matter how long they are cooked, cause lumps in the finished products.

Another young man who is jerking sodas has marked artistic talent for which he finds outlet by helping to trim the restaurant show windows.

This brings me to the fourth and best reason for liking restaurant work—because it is so broad in scope. It allows room for artistic talent, executive ability, psychological observation, salesmanship and advertising, accounting and many others.

Returning again to show windows. This is a field in itself, yet only the larger concerns can afford to keep such an artist on the staff, so the manager, with such amateur talent as he or she can recruit from the ranks, must fill the breach. But if the manager does, the extra work is nothing and only makes the business more fascinating.

I generally plan on seasonal monthly changes in our windows, although sometimes they are decorated oftener. Of course food, which is the keynote of every restaurant display, is very necessary, for after all, show windows should arouse a desire to enter and buy, yet nothing is so undesirable as a bit of shriveled food that shrieks “I’m left from yesterday.”

Also for the manager who has a desire to be different menus, waitresses uniforms, and atmospheric decoration are good channels for experimentation.

And as for psychological observation, perhaps in no other field is there so much chance and necessity for observing and studying humans. It is said that to write about people you must be interested and “properly curious” about them. But to feed your fellow men and women you must know them from their most primitive instincts to their most civilized subtleties.

Not that it is hard to learn about (Turn to page 16).
secondary one sounds just as deep:
Should Iowa and other states adopt the unicameral legislative plan of Nebraska?

The women's chief question (don't be alarmed) is: Should all nations abolish the export of arms and munition?—yes, you guessed right. The subtle meaning is that it would stop war.

But it is not all so dry and deep.
Last year three debaters accompanied by Mr. Whan took a trip to Austin, Texas.

They made a little side excursion to Arkansas Pass several miles out by ferry—not as one might suppose, to debate—but rather, to fish. They fished so long and so late that they missed the last ferry and had to charter it to bring them back. The fish story is than one doughty debater caught 200 fish that day with a pole and line—all the way from stingerees to cat-fish.

All-college debates for the entertainment of students on the campus, similar to the English debate, are scheduled with the University of Honolulu, the University of California and perhaps the University of New York. Phi Sigma, a debating society to which all the debaters belong, takes care of all housing.

Increasing interest has been shown in debate and more and more people have wanted to participate, even though they had to plug through a course in the subject. Although no urgent call is made for more debaters, unless facilities for handling them are greatly increased, if you are interested, want the training, and are willing to work, you can make a place for yourself on the squad.

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them—quite the reverse—for in no other occupation do people so clearly reveal their characters and background as in eating. Even the sounds in a dining room indicate the kind of people dining.

And, I believe that in a public dining room, people most clearly reveal their true breeding. Often the poorly dressed patron is the most courteous and kind to those who serve them and this is the true mark of breeding. The well dressed man or woman to whom the price of a meal means little or nothing oftentimes complains unnecessarily of service, food and price, making life miserable for both waitress and manager.

I find the greater number of customers are considerate and interesting people, so I still repeat that it is one of the most interesting and profitable careers that a girl may choose.