**Maintaining fresh and crisp buffets – Updated February 2012**

**GUIDELINES:**

1. Hot food must be hot, cold food must be cold!
2. First impression is capital! The display must look like it looked when opening the buffet at anytime and all actions must aim toward that goal.
3. Food must never look dry, clotted (sauces), soaked, overfilled or greasy.
4. When you walk in the buffet areas, make eye contact with guests first, then check your food!
5. If a guest is looking at a dish, seems wondering and is not helping him/herself, immediately, offer assistance and make a comment on the dish(es) to the guest, descriptions, ingredients, etc….to help them make their best choice! (or try it all)
6. You see it half full, the guest see’s it half empty!.........never go below half full! (Only when very busy and guests are helping themselves and refill is at hand, ready to replace immediately)
7. Never leave any of the dishes from the menu missing for more than 5 seconds! (Anticipate) or even better 3 seconds.
8. Fill buffet based on volume of guests so food doesn’t stay for more than 20 minutes on the line untouched. (refer to volume of production/display chart)
9. Ensure that the best utensil possible is there for the guest and that they are clean, if not, change immediately!
10. Do not use tongs and utensils used by guests for refilling, use kitchen tongs and spoons.
11. Do not pour left over from previous dish or from tray to tray, use tongs!
12. Do not refill dressings, soups and other liquid based items in front of the guest without using a ladle. If pouring directly from a container to another, this must be done in the back and into a clean container.
13. When busy (guests in front), do not keep the dish away from the guests while transferring for more than 5 seconds or even better 3 seconds!
14. Carving stations must be garnished and remain as clean and free from debris as guest flow allows.

**ARRANGE AND PRESENT!**

1. Food should continuously be centered in dish, properly presented.
2. Garnish must be in place, edible and be paired with the type of dish.
3. Garnish must not be on top of food so it remains presentable before dish is used beyond half empty as it would sink into the preparation if set on top.
4. Any sight of excessive grease at bottom of dish needs to be removed or replaced by a new dish.
5. Never fill any container (cold, hot, condiments and dressings) to the top edge of the container it is to be presented into. Allow ½ inch space and room for garnish.
6. Dishes outer and inner rim must be wiped clean with a clean towel; this includes the covers if in use.
7. Food debris, stains around dishes and on dishes must be avoided at all times, keep your line clean and don’t wait for someone else to do it. ACTION IMMEDIATELY!

**REFILL!**

1. When close to half empty!
2. Take old dishes and replace with new one, making sure that the dish is not missing for more than 5 seconds or even better 3 seconds!

**REFRESH!**

Refresh means to bring back all dishes presented as close to our guidelines & standards without going beyond half empty. There are critical key steps and needed knowledge to do so, they are listed below.

1. **Maintain!**

* Keep all dishes, bowls and pans properly laid out on buffet top and keep in the same alignment from open to close.

1. **Stir!**

* Frequently.
* Stirring keeps temperature balanced and helps to avoid hot food, cold on top.
* Stirring salads and other moist preparation (pasta in sauce, vegetables) allow to re-distribute moisture (sauces & dressings) in the dish.

1. **Re center!**

* The rule here is to reposition food that guests have used so they look as much as possible like new or untouched.
* When guests have taken a few portions out of the salads or hot foods, the presentation is un-balanced, re-present the food, ensuring that it is as much centered as possible and that the garnish is still acceptable. i.e. imagine a bowl of coleslaw after a few servings have been taken out of it, you will need to stir and re-center the coleslaw so that the salad looks as much as possible un-touched or like a left over.

1. **Baste!**

* Chicken, fish or other meat portions or preparation are served with sauce, after a few minutes, the sauce drips away and the portion looks dry. Stirring some sauce or butter at the bottom of the dish and pouring it again over the portions will allow them to present nicely for another few minutes. If this step has been repeated 3 times or more, there will be most likely dry sauce on the edges of the dish and in that case the dish must be changed.

1. **Clean!**

* Clean the outer and inner rim from drippings made by guests when they helped themselves.
* Clean the surroundings of the dishes from fallen debris and stains also.
* Remove all dirty utensils, covers and pans that are not in use from sight of the guests.

1. **Change!**

* Change utensils or have them changed if dirty, ensure presence of a back up of clean utensils to do so as needed.

**How do I know ?**

How do I know I am on the right track? That I am doing the right thing? That I have the right attitude? Below are a few points that explain/describes situations in particular and overall guidelines for all of you to be able to answer the question above.

1. Is the food I am serving/displaying of great quality?
   1. Would you serve that food to the most important people in your life (parents, spouse, children, best friends, mentor…) ? would you stand with your Chef’s pride and serve this food the way it is now ?
   2. If this food was taken now as it is and plated like a dinner plate in the main galley; would it look good enough to be served? Are each and every component of the best freshness and taste?
2. Why passengers would think that the food we present is left over food?
   1. Because it looks like it and this is due many reasons that may be avoided using all the principles that you are learning now.
   2. Example: When our guests order Chinese food in their home to be delivered. It looks nice, shiny, fresh and the container is full. As they have not finished the container they will place it in the fridge for the next day and on that day the food will look dry as the sauce dripped at the bottom, sauce stains on the side of the container, etc,etc… So they naturally call it “left-over”. Now imagine when we place a ceramic dish of sweet and sour pork on the line, if it is left unattended under the heat lamp, what will happen? The sauce will dry on top, drip at the bottom, leaving stains on the side of the container. Regardless that we have cooked this dish a few minutes ago, it will still be looked at as left over by our passengers, because it is what it looks like at that time. Now what should you do to avoid it? (Q&A with group)
3. What is the contract, how do I meet its requirements?
   1. The contract is signed by the Executive Chef every day and as he signs it he engage all of us to do our outmost to meet its requirements. The Contract is also known as the menu!
   2. The requirements of the menu are that I engaged myself and my team to ensure that all items listed on this menu will be available at any time from opening to close without interruption. Think about the 3 seconds rule; does it make more sense now?
4. Team work=Work as a Team, Team up for the work!
   1. A buffet experience is successful because all are focused to eliminate any negative impressions and it takes everyone’s attention and focus to do so. There is no job for one only, everyone must learn and know how to do each and every job in the buffet area, including the preparation kitchen.
   2. If you know how to do things and someone does not know, then it is your obligation to show, explain, teach, and demonstrate. If you do not know and are not sure, then ask!
   3. Team up for the work means that you need to plan ahead and participate in everything you do to make the other’s job, better, faster, cheaper. This starts by keeping areas clear and accessible for all, actively look for ways to support such as helping the filler when you have 2 spare minutes.
5. What is a good filler/runner?
   1. A good filler is someone who makes the runner be a good runner and a good runner is the one that ensures that the contract is fulfilled at all times! It is clearly a team effort and it is everyone’s duty to support the other and/or to ask for support when needed in order to maintain the menu offering as per contract.
6. What is an opening/closing/low volume operating mode? What does it means to me?
   1. As we want to present the freshest food possible at all times, we need to understand the basics of consumption and ensure that we display food in quantities that will allow it to be replaced/refreshed on a regular basis and without the food looking stale, dry, etc…. This means that all food on display need to be consumed/replaced every 15 to 20 minutes maximum! This is not time control for USPH!!! It is only about freshness and appearance. You must understand that the techniques used to refresh and represent the food already on the line has its limits in time and cannot be used indefinitely.
   2. Example: when a tray is set in preparation of opening a buffet line; it is placed sometimes 10 to 15 minutes before the actual opening time and it might take another 15 to 20 minutes before that tray is replaced. In short, for about 15 minutes, food displayed already looks 15 to 30 minutes old!...not good for a first impression!
   3. A slow buffet is trouble waiting to happen as food does not move fast enough and requires a lot of maintenance work; it is during slow hours that the cooks should be the busiest to constantly apply the refreshing rules in order to maintain a fresh and crisp buffet.