



IN FRONT OF THE GUEST · SEASON 1 · EXTRA MODULE: SELLING IS SERVING · LESSON 49

The Table That Recommends: The Day's Specials and Off-Menu Wines

*Everyone gets the menu.
The recommendation is yours to earn.*

In five lines

The menu is the document every guest receives in the same way; the recommendation is the layer only you can add — and it is the one that turns a dinner into an experience and a check into a result. It works with the same mechanism you learned at check-in in lesson 5: you know what the guest cannot know — what is at its best today, the off-menu wine, the finishing touch at dessert — and offering it to them with its description and its extra cost made clear is a service, not a sale. What decides everything is the moment you say it and the truth with which you say it. This lesson gives you the exact timing.

The script, step by step

- 1. MOMENT 1 — When you hand over the menu: opening with the day's specials.** Before they dive into it: “Before you look at the menu, let me tell you: today we have [this and this], which are at their best right now.” Two or three, not seven; told with appetite, not recited. You have just given them information the menu doesn't have — from that instant on, you are their advisor, not their server.
- 2. MOMENT 2 — At the order: the off-menu wine.** Once the dishes are chosen, the targeted recommendation: “And if you'll allow me a recommendation, to go with this we have an off-menu wine — [twenty-second story: winery, grape, why it's special] — for just [X] extra. It's a little gem.” The short story makes it desirable; the clear price makes it honest. Without both pieces there is no recommendation: there is an ambush or there is a mystery.
- 3. MOMENT 3 — When you serve dessert: the finishing touch.** Never with the check — when you serve dessert: “Would you like a glass of champagne with it? It rounds off the meal.” You already know from lesson 8 that the last impression is the one that turns the stay into a memory: the finishing touch at dessert is its table version.
- 4. Once, with elegance.** Each offer is made once, and the no is accepted with the same smile as the yes. The guest who declines today and didn't feel pushed is the one who asks tomorrow, “What do you recommend?” — and that guest is already yours.
- 5. The truth as the limit.** You only recommend what is truly at its best, and you only tell the story that is true. The day the fish didn't arrive as it should have, that day you don't recommend the fish. Your credibility is the most expensive inventory to restock.

With limited resources: how to hold the standard

If you don't have...	How to hold the standard
A large cellar or exclusive labels	The "off-menu" doesn't require a luxury cellar: it is the special bottle the hotel keeps in small numbers, the local label the wine list doesn't include, the manager's own find. Scarcity, well told, is exclusivity.
A sommelier or wine training	It is built at the briefing: at every service, the manager presents to the team what is worth recommending that day and its twenty-second story — and whoever can, tastes it. Nobody recommends well what they don't know; nobody needs a diploma to truly know three wines.

In front of the guest

DO	DON'T	NEVER
Tell the recommendation with a brief story and a clear extra cost, looking them in the eye. Accept the no with the same smile as the yes.	Recite the same soulless "today we have" at all twenty tables. Systematically push the most expensive item. Insist after a no.	Invent a wine's story or its origin: a lie uncovered at the table invalidates all your future recommendations. Hide the extra cost and let it show up on the check: it is the small betrayal from lesson 8, in its expensive version.

Common mistakes

- ◆ Offering the champagne with the check: the finishing touch is served with dessert; after that it is no longer a finishing touch, it's a charge.
- ◆ The three-minute story: twenty seconds seduce; three minutes hijack the table.
- ◆ Recommending without knowing: "everything is very good" is the absence of a recommendation (lesson 23) — and the off-menu demands that you know it better than the menu.
- ◆ Measuring success only by the check: the declined recommendation that left a good taste also sold — it sold your credibility for tomorrow.

THE GOLDEN RULE

**"Selling is serving
when what you offer makes their evening better."**

This lesson's exercise

Write your complete script for the three moments for a real dinner in your restaurant: your opening with the day's specials (two dishes), your off-menu wine with its twenty-second story and its extra cost, and your finishing touch at dessert. Word for word. In the answer that follows, I share mine.