The Counter East.

THE HOST'S FIELD GUIDE

The Waiting Guest.

A confident welcome. Even when there's a wait.

The first impression starts before the first seat. Give guests an honest picture, a useful choice, and someone who will come back with an answer.

This guide gives your hosts words they can use under pressure—and the actions that make those words credible.

THE FOUR-MOVE RESPONSE

1. **Recognize.** Name the concern without arguing.
2. **Check.** Find the current fact before offering a promise.
3. **Offer.** Give only choices the team can actually deliver.
4. **Return.** Agree on the next update, then keep it.

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01 / SET AN HONEST EXPECTATION

Time is a promise.

Use these scripts as starting points. Replace bracketed details with confirmed facts. The examples are not guarantees or house policies.

01 “How long is the wait?”

> “Our current estimate for your party is [range]. I’ll check again by [clock time] and update you here, even if nothing has changed. Does anyone in your party have a seating need or a time you need to leave?”

Next step. Check party size, a suitable table’s stage, and the receiving section. Record arrival, quoted range, and the next update. If you cannot support a range, say so and give a time to return with a status check.

02 “You said twenty minutes.”

> “You’re right—we’ve passed the estimate we gave you, and I’m sorry. I’m checking the table now. I’ll come back by [clock time] with what we can realistically offer.”

Next step. Acknowledge the original quote. Verify the revised outlook before giving another range. Return at the promised time even if you still have no reliable seating estimate. Bring in the manager when the delay needs a recovery decision.

03 “We have a reservation. Why are we waiting?”

> “You booked for [time], and we haven’t been able to seat you on time. I’m sorry. I’m checking the next suitable table with our floor lead and will update you by [clock time].”

Next step. Confirm the reservation and arrival status. Explain the actual constraint briefly, without blaming the previous guests. Check alternatives with the floor lead. If the party arrived early, distinguish the booked time from any earlier seating you can offer.

A check-in time is yours to keep. A seating time depends on the room. Never replace a missed estimate with “just five more minutes” unless the current facts support it.

02 / EXPLAIN WITHOUT GETTING DEFENSIVE

Make fairness visible.

Guests can see chairs. They cannot see the handoffs behind them. Give one truthful explanation, then move to what you can do.

04 “There are empty tables right there.”

> “I can see why that’s frustrating. That table is [being reset / held for an arriving reservation / waiting for the section to be ready]. I’m checking which suitable table we can seat you at next.”

Next step. Use only the explanation that is true. Confirm the table is released and the server can receive the party. Keep internal staffing complaints out of the conversation; check whether another section is actually available.

05 “They arrived after us.”

> “I understand why that looks unfair. Let me check your place and the table we’re waiting on for your party. I’ll explain what’s affecting the order.”

Next step. Verify before defending the seating order. Explain a relevant difference—such as table size or a reservation—without identifying another guest. If the team made a mistake, acknowledge it and ask the floor lead for a fair correction. Do not invent a reservation to end the discussion.

06 “Can’t we just sit and wait for service?”

> “Let me check whether we can welcome you properly at that table now. If we can seat you with a delay before service, I’ll explain that first so you can decide.”

Next step. Get agreement from the receiving server or floor lead. Confirm who will greet the party and what delay to disclose. If the table cannot be released, explain the available waiting options. Seating a party must not make them disappear from the team’s attention.

Finish with an owner. “I’ll check and come back to you” is useful only when someone is actually checking and the guest knows when to expect the update.

03 / FIND THE NEXT USEFUL CHOICE

Meet the need behind the words.

07 “We have a show to get to.”

> “What time do you need to leave? I’ll check both the table wait and the kitchen timing before I tell you whether we can make that work.”

Next step. Confirm the full visit window with the floor lead and kitchen. Offer only verified alternatives. If the timing will not work, say so promptly; do not promise a rushed meal on someone else’s behalf.

08 “Can we leave and come back?”

> “Here’s how our waitlist works: [contact method], [response window], and [what happens if you miss the call]. Let’s confirm how we’ll reach you before you go.”

Next step. Use the actual house policy. Confirm the contact details and that the guest understands any return deadline. Update the list if they leave permanently. Do not promise to hold a table indefinitely.

09 “I can’t stand here this long.”

> “Thank you for telling me. What would make the wait more comfortable? Let me check a suitable place to sit and the seating options we have for you.”

Next step. Ask about the practical need, not a diagnosis. Offer available seating and confirm a suitable route and table with the floor lead. Apply the same care to families with tired children; check for a high chair or other requested setup before promising it.

10 “This is unacceptable. Get your manager.”

> “I’m sorry this has been frustrating. I’ll bring our manager over and explain what’s happened so you don’t have to start again.”

Next step. Give the manager the original estimate, current facts, guest’s concern, and promises already made. Confirm they have taken over. Ask for help promptly if behavior becomes threatening; follow the venue’s safety procedure and do not argue or physically intervene.

PRINT / KEEP AT THE HOST STAND

A good wait has an owner.

Before the doors open

- Confirm who can release a table and who handles recovery decisions.
- Agree on current wait guidance, update intervals, and contact/return rules.
- Check waiting seats, accessible routes, and options for different party sizes.
- Know which alternatives you may offer and which need a manager’s approval.

Record the promise

Party / size: _____

Arrival / reservation time: _____

Quoted range: _____

Next update at / owner: _____

Current table status / next action: _____

Practical seating need / departure time: _____

Use the restaurant’s approved waitlist. Record only what helps service; keep contact details and sensitive guest information out of public view.

When the estimate changes

Check the facts → tell the guest → offer confirmed choices → set the next update.

If the guest asks for a manager, the delay keeps slipping, or a decision is outside your authority, bring in the floor lead. Do not offer a comp or refund you cannot authorize.

Close the handoff

Tell the receiving server about the wait, any time constraint, and commitments still owed. Get an acknowledgement. After the rush, note what broke: the forecast, the table status, or the handoff.

For your next pre-shift briefing: choose one script, role-play the question, then name the real person who can supply the answer in your restaurant.
Read further: Waitlists: change the promise early · Service recovery needs an easy next step.