

Thoughts on Presentation

Let's talk about that. A lot. It's really a huge issue and we see so many missed chances to make a big impression. You know, the Wow Factor.

Think about your first impression when you walk into a place for the first time, and then when you go there again and again. First time? You're thinking this is great! But, by the second or third time, it's just the same place and you don't really look at it much.

That's our challenge. Our customers are there day after day. It's home. Same-old same-old. Add to that the fact that it's always steak day on Tuesday and Saturday; seafood on Friday. So how do we make it different, interesting, and a welcome change?

It's not just the meals, it's how we present them and how we change even the ones that are written in stone. So if every steak day is steak, burgers, broccoli and cheese, baked potato and grilled onions and mushrooms, well then, welcome to the land of the ordinary.

And, when it takes so very little to make noticeable changes, it's worth our time and effort. Why, you ask? Great question! It's because a very small effort – even a simple relocation of an item or two – makes the whole meal seem new and fresh. And that gets noticed. Our customers are happy – sometimes not even really being aware of why – and you get the props.

So where does presentation begin? From the moment our guests walk in the dining room door. They should be able to see that the tables are set for the meal:

- Breakfast? Syrup out on the tables, all the other stuff gone.
- Taco Tuesday? Salsa, baskets of chips on tables.
- Steak Day? Sauces neatly arranged on tables, jellies are long gone.

What else is in that dining room? How about the pie case? Is everything in it organized, covered and appetizing? Are the portions even and nicely cut? All pointing in the same direction?



And is there a good variety?

How about the salad? If you have a salad bar, it should be fresh-looking at every meal, with an assortment of fresh vegetables, lettuce, at least one or two prepared salads (they can be pasta, potato, etc).



And don't go crazy killing yourself. Use those canned items too. Have the chow mein noodles, 3-bean salad, jalapenos or other pickles out. And of course, olives. Cottage cheese. And don't forget the cheese and maybe ham or bacon or diced turkey.

On theme days, the salad bar is an asset too. For Mexican, put all the condiments there: salsa, extra jalapenos, maybe some guacamole, the sour cream and some shredded lettuce for tacos and such.

But the main event is the meal you're serving. And it doesn't matter if it's a surf and turf, seafood blowout with Prime Rib and Lobster, or a fast food lunch with burgers, dogs, and fish sandwiches. It's HOW you present it that really makes a difference and gets our customers to say, "Wow, that looks really good!"

Many of the things that matter are just little things. Details that you might

think don't matter – and that the diners may not even notice – are the ones that make a meal memorable.

Did we put out cornbread with the cabbage? It's a Mexican theme. Do we have something for those who don't like it? How about a healthy choice?

For Steak day, are we really trying to sell something other than the steaks, or are we just doing the steak, burger, baked chicken thing? If you think about it, you can make every steak day different by simply offering a different side item or two, and doing something other than that same-old baked chicken.

By doing these, you make the meal fresh, different, and something not only to look forward to, but to remember well also. It adds to your personal well of good karma. Customers remember all the little things you do to make it better. They're aware when you're in a rut and when you're on your game.

If they walk into the dining room quiet, like the death march to Bataan, you might get the sense something's wrong. Take a look around and, if you are aware, and you pay attention, you'll see what it is.

It's also a **must** to step out into the dining room and look at your galley area like a customer would. What do you see? Is the galley neat and organized; does it look professional or is it chaotic because we just now pulled the meal together and there's all the evidence lying about. And how about the housekeeping... how does it look to you, the customer?



If you walked into a restaurant that looked like your operation, how would you feel about it? Well, that's what our customers think. So, run your operation the way you want people to think of you. And SONOCO. And look carefully at what they see when they come up to your serving line.



So let's talk about that steamtable. It's pretty important. It's where the end result of your work can either shine in its professional glory, or lay there, limp and soaking in grease, or water, or worse – dried out because the pans are monitored.

Before we get to the layouts that follow, a few pointers about steamtables, the pans, and how to setup and manage a quality meal from beginning to end.

Pan Size: pick the right size pan for the job. That doesn't mean pick a pan that will hold a 12 pound roast because that's what you cooked. It means pick a pan that will best display the product, and that will make it easier and more pleasant for the customer to use.

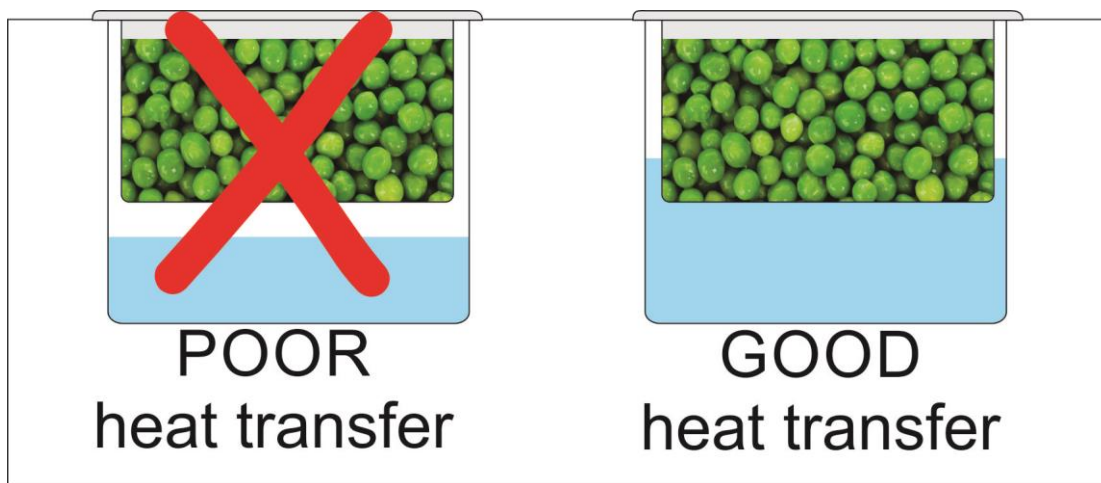
We confidently can say that you never – and we do mean never – need a full pan of mashed potatoes. We've served 600 guests at a time with half pans. They stay attractive and can be swapped.

Depth: As a rule, use the shallowest pan possible. It shows the product at its best and is easier to take portions from. Instead of a 4" pan piled with product, a shallow pan and a backup will do a better job. And the food will stay fresh-looking and not picked over.

Six inch pans should be avoided. They're hard for customers to use, and we usually fill and forget them. So halfway through the meal, the sides of the pan are dried up and unappealing.

Grates: It's always a good idea to have some on hand in three sizes: third, half and full. They're invaluable for fried foods, foods that tend to sit in their own fat (bacon, fries) are a good example.

Water: what about it? Well we're talking about how much to put in the steamtable. And here's the news: it's a lot more than you think. It should be enough to touch the bottom of the pans. Of course, if you're using 4- and 2 1/2 inch pans, you can't do both or you'll have pans floating all over the place. So have it come up as far as you can on the deeper pans. Like this:



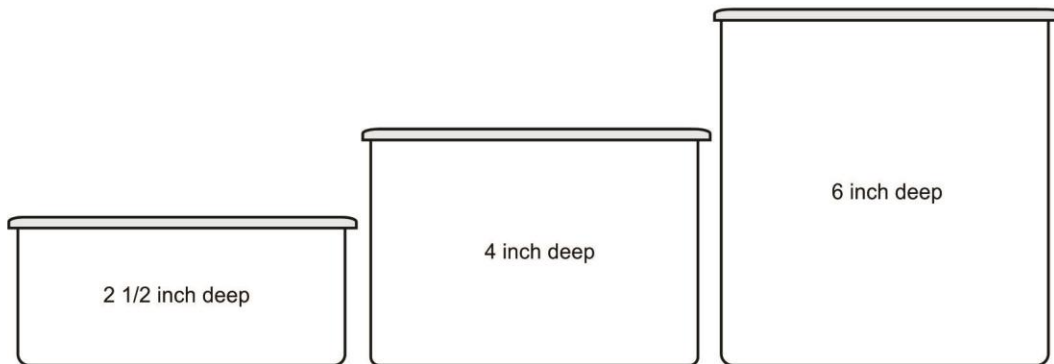
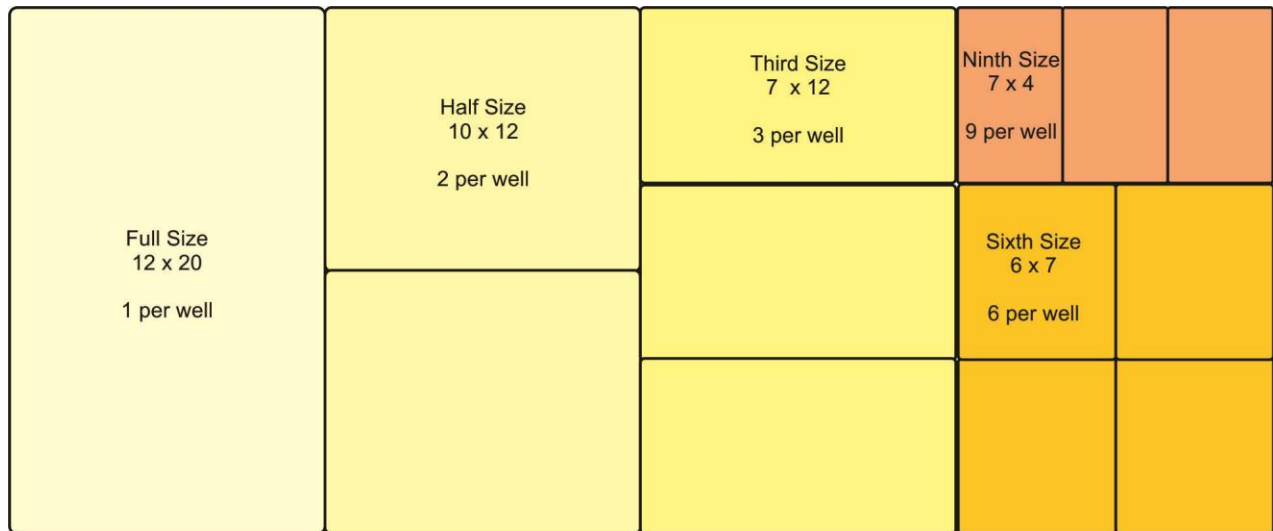
If you're hearing that the food isn't hot, check here first. If there is an air gap (as shown at left) between the food pan and the water well, then heat can't efficiently transfer to the food as shown at right. Food can get cold this way.

Again, as shown at right, you can see that water touches the pan and that moves a lot more heat into the food than the air in the image at left.

Think about it. You can put your arm in a 350 F oven with no protection at all. But you'd never just stick your hand in a pot of boiling water that's nearly 150 degrees cooler! Why? Because air is a poor conductor of heat. Water is a great conductor. So fill those wells.

Steamtable Pans, Sizes and Capacities

Pans are usually called by their size: full, half, third, sixth and ninth. That is how many can fit in a standard, 12 x 20 inch steamtable opening. For example, 3 pans in a single well are “third pans”. And so on. The chart below shows some, but not all, sizes and types available.



In the image above, you see the three most common pan depths. The 6” deep should be the last you use for meal service because it doesn't hold much more than the 4”, and because people tend not to pay attention to the pans, and therefore they don't look good during meal service.

The shallow and 4” are the best choices for almost any application, whether you're running a 20 man or 225 man operation.

The chart below will give you an idea of the average capacity of the pans we use most often. The capacity is shown in cups, so you can convert most recipes into a pan size.

Some of it is just eye appeal, and you know you don't want to put fried chicken in a third pan, or the green beans in a full pan. Do you? 😊

Steam Table Pan Capacities in Cups			
	2½-in.	4-in.	6-in.
Full Pan	33	53	79
Two-Thirds Pan	22	35	53
Half Pan	17	26	40
Third Pan	11	18	26
Quarter Pan	8	13	20
Sixth Pan	6	9	13
Ninth Pan	2	4	

As you can see from the above chart, a 2 1/2 inch full size pan can hold 2 gallons of product. That's if it's lasagna or something filled just to the top and baked. It can hold twice that if you use it for fried chicken.

The ninth pan can hold a couple of cups, so it probably has more value on the salad bar for something like radishes – a slow mover – but there are still uses for it on the dinner line. For example, doing a baked potato topping bar, you could fill one with butter, one with bacon, with jalapenos, and chili and so on. So they have a purpose. Perhaps a garnish sauce for a fish dish.

Here are three steamtable setups for 3-, 4-, or 5-well steamtables. This is to give you an idea of why and how. The meals are essentially the same menu. The difference is how it is planned for presentation and location crew size.

Roast Chicken shallow pan	Rice 4" pan	Green Beans 4" pan	
	Beans 4" pan	Broccoli 4" pan	
Meat Loaf shallow pan	Mashed Potatoes 4" pan	Gravy 4" pan	Cheese Sauce 4" pan

Customer Service Side →

Meat Loaf shallow pan	Roast Chicken shallow pan	Green Beans 4" pan	Rolls / Cornbread 4" pan	
	Mashed Potatoes 4" pan	Broccoli 4" pan	Rice 4" pan	
		Gravy 4" pan	Cheese Sauce 4" pan	Beans 4" pan

Customer Service Side →

Meat Loaf shallow pan	Roast Chicken shallow pan	Rolls or Cornbread 4" pan	Grilled Onions 4" pan	Green Beans 4" pan	
		Mashed Potatoes 4" pan	Rice 4" pan	Broccoli 4" pan	
			Beans 4" pan	Gravy 4" pan	Cheese Sauce 4" pan

Customer Service Side →

If you'll notice, we planned that the main entrees are at the beginning. This is not always the case or even best. But in this situation, with two low-cost main entrees, there's no reason not to.

The next thing to point out is that the “wetter” stuff is moved to the front. So if a customer puts gravy on their potatoes and spills some, it won't end up in the broccoli. Or beans won't spill into the cheese sauce. And so on.

This should always be in our minds because it makes our job easier when we're managing the line. Less mess to cleanup and a better looking serving line throughout the meal.

We put bread (or cornbread) on the line for a couple of reasons: One, lots of locations don't have a bread warmer. This is a way to keep hot bread available. Especially cornbread, which kind of sucks when it's cold. Don't you agree?

Another thing is that it takes up an extra space, which is sometimes a challenge, but can also be a big help if you have space to fill, and bread can fill that void. Heck, you can make a “special” dinner roll, cheese biscuit or something to feature and start a bit of buzz.

Try something different at those same old, predictable steak days, seafood days. And breakfast, too. Check out some of the things we have for you to try there. Use your imagination too. And when you find something that really works, share it. Teach your guys and maybe pass it on to us too.

Remember that the steamtable is the focal point of the meal. Remember also that people “eat with their eyes”. So if it looks great, it's likely that that great meal you spent all that time putting together will taste even better!