

2.3 Exercise 1

- Hadia Rafiq: Ah, Suzanne, there's something I'd like to talk to you about before you go.
- Suzanne: Yes, Miss Rafiq?
- Hadia Rafiq: Please, call me Hadia.
Now then, how are you finding your internship at Plymouth College and the Padstow Inn, Suzanne? You have been there for twelve weeks now; could you briefly summarise your experience?
- Suzanne: Yes, Miss Hadia. I'm really enjoying it. I worked in a kitchen in Rotterdam before deciding to work abroad, but I can't really compare it to living and working here.
- Hadia Rafiq: Why is that, Suzanne?
- Suzanne: Well, it's so different. Back home I wasn't really learning much. Mostly, I had to wash pots. It was just a kind of weekend job. You know?
- Hadia Rafiq: So what have you learnt here then?
- Suzanne: I had this thing against the uniform we had to wear. But now I realise that it's important.
- Hadia Rafiq: Good. Can you say why it's important to look smart?
- Suzanne: Erm, so that you give the customers a good impression. If you have a clean, tidy uniform, it'll give customers the idea that they are in a clean and tidy restaurant. It gives them the confidence that they are in a good place to eat.
- Hadia Rafiq: You do look very smart in your uniform, Suzanne. Your shirt is always neatly ironed and your shoes are nicely polished.
- Suzanne: Thanks, Miss Hadia.
- Hadia Rafiq: It's just Hadia.
- Suzanne: Pardon?
- Hadia Rafiq: Not *Miss* Hadia; Hadia is my first name. Like Suzanne.
- Suzanne: Sorry, Miss.
- Hadia Rafiq: Never mind. So what else have you learnt since you started your internship here?
- Suzanne: That it's not only about the uniform you wear but the way you speak to customers, too. I think I'm better at that now than I was before.
- Hadia Rafiq: Can you say a bit more about that?
- Suzanne: I'll try. You should always be polite to customers. That means saying hello and smiling. And if they're wearing a coat or jacket, you can ask politely if they would like it put on a coat hanger. That'll make them feel welcome.
- Hadia Rafiq: Good. Well done. You can also check what you actually say to a guest. For instance, if they order something that isn't on the menu, try not to use negative language like 'we haven't' or 'we can't'; be positive instead by saying something like 'I'll just check' or 'we're working on it'. You want to provide solutions, not disappoint them or push the

paying customer away. So what about listening to the customers, Suzanne? How good do you think you are at listening?

- Suzanne: Well, I know it's important to listen ... [adds tentatively] and to look the customers in the eye.
- Hadia Rafiq: Yes, that's very good advice. You should always try and look at the customer's face and try to keep eye contact. That way you're more likely to hear what they're saying to you. What else do you think is important when taking orders and listening to customers? Or listening to other members of staff, for that matter.
- Suzanne: Erm, well, it's important to pay attention.
- Hadia Rafiq: That's also a very valid point. Perhaps you could explain what you mean by that in a little more detail.
- Suzanne: OK. What I mean is that once you've made eye contact with the customer, you need to relax a little bit. You shouldn't stare at them or at other people. I mean, you can look away now and then and carry on like a normal person. But the important thing is to pay attention; listen carefully and be ready to serve the customer.
- Hadia Rafiq: That's good, really good, Suzanne. It shows me that you have been paying attention to the classes ... but have you been able to put this into practice, I wonder? It's just that we've had a few complaints from the kitchen. They told me that you've been putting in orders for the wrong food and drinks. I had another guest this afternoon who sent some dishes back because it wasn't what he ordered.
- Suzanne: I'm really sorry, Miss Rafiq. I think I know which guest you mean. I really tried with him, but I had trouble understanding his English. He had quite a strong accent and I found it hard to follow.
- Hadia Rafiq: I see. So what do you think you should do if you find yourself in that kind of situation again?
- Suzanne: I'm not sure, Miss. I asked him politely if he wouldn't mind repeating himself. In fact, I asked him a few times. Perhaps too many times: it became a bit embarrassing. So in the end, I kind of guessed.
- Hadia Rafiq: You guessed at what he'd ordered?
- Suzanne: Yes. Sorry.
- Hadia Rafiq: OK, well next time, I want you to try something else rather than just guessing. Just guessing obviously isn't working very well. So first of all, try not to focus on the customer's accent or mannerisms to the point where they might start to become distractions. Try to mentally cut out all the background noises and activity around you. Stay focused and ask them to repeat the order if necessary. If you still have trouble understanding what someone has said, you can politely ask them to point to what they've ordered on the menu. I also think it's a really good idea to get to know the menu inside out. Know exactly what you're serving to the customers. You should know what's available and everything there is to know about each dish: what the ingredients are, whether it contains anything that may cause an allergic reaction – wheat or dairy, for example – whether the dish is vegetarian, halal, kosher, etcetera; these things are extremely important for excellent customer service. Are you listening to me, Suzanne? What's so funny?
- Suzanne: Er, yes, Miss. I was listening. It's just that I was thinking about that man whose order I messed up. I found out that what he actually ordered was the pane-fried hake, but I gave him the rib-eye steak!