

THE FIRST 60 SECONDS

How a better opening can create conversation, trust, and a stronger guest experience.

The problem: "What can I get you?" is efficient, but it can also end discovery before it begins. A better opening gives the guest an easy way to talk without forcing a script.

▲ SEC. 01

A BETTER SEQUENCE

- **Recognize:** "Hey, welcome in."
- **Open:** "Have you been here before?"
- **Listen:** let the answer tell you where to go next.
- **Follow up:** ask one relevant question.
- **Guide:** recommend only when you have enough information to be helpful.

In live-conversation studies, asking more questions, especially follow-up questions, was associated with greater liking, with perceived responsiveness helping explain the effect. The 2025 correction reported no change to the substantive conclusions. [R1][RIC]

▲ SEC. 02

WHAT NOT TO DO

- Do not interrogate.
- Do not force the same greeting on every guest.
- Do not turn every question into an upsell.
- Do not ignore guests who clearly want a fast, low-interaction transaction.

LEADING-BAR EXAMPLE

Overstory has described intentionally simplifying cocktail descriptions to encourage guests to talk with bartenders rather than spending the entire decision moment looking down at the menu. [c1]

The principle: the goal is not more words. It is more responsiveness. Great service adapts to the guest.

▲ SOURCES

EVIDENCE & SOURCES

● **RESEARCH EVIDENCE** peer-reviewed study

○ **MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK** established management literature

■ **LEADING-BAR CASE** documented operator practice, not a controlled experiment

R1 ● **RESEARCH** Huang, Yeomans, Brooks, Minson & Gino (2017). "It Doesn't Hurt to Ask: Question-Asking Increases Liking." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 113(3), 430–452. 2025 correction issued; see R1C. **Source**

R1C ● **RESEARCH** APA correction (2025): independent audit reported the paper's substantive hypothesis-test results and conclusions remained unchanged. **Source**

R2 ● **RESEARCH** "The impact of personal and functional aspects of restaurant employee service behaviour on customer satisfaction." *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 66 (2017), 46–53. **Source**

C1 ■ **CASE** Overstory, New York. North America's 50 Best Bars: Michter's Art of Hospitality Award 2022. **Source**

C2 ■ **CASE** Jewel of the South, New Orleans. North America's 50 Best Bars: Michter's Art of Hospitality Award 2024. **Source**

Interpretation note: hospitality and restaurant studies are used as evidence for general service and environment principles. They should not be read as guarantees of a specific sales lift in a particular bar. Leading-bar examples illustrate execution patterns consistent with those principles.

Part of The Happy Thesis Co.'s free Bar Owner Resource Library. **Get in touch** if you'd like help putting any of this into practice.