



## 10 Catering Tips

**If starting a home catering business is your dream, consider these tips from a professional caterer.**

Photo Courtesy Kate Savage

Kate Savage, a Lexington, Ky., professional caterer and writer, has learned to persist even in difficult circumstances. By Kate Savage

If starting a home catering business from your hobby farm is your dream, consider these 10 tips from a professional caterer.

**1. Be realistic.**

Catering is not glamorous! It's hard work and long hours. When others play, you work.

Try these truths on for size before you invest any money, time or effort into an extension of your endeavours. Only the strong survive!

**2. Cool as a cucumber.**

Above all you must be able to handle stress and never appear flustered.

And that's not just your stress, but also the "freak-out" levels of stress your client might be experiencing.

Realise what's at stake for them. Trust and powerlessness can be scary emotions for anyone.

**3. Deadlines, deadlines, deadlines.**

Time is unforgiving in the catering business. Five or ten minutes leeway is acceptable when serving, but half an hour late is not, unless the client has pushed back the clock. Are you reasonably punctual? Examine your ability to deliver in a timely manner.

**4. Find your own niche.**

Remember there are many categories of catering; from barbeque and beans to pheasant under glass.

Establish your own area of excellence and interest. Something you enjoy, something that makes your product different.

If successful, you'll be making lots of it!

**5. Listen to your client.**

Naturally your thoughts and suggestions are what they are looking for, but most clients have some preconceived ideas regards their event. Prize these out. They'll provide you with guidance and insights. It's the client you're trying to please.

**6. Never apologise for your price.**

Your product will always cost more than the frozen semi-equivalent bought from the warehouse megamarket.

Don't be brow-beaten or back off your price with a client that wants to negotiate a "discount", or promises you all their friends' events. Nobody wins.

**7. Start early.**

Catering is like Christmas. If you leave it until the last minute, you'll wish you'd started sooner. Many things can be organized in advance such as rentals and the work force.

Over time, you'll become familiar with the natural sequence. Until then, make lots of lists.

**8. Friendly and flexible.**

Ten minutes before serving you're told to hold dinner – the guest of honour's flight is late.

Can you slap on a smile and reassure the hostess that you can ratchet down and maintain the meal indefinitely in a holding pattern? Do it anyway!

**9. Remember your place.**

Probably an old fashioned idea, but it's easy to get caught up in the excitement of an event. A good rule of thumb for you and especially any extrovert servers you might employ is "if you're having too much fun, then you're not



working.”

10. Belle of the Ball Clients love to know they have thrown a social smash. Share some of the comments and compliments that came your way.

Part of the point is to glow in the glorious aftermath of the event – and that goes for you too!

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This is not exactly an Aesop’s Tale ...  
... but it does have a moral.

Many years ago when I was first getting established in the catering business I was asked to provide breakfast and lunch over a ten-day period for about 30 horse farm workers.

These worthy souls were working for one farm during the Keeneland horse sales here in Lexington, Ky.; the idea behind the catered meals was that they wouldn’t have to leave their posts in search of food; and they’d be around when potential clients might appear wanting a horse showing.

The Work -- Hard Work!

Both meals had to be delivered on time, piping hot and then set up, the previous one being cleared away at the same time. It was all very crude and the “staging” area was simply a barn with a table. We had to make many trips back and forth carrying in and then carrying out--sometimes covering great distances as parking was always a problem.

My catering "corporation" comprised just me and a willing friend that I paid--when I could!

The turnaround time between meals was excruciating and it seemed we’d no sooner delivered one meal than it was time to return with another.

Lunch served, we barely had time to shop for the following day and start all over again.

It was utterly exhausting. We knocked ourselves out trying to be creative with our menus and even to accommodate some requests.

The Spoils?

I had hopelessly under quoted the job and we got little thanks from those we fed (who we suspected might have preferred a chance to nip down to MacDonald’s for a burger and to warm up!).

Still, I’ve never been able to compromise my product or my service, so we gave them our best and did our best.

At the time I buoyed myself up with the hope that through our stellar efforts we would get noticed and secure additional business from this prestigious horse farm. In particular, from the owners who entertained regularly and had two daughters of marrying age who would surely be good for a couple of lavish weddings!!

My mistake with this thinking was that when it came time to throw these parties it never occurred to the farm owner to employ the same caterer who had fed his stable hands!

The Happy Ending!

However, there is a happy ending and one that goes to prove hard work really does pay off.

Several years later, the farm manager of the original farm changed jobs and went to manage farms belonging to the Maktoum family – the wealthy, influential and much respected ruling dynasty of Dubai.

He remembered me and I have enjoyed the rewards and challenges of this farm's account for over 20 years!

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