

# HOW TO RESPOND TO BAD RESTAURANT REVIEWS LIKE A PRO: TIPS FROM EXPERT RESTAURATEURS

If you have been [running a restaurant](#) for more than a day or two, you are no doubt well aware of the pervasiveness of bad reviews. No matter how much effort and thought you put into creating a delicious menu, appealing decor and a great experience, there will always be some customers who aren't happy with their experience.

We spoke with two restaurant industry professionals to get their thoughts on the best way to respond to a bad review to help you navigate this tough situation.

## Respond to (almost) every review

Twenty years ago, if a customer wasn't happy with their food or the service they received, they might go home and tell their family or neighbors. Today, they can post about their experience online at restaurant review sites like Yelp and Google for the world to see.

That's one reason Melissa Lewando, marketing director of Moe's Southwest Grill Long Island,<sup>1</sup> and Russell Parrott, restaurant consultant and founder of Russell Parrott & Associates,<sup>2</sup> recommend responding to every review customer's post.

# Next



"I know a lot of people let it fall off, and that's when customers get mad and won't come back. If you respond, you're opening yourself up to the opportunity of not losing that customer and having them come back," Lewando says.

"The only time I would recommend not responding is if we handled the situation the best way we could, and they're still upset and keep submitting negative feedback."



## Develop a structured process for responding

Owners don't want customers to think that some people get special treatment while others don't. But according to Parrott, many restaurants don't have a structured process for responding to reviews, which leads to inconsistencies in how they're handled.

He recommends creating a process and following it for every restaurant review — good and bad — to ensure owners treat everyone the same.

## Move the conversation out of the public eye

A single person's experience can influence everyone else's opinion before they even give a restaurant a chance so it's best to handle the criticism before prospective customers are unduly swayed.

After thanking the reviewer for their feedback and apologizing for their experience, Lewando and Parrott recommend moving the discussion somewhere private such as email, phone or private messenger.

"I don't want that conversation to go back and forth where everybody can read it. I'm trying to settle the situation, and I'm not sure what the reviewer is going to say," Lewando said.

## Ask how it can be made right

"If you ask, most customers will tell you how you can make it right," Parrott said. Some people might want a free drink or the best table in the house the next time they visit. Others might like a full refund for their meal. Whatever it is, owners should try to make it happen — within reason.

After resolving the situation, Parrott recommends asking the customer if they'd be willing to update their review, saying the restaurant contacted them privately and they're happy with the outcome.

If they won't do that, he advises restaurants to respond to the review, letting the customer know they're happy they could resolve the situation privately. It sends a message to anyone thinking about dining there that the restaurant takes customer concerns seriously.



## Investigate and make changes

If they're handled properly, negative reviews can help improve every customer's experience. If you receive less-than-glowing feedback, ask yourself what lesson they can learn from it.

Was the service slow because it was a holiday weekend, and you didn't have enough staff scheduled to work? Did a piece of equipment fail, and you didn't have a backup ready to go?

If you can learn and make changes for the future, you can help prevent mishaps from occurring again. And if you're getting similar feedback from multiple people, it's especially important to investigate what's going on.

"When there's consistency in negative feedback, you know there's a problem," says Lewando.

## Invite them back

Repeat customers are the lifeblood of the restaurant business, so it's important to welcome back all customers — even the ones who leave bad reviews.

**"Always encourage them to come back. We want them coming back. That's how we survive as a business."**

Melissa Lewando,  
Moe's Southwest Grill Long Island

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### Sources

<sup>1</sup> [Moe's Southwest Grill Long Island](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Russell Parrott & Associates](#)