SOP Template: Managing Walk-in Guests and Waitlist Procedures

This SOP details the process for **managing walk-in guests and waitlist procedures**, including greeting and seating walk-in customers promptly, assessing wait times accurately, maintaining an organized and updated waitlist, communicating clearly with guests about expected wait durations, handling special requests or accommodations, and ensuring a smooth transition from waitlist to seating. The goal is to enhance guest satisfaction, optimize seating efficiency, and maintain orderly management during busy periods.

1. Purpose

To provide clear and consistent steps for staff to manage walk-in guests and the waitlist, ensuring efficient operations and positive guest experiences during high-traffic periods.

2. Scope

This procedure applies to all front-of-house staff responsible for guest reception, seating, and waitlist management.

3. Responsibility

- **Host/Hostess:** Primary role in greeting guests, maintaining the waitlist, communicating with guests, and coordinating with service staff.
- **Supervisors/Managers:** Oversee process, handle special requests or guest concerns, and assist with escalation as necessary.

4. Procedure

1. **Greeting Walk-in Guests**
   - Welcome each walk-in guest with a friendly and professional greeting as they arrive.
   - Inquire about the party size and any special needs (e.g., high chair, wheelchair accessible seating).
2. **Assessing Wait Times**
   - Check table availability and estimate wait time if immediate seating is not possible.
   - Consult seating chart/management system for accurate estimation based on current turnover rates.
3. **Maintaining the Waitlist**
   - Record guest's name, party size, arrival time, and contact information (if using SMS/pager system).
   - Update the waitlist in real-time as tables are cleared and guests are seated.
   - Clearly mark parties with special needs or requests.
4. **Communicating with Guests**
   - Inform guests of their estimated wait time and any updates as needed.
   - Provide options for waiting (e.g., bar, lounge area, text/pager notification if leaving premises).
   - Be transparent about potential delays and reasons for wait.
5. **Handling Special Requests/Accommodations**
   - Note any special needs (dietary, accessibility) and highlight these on the waitlist for smooth seating.
   - Communicate special requests to service team in advance of seating.
6. **Seating Guests**
   - Call or notify parties promptly when a table is ready.
   - Escort guests to their table and hand over to the assigned server.
   - Update the waitlist system to reflect the change in status.
7. **During Peak Periods**
   - Monitor wait times closely and adjust estimates proactively.
   - Communicate with kitchen and floor staff to expedite turnover when appropriate.

5. Documentation

- Use a digital or physical waitlist log to track guests efficiently.
- Retain waitlist records for review and analysis of peak times and customer flow.

6. Review and Continuous Improvement

- Hold periodic reviews to evaluate waitlist efficiency and guest feedback.
- Implement process improvements in response to recurring issues or bottlenecks.

7. Tools & Resources

- Waitlist management system (digital or manual)
- Guest pagers/SMS notification system
- Seating chart/table management tool

8. Sample Waitlist Log

#	Guest Name	Party Size	Time In	Estimated Wait	Contact/Notification	Special Requests	Status
1	Smith	4	6:15 pm	15 mins	SMS	High chair	Waiting
2	Lee	2	6:18 pm	10 mins	Pager	-	Seated

9. References

- Company Guest Service Handbook
- ADA Accessibility Guidelines
- Local Health & Safety Regulations