

## "So you Guys are... hungry?"

### -- A user's guide to the minimalist patois of the modern young waitress

A few weeks ago, my parents, spouse and I went out for dinner at what we all think of as a nice place to eat. Not inexpensive - busy - reasonable food.

Not to put too fine a point on it, we are not young. I am in my late fifties and my wife is somewhat younger. My father will turn 90 in January and my mother will be 87 in October.

When we entered the restaurant, we were quickly told that Amy would be our waitress. She smiled at us and walked briskly towards our table motioning us onward with a hand gesture. Half turning before we got to our table, she started with a first question almost barked in the husky alto that almost all young women aspire to these days.

"So you guys are hungry?" she asked.

Smiling broadly as we sat down, she looked us all over and queried:

"So you guys are thirsty?"

This was the cue for drink orders and we agreed to share a bottle of a middling Pinot Grigio. She left and returned with the wine.

Without saying another word, she poured us all a glass and set the bottle down on the table. She now looked businesslike and intoned seriously with the mandatory 'uptalk uptick' of the voice at the end of the question:

"So you guys are ready?"

We ordered the food - pastas and meat dishes, some seafood - the usual fare. It was delivered by a different person who said nothing at all. Then Amy returned about three minutes later and asked.

"So you guys are ok?"

We assured her that we were indeed 'ok' and started eating again.

Five minutes later, another more serious looking young woman approached our table, surveyed the food and our progress and barked in almost the same alto monotone with the uptick:

"So you guys are good?"

Once again, assurances were provided.

Once clearly finished the meal, Amy returned and with a big smile and asked:

"So you guys are done?"

We were in fact 'done' and she returned with dessert and coffee menus and once again, after waiting a few patient moments, asked:

"So you guys are ready?"

We were in fact ready, ordered dessert and coffee that was delivered with a big smile and a question:

"So you guys are full?"

We agreed.

She returned with the bill and I placed the credit card on the bill holder without comment . Amy returned with four candies and the credit card slip. Amy said:

"So you guys are ok?"

We agreed that we were and left the restaurant. I thought for a moment and realized that it does not matter how old we are, our gender, our demeanour or anything else. We are "you guys".

I realized that we had just experienced a watershed moment in minimalist waitressing. Amy and her colleague had managed to serve us with just nine questions that all began with the same four words followed by just one other word. To recap, it was "So you guys are ... hungry, thirsty, ready, ok, good, done, ready (again), full, and ok? (again).

And what are the implications?

The first is the wonderful sense of equality that these questions engender. Everyone is equal. Everyone is "you guys". On reflection, there is something nice about that. It does not matter that my father and mother are older; they are "you guys". It does not matter how we dress and curiously there is a rather broad range of restaurants from chains to roadhouses, specialty to ethnic, expensive to popular priced where young waitresses refer to all their customers as "you guys". I have now started involuntarily counting my experiences of "So you guys are....?"

The second is that it is very useful for young women learning English as a second language and in need of work. Imagine - you can learn just eleven words and wait a table like a veteran. Since the same four words begin each and every sentence, all of which are questions, almost anybody should be able to master them in an hour or so. A couple of rounds of practice and regardless of your fluency in English, it's nine questions (some repeats) and an ability to read a menu and listen to the selections being read back at you.

But pity the young men who have become waiters and the traditions they must observe. Almost none of them say "So you guys are....?". They say things like "Hello" and How are you tonight? and "May I take your order?" and make gender distinctions like "What would you like sir (or ma'am)?"

Perhaps it's another gender gap.

"So you guys are wondering about that, right?"