

COUNTRY & TOWN HOUSE

HOME SUBJECTS ▾ AUTHORS ▾ BRANDS ▾ GUID

WE CHAT TO FIRST DATES MAÎTRE D' FRED SIRIEIX ABOUT SOCRATES, SERVICE, AND WHY HOSPITALITY IS A RELIGION

1 month ago · Josh Barrie · Food & Drink · ❤ 0

Home > Food & Drink > We chat to First Dates maître d' Fred Sirieix about Socrates, service, and why hospitality is a religion

FRED SIRIEIX IS THE GENERAL MANAGER OF GALVIN AT WINDOWS, THE MICHELIN-STARRED RESTAURANT ON THE 28TH FLOOR OF THE HILTON, PARK LANE. HIGH ABOVE LONDON, THE FRENCHMAN PRACTISES WHAT HE PREACHES...



— Fred Sirieix via Facebook

Fred Sirieix quotes Socrates as we begin talking of restaurant service. We're chatting about the elevated type of hospitality, where people feel truly special when their fillet of cod arrives – as rich as the butter that coats it, as warm and fragrant as the lentils below.

‘There is only one good, knowledge,’ Fred says, quoting the Greek philosopher he admires. ‘And one evil, ignorance.’

He recites this, and similar, to his staff when encouraging attentiveness.

‘It’s our job,’ Fred explains. ‘We, in service, must make our customers feel truly welcome and loved. It’s more than smiling and being punctual. We must pre-empt their needs, show them we care – because we do.’

You’ll likely best know Fred from his appearances as maître d’ on Channel 4 show *First Dates*. But first and foremost the Frenchman is general manager at [Galvin at Windows](#), the Michelin-starred restaurant at the Hilton Hotel on Park Lane. Fred has been there for ten years. Alongside it, he runs *The Art of Service*, a worldwide service consultancy company that provides solutions for businesses.

Fred believes that quality service is ‘a religion’, a ‘way of life’. I believe him when he talks of love: ‘You need your guests to feel as if they are loved. You build up a trust with them, and there’s no love without trust. It cannot survive.

‘When customers walk through the door, I greet them and act before their expectations. It’s about understand their needs and what they want. They’re here and it’s my job – and my team’s job – to show them a good time.’

Fred has been in the game a long time. He started his career in France before moving to London. These days he lives in Peckham with his partner. He has two kids. He’s won countless awards – and most recently was nominated for *Industry Legend of the Year* at the Imbibe Personality of the year awards 2014.

On *First Dates*, the bearded maître d’ has struck a chord. His charm is palpable, his instruction to staff is as joyful as his welcomes to nervous guests, who walk through the door uneasy. They’re about to meet their ‘blind date’, after all. Fred tells me that understanding customers is something that is perpetually whirring through his mind.

‘You have to be self aware in restaurants,’ Fred says. ‘There’s always ways to strive for improvement, to better yourself and better who you are, what you do.’

‘We all have a responsibility to others. In restaurants, it’s almost as if it’s a micro climate of the real world – we’re looking after other people, and we’re trying to make people feel special.’

Read more: [British Pie Week: Here’s Hélène Darroze’s wild duck pithiviers recipe](#)

‘And it’s about everyone. You can’t run a good business if staff don’t believe in what you’re saying. Life is short, and a dinner is even shorter. We’ve got to always hope to make it worthwhile.’

Using philosophy to keep people happy as they sip their wine and eat their scallops, I think, is pleasing. I only hope that Fred ignores Socrates’ comment: ‘Worthless people live only to eat and drink; people of worth eat and drink only to live.’ For that is thoroughly upsetting. I would’ve stripped Socrates of his feta and olives for such a calamitous remark.

I doubt Fred does take heed of such a worrying sentiment. Fred is the prime mechanism in people’s appreciation of fine food, good booze. He’s the cog that drives the togetherness and sense of happiness that restaurants bring. And although those suppling tables with the appropriate pieces to complete this puzzle are traditionally supposed to be ‘invisible,’ Fred too says that those in service mustn’t be easily forgotten.

‘It’s important people remember us. If we’re bringing positivity, there’s no reason why we shouldn’t be a part of the direction. The atmosphere, food, drink – they’re all reliant of the people fuelling that. Our goal is customer satisfaction.’



— Galvin at Windows

As evident from his television appearances (he was also on BBC 2 series *Michel Roux's Service* and once appeared on *The Apprentice*), Fred has charm in his armoury if something goes wrong. Testing times happen. What if somebody's getting emotional about an overcooked steak?

'Of course I do the charm offensive,' he says, 'I need to answer before being asked the question. If there's something wrong, we'll change it, every time. It's not really a huge issue. It can come about in any restaurant.'

There is, no doubt, a pleasurable tasting note to finely honed service. Fine, not every waiter or waitress might possess the charisma Fred has been admired for, but necessary traits can be taught. I think anyone can be elegant when carrying a tray of petit fours. What's more, with guidance centred on a 'religion,' all you need, it seems, is the 'belief to do so'.