# Starbucks baristas face inconsistent rules on cup messages amid policy changes



A Starbucks barista has drawn attention to a significant inconsistency in the coffee chain’s recently reinstated policy concerning the messages written on customers’ cups. According to a post shared on Reddit by an employee, workers are prohibited from using popular internet abbreviations such as “YOLO” (You Only Live Once) and “GOAT” (Greatest Of All Time) when personalising drinks. The company justifies this restriction by asserting that different generations may not understand these terms.

The barista expressed particular frustration upon noticing that the same terminology, specifically “IYKYK” (If You Know, You Know), was used in an official Starbucks advertisement on Reddit. The employee remarked, “Of course there’s got to be a double standard with the higher ups,” highlighting a perceived inconsistency between corporate messaging and in-store practices.

This policy of writing personalised messages on cups was reintroduced earlier this year by Starbucks as part of CEO Brian Niccol’s “Back to Starbucks” plan, which was unveiled in September 2022, shortly after Niccol's appointment in August. The plan aims to enhance customer and employee experience while boosting morale across the chain.

The return of personalised cup messages has not been universally welcomed by the company’s workforce. Baristas have expressed dissatisfaction with the rule, describing it as a “forced” method to establish connections with customers that ultimately slows down service. Some employees have resorted to what they describe as “malicious compliance,” such as writing only a lop-sided smiley face on cups. However, this too has reportedly been met with resistance; one employee recounted that district managers have strictly prohibited writing just smiley faces or hearts without accompanying written messages.

Amanda Rivera of Starbucks Workers United further commented on the additional burden this policy places on employees, saying, “It’s just a lot for workers to have to add to the number of things we’re expected to do. It would be more sincere if I didn’t seem stressed out of my mind making 10 other cups.”

The company has implemented several other policy changes under Niccol’s leadership. Earlier adjustments include removing surcharges for dairy alternatives and enforcing a requirement that customers must make a purchase to use the restroom or remain in the store. A recent policy that has garnered considerable employee reaction is the introduction of a new dress code, effective from 12 May 2023, mandating that employees wear solid black shirts paired with khaki, black, or blue denim trousers. This dress code has elicited threats of resignation from some baristas.

Daily Mail has reached out to Starbucks for comment on these issues but has not yet received a response.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://economictimes.com/magazines/panache/starbucks-feel-good-cup-messages-policy-leaves-baristas-steamed-is-that-really-connecting/articleshow/118067338.cms> - This article supports the claim that Starbucks' policy of writing personalized messages on cups has faced backlash from employees, who feel it adds unnecessary pressure during busy periods. Employees worry that forced messages can feel impersonal.
2. <https://www.businessinsider.com/starbucks-memo-handwritten-names-messages-back-to-cups-2025-1> - This article confirms Starbucks' memo requiring baristas to write messages and names on single-use coffee cups, aligning with the company's effort to enhance customer connection.
3. <https://gadallon.substack.com/p/when-personalization-feels-fake-starbucks> - This article highlights Starbucks' policy change to include personalized messages on cups as part of a broader initiative to improve customer and employee experiences, indicating a focus on personalization.
4. <https://www.tiktok.com/discover/new-starbucks-rules-with-the-cups> - Although not directly addressing the messaging policy, this TikTok link demonstrates how Starbucks is adapting policies, such as allowing reusable cups, which can be related to broader efforts to change in-store experiences.
5. <https://www.tiktok.com/discover/what-is-the-starbucks-new-cup-policy> - This link supports the notion that there are updates to Starbucks' cup policies, including those related to writing on cups, which aligns with the company's effort to enhance customer interaction.
6. <https://noahwire.com(FLAGSOMEDETAILSHERE)> - Although specific details are not provided, this article or platform could potentially discuss other policy changes at Starbucks, such as the 'Back to Starbucks' initiative and employee reactions to these changes. However, exact details cannot be verified without accessing this content.
7. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/yourmoney/consumer/article-14656541/starbucks-barista-flaw-writing-cups-rule.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data