

THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



1253 Customer Service Recovery: Go the Extra Mile

When serving customers, everybody makes mistakes. We're all human and this is expected. What separates the best from the rest is how they respond to those mistakes. I'm Jerry Roberts and we'll get into this, next on The Extra Point.

In the late 1980s, while living in California, there was a very brief period when I left the world of the vegetarian and had a little beef on occasion. Just a few times total, and one of those brought a customer service experience I'll mention now.

I was on the way to an event and hadn't eaten all day, so I stopped at a fairly popular eatery which specialized in steaks. I ordered one and asked the server to please be careful that it was thoroughly cooked. I didn't want it burned, but I especially didn't want any pink.

It came back, looked good, with a big baked potato and veggies. I was still into the salad and bread, and started picking at the potato. Then, I cut the steak. It was not pink...it was red. I groaned.

It took me a few minutes to flag down the server, and I ate most of the potato while I waited. He asked how the steak was and I showed him. Then he groaned. He apologized and took the steak away, saying he'd make it right.

Maybe 10 minutes later he returned and, to my delight, he had given me another potato and everything was on a fresh plate. My mom was a waitress and that was right out of her playbook. Do the right thing, and impress the customer.

I thanked the server and cut off a chunk of the steak. Man, it was still a little bit pink. I didn't want to say anything but he saw hesitation on my part and leaned over to look, and he saw the pink. He said, "I'm really sorry for the trouble, and this is my fault. It was up to me to make sure everything was right before I came

back with your food." He was absolutely right.

If there's a problem with a customer's meal, it's up to the server to make sure everything is okay before returning it to the table. He apologized again and I could see he was upset. He went back to the kitchen and the process repeated.

This time, it was a new steak and cooked to perfection. The server stood there while I cut into it and took a bite. I thanked him again.

The problem now was that I was out of time. I got down a few bites of the steak and had to go or I'd be late to the event. I waved down the server, explained my problem, and he offered a doggie bag. Since the food was going to sit in my car for five hours before I got it home, I declined and asked for the bill.

The server shook his head and said he'd take care of the bill. There was no charge, and he again apologized for my trouble. Then, he asked if I could wait just two minutes more. I nodded and he scurried off. I thought maybe he was going to wrap up a dessert to go.

When he returned he handed me an envelope. Inside was a card good for dinner for two. I smiled, thanked him, and asked him what nights he worked because I wanted to make sure he was the server when I came back. That way, I could show my appreciation in a more tangible way with a nice tip.

There are two lessons here. One is general. If you make a mistake, fix it to the satisfaction of the customer. Don't go halfway. He gave me a new potato, fresh plates, and a fresh steak. This is when you overdeliver.

The second lesson is specific to restaurants. If there is a problem and a guest doesn't have a good time, many restaurants won't charge for the meal. That's appropriate and if that's how your restaurant rolls, I give you a thumbs up.

(Con't.)

However, not charging is not enough because you're missing a key ingredient.

That key ingredient is the customer coming back again. You want an opportunity to show me how good you are, and to make me a regular customer.

If I had a bad experience and you pick up my bill, I'll thank you and, frankly, that may be it. I may not come back. I'll remember things didn't go well and you did the right thing, but there will be no stimulus to try your place again.

However, if you invite me back for a free meal, giving me a card or certificate, now I have that stimulus. I'll very likely give you another go because you went the extra mile and I want to honor that.

Do the unexpected to put a smile on your customer's face. You'll both be glad you did.

That's the Extra Point. Be responsible and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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