

## Think about the multiplier effect of bad service

They just opened a new bistro in my neighborhood, and boy was I excited.

I eat out a lot and have gotten quite bored with most of the restaurants nearby. I had high hopes for this one, until I

got the surprise of my lifetime - an outburst by a staff member that will cost this little bistro \$5,000 in business this year - if they stay open that long.

Let me explain that I am not your typical diner or restaurant critic - I'm a corporate psychologist and work internationally as a hospitality and customer service consultant. Even when I'm not on an assignment, I always make a mental note of everything related to service at an establishment.

For example, I always notice: Was I greeted warmly? Were the specials or house specialties explained in an inviting manner? Did the wait staff seem positive and attentive? Did they seem interested in enhancing the quality of my dining experience whether I ordered a chef salad or chateaubriand?

In this case, I had mixed initial reactions. The bistro was attractive, clean,

and nicely decorated, with a limited but interesting menu. Though I was the only client in the place, the waiter seemed curt and distracted.

When I asked about one unfamiliar menu item, he replied in an agitated tone, "You can't order it - it's in the oven and wouldn't be ready."

Now, I must admit, what I ordered did arrive fairly quickly, was well presented and quite tasty. I found myself making some notes about my father's upcoming birthday party and imagining how nice it would be to finally have good and healthy food in a pleasant setting near my home and office.

Throughout my meal I remained the only customer while my waiter stayed on his cell phone speaking to his banker and never coming back to check on me.

About halfway through the meal, I needed a refill for my iced tea. I finally flagged down the busboy, who brought me one.

After waiting for quite some time after I had finished eating, I requested my check. And though they had a nice selection of coffees and desserts which I might have ordered, the waiter did not offer them to me.

When my check arrived, I noticed that I had been charged full price for two iced teas. I inquired politely about this practice, as refills of ice tea are generally free

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of charge in the United States. I was prepared to pay the fee and leave a decent tip because I had enjoyed the food, but was mainly curious about the practice.

Well, I guess that was the \$5,000 question.

The waiter grabbed the check out of my hand, ripped it in half, made some rude and angry remarks to me, threw the pieces of the check behind the counter and sarcastically told me to "have a nice day."

I tried for several minutes to speak to him and twice offered to pay the bill stating that it was never my intention to not pay the bill, just to clarify their iced tea refill policy.

When I asked to speak to the owner, he said haughtily, "I am the owner!" When I asked him if he realized how much business I could bring to his place, he said, "I don't know and I don't care!"

Well, it certainly was a pity that he was so defensive and customer unfriendly. As he suggested, I won't be going back there and here is what I calculate he

stands to lose in terms of my business for the year:

- One catered birthday party dinner for 50 people: \$2,000
- 20 lunches with clients and staff: \$1,000
- 30 to-go orders-lunches and snacks, \$1,000
- 20 dinners for two or three: \$1,000

The total is at least \$5,000.

When you look at lost prospective income, this doesn't even consider that any of my friends, family or colleagues might also have enjoyed the bistro and returned on their own.

As I was leaving his establishment, I had to wonder who he thought won in this interaction?

I feel I lost. I got a tasty but ultimately very unpleasant free lunch and would never consider going back there. What I wonder is, when he saw me walk out the door, did he see the \$5,000 going with me?

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**GUEST COLUMN**

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