

Wings & Ribs - The Epitome of Customer Service at Beef O'Brady's - By Dr. Rick Johnson

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Last year I mentioned in one of my newsletters a customer service incident that happened to me while entertaining friends from Hilton Head Island. What we experienced then at a very upscale country club in The Villages was in my opinion a perfect example of how not to treat your customers. At the time I thought this really takes the cake.

The Incident

Since I mentioned this before I'll be brief in review. We had finished playing golf and decided to have lunch in the club restaurant. I ordered the soup and sandwich special. Unfortunately the waitress made a mistake and brought me the sandwich with French Fries. Not a big deal. I actually ate a couple of fries but called her over and mentioned that I actually ordered the soup and sandwich. She was very apologetic and said that it wasn't a problem and that she would return with a cup of the soup.

She was gone over ten minutes but when she returned she was excited and walking at the pace of a trotter at the race track. She didn't have the soup but she had a plate in her hand. She approached the table and before she said a word, she reached down with her right hand and scooped the French Fries off of my plate onto the empty plate she was holding in her left hand.

Seeing my look of surprise, in a voice that cracked like she had been crying, she said,

'The Chef won't let me have the soup unless I bring back the fries.'

'You're kidding', I replied with a look of bewilderment.

'I'm sorry', she said with tears in her eyes and she ran off toward the kitchen.

I couldn't believe it and figured this has got to go in the record book. I have never experienced anything like that in my life. The club manager did come over and apologize. I told him that this really takes the cake and it's something I'll never forget and probably never experience again. He assured me it would never happen again at his club anyway. Little did I know that Beef O'Brady's in The Villages, Mulberry would top that event less than a year later.

Tracy and I stopped at this local restaurant which is close to our house. It's a place that many of our neighbors go to and in fact our neighborhood golf league eats there every week. Beef O'Bradys is like a sports bar and grill as it has numerous televisions and people go there to watch different sporting events and eat. It is generally a pleasant dining experience because the staff is very professional and competent.

What a Surprise

To my understanding the establishment had recently had a change in ownership with one partner taking full control and buying the other owners shares. I don't know if that is relevant to what happened but I thought I'd mention it anyway. The menu had several new items on it. One of which was a wings and barbeque ribs combo. Tracy ordered a chicken Caesar salad but I fancied that wings and ribs combo.

The waitress was very nice and our food came rather quick so everything seemed to be going well. I actually had eaten three of the wings before I realized that there were no ribs in the basket. I dug around and moved the fries to make sure before I called the waitress over. The waitress came over and I explained that I had ordered the wings and ribs combo but there didn't seem to be any ribs in my basket.

The waitress looked at her ticket and said, 'I'm really sorry sir, do you want me to bring you some ribs?'

I thought - 'Duh - I ordered ribs didn't I?' but that thought didn't pass my lips. I simply said, 'Yes, Please.'

The waitress disappeared for a few minutes but she returned without the ribs. Instead she was carrying a little cardboard tray, the kind you put fries in. She couldn't seem to make eye contact as she kept looking down as she started apologizing profusely.

'I am really sorry sir. I don't know how to say this but would you mind giving me two of your ribs back?'

I let out a loud laugh and said, 'Are you kidding me, I've already eaten three of them.'

'I know sir, she replied. But I need to get two of them back. The combo only has six wings and the wings basket has eight.'

'This is unbelievable, in fact it is hilarious. Can I give you the bones of the ones I have already eaten?'

'No Sir.' She said looking down again as her face turned redder from embarrassment. I felt sorry for her and assured her that this was too ridiculous to be mad and I wasn't upset. Actually, I had a hard time keeping my composure. I wanted to just bust out laughing.

She apologized again and I gave her the ribs as I asked her who actually made the mistake on the order.

'I did sir, I only wrote down wings. I am so sorry to have to ask for two wings back.'

I gave her two of the uneaten wings and off she went. She returned right away with a ½ rack of ribs. She apologized again. Having experienced a similar incident with French Fries I asked her whose decision it was to ask for the two wings back, the cook or the manager?

Again, very sheepishly she replied, 'Neither one, it was the owner.

I still laugh every time I think about it. I have to wonder what the owner did with those two wings. Surely he didn't serve them again to someone else. That would be a health code violation, wouldn't it? And, if he just threw them away the question becomes ---- Was it really worth two wings valued at probably less than one dollar to risk creating such a negative customer experience?

Go figure. As a Howl subscriber if you can top such a ridiculous unprofessional customer service experience dictated by the owner of an organization whether it is in the restaurant business or any other segment of the hotel and resort industry, I would love to hear about it. E-mail it to me, rick@ceostrategist.com.

I spend a lot of time and energy talking to clients about creating the 'Ultimate Customer Experience'. It's hard to believe that there are owners and managers out there that actually create the 'Disastrous Customer Experience'.

I wonder if Beef O'Brady's corporate could use this example in their customer service training programs.

Just a thought.

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