

Real vs Fake - Customer Service with a Smile

By Marilyn Suttle



Last Friday night, Nick, my waiter at a nearby family restaurant, pulled me out of a gloomy mood. Friday started out great. A few of the ladies in my family came over to decorate and prepare for the next day's wedding shower for my nephew and his fiancée.

Just after the ladies went home, it started to rain. The rain turned into a raging thunder storm. My whole neighborhood lost electricity. At first, I wasn't concerned. I called the electric company and the recorded message predicted that I'd have power in the next three hours. Then, I noticed that the rain had created a lake where my street used to be.

When three hours had passed and I still had no lights, I called the electric company again for an update. This time the message said, 'due to extensive outages, there is no specified time determined for regaining power. Any previous time estimate is no longer valid.'

Okay, by now I'm getting nervous. I had a party to give the next morning . . . tables set for 20, full of my best china and crystal . . . no electricity . . . a flood in the front of my house . . . and four chicken salads and a cream cake warming up in a refrigerator without power. After a couple more hours and a flurry of phone calls to figure out what to do, the sewer did its job, and the flood disappeared from my street. I still had no electricity.

At about 10 p.m. a contingency plan was put into place, which involved taking the food over to my sister's house. My husband, Cliff, offered to drive with me. With no electricity, Cliff didn't want to go home. He is an electricity junkie. No power means no computer, no electronic music, no power tools and no television. We wanted a low key place to just sit quietly with a cup of hot tea.

Our waiter, Nick, approached us, the poor guy. He found us in a foul mood. We were both tired and cranky. He looked us over and got the biggest smile on his face. It wasn't one of those annoying fake smiles, like the waiter who wore all that bling, from the movie, Office Space. If it had been a fake smile, I would have felt like smacking him. There is nothing that turns me off more than inauthentic niceness. It feels so condescending. Like most customers, I can spot it a mile away.

Nick's pleasure was so genuine, we could almost SEE happiness seeping out of his pores. Next thing I knew, I had a smile on my face too, just from being exposed to him. 'You sure look happy,' I said. 'I am,' said Nick, 'I just won our corporate customer service award!'

Now that cheered me right up. It feels good to be waited on by The Best! After congratulating him and asking more about his award, my mood lifted and I switched my order to a chocolate malt. 'My chocolate malts are the best,' he said, 'They are part of the reason I won the award.'

'Then, I better order a malt too,' said Cliff. Nick brought out our delicious malts. He also brought us two large glasses of water, which we hadn't ordered but very much appreciated. Then, he gave us privacy to relax and unwind. He stepped in after a while to make sure we were happy with the malts, and I asked him if he received any special gifts. 'I'm going on a trip to Puerto Vallarta,' he said with a twinkle in his eye. It's great to see that the leaders of Big Boys Restaurants value and acknowledge their customer service stars in tangible ways.

The good mood and service that Nick brought to us that night helped me let go of my tension, relax and have a good night's sleep. At 7 am the next morning, our power came back, the food and cake were brought back, and I was able to host a lovely wedding shower after all.

Something to Think about:

Was Nick happy because he won the award, or did he win the award because he was happy?

How can you bring more happiness to the lives of your less-than-happy customers?

To Book Marilyn Suttle for your next event, email: Marilyn@MarilynSuttle.com or visit her website www.Suttleonline.net.