

Guest Experiences Gone Awry! *What's Your Service Recovery Strategy?*

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Have you ever thought to be thankful for guest service experiences gone awry? A less than perfect guest experience *can be an opportunity for excellence*. If you embrace your guest's candidness, raw emotion, and pure honesty, you can actually learn enough to ensure the situation doesn't happen again. You should be rejoicing the guest is actually communicating the problem with you!

Here's why:

- 96% of your guests do not complain to anyone who can help them.
- 95% of your guests will return if they feel their complaint was resolved quickly.
- 90% of your guests with **unresolved** complaints will **never** return.
(White House Office of Consumer Affairs)

June Service Tips

Practice service recovery strategies with your employees to ensure they are ready and empowered to handle a guest service issue.

Tip 1: Acknowledge that the guest has been inconvenienced and apologize for it.

- Don't be defensive, and don't shift the blame to the guest or fellow employee.
 - Often times just a simple *genuine* apology will help neutralize the situation.
 - "I'm sorry about your experience today. Let me see how I can make this better for you."

Tip 2: Listen and empathize with the guest.

- Listen carefully, and let the guest explain their point of view. Let them vent their frustrations.
 - Stay calm as the guest verbalizes their issue. It is important for the guest to be heard. Somewhere along the line their expectation of what they wanted, and the reality of what they received, did not sync, and it's your job to show *genuine* care during the complaint.
- Try to understand the guest's perspective of the situation.

Tip #3: Step up to the plate and take care of the problem.

- Personally take care of the issue. Don't push it off on someone else.
 - The guest wants to feel that you have the ability to handle the problem, without having to escalate it to another level of company hierarchy.
 - Resolve to fix the problem in a timely fashion.

Tip #4: Offer some value-added compensation for the inconvenience.

- Offer a token of goodwill, or something that symbolizes you are sorry for the service breakdown.
 - Empower front line service workers to appropriately compensate the guest for their inconvenience in a service breakdown situation.
 - True empowerment is about giving employees the freedom to act both creatively and responsibly to meet service recovery needs.

A colleague of mine, who I'll call Kay, recently shared a story of visiting a local restaurant. Kay ordered a beef brisket sandwich and was instead served pork. She informed the server of the mistake, and the meal was removed. The server promptly returned with the same meal, stating the chef has checked it, and said it was the right order. Kay asked to speak with the chef, and in their tableside conversation, the chef debated about the order, and insisted it was right. With more insistence, Kay convinced the chef that there was a mistake. The chef went back to the kitchen and then returned, stating there was an apparent switch in the meat trays and Kay's assessment was correct. The right meal was offered, but declined because the situation took too long to resolve. There was a slight apology by the server, but other than that, no other offer of service recovery.

What was the outcome of this guest experience gone awry? This restaurant is off my colleague's list of places to patronize, however, she is more than willing to share her experience with anyone who will listen, including the social media blogs. This could have been an easy resolve, but no one at this restaurant thought to implement a service recovery for the situation.

All service recovery begins with the expectation of fairness from the guest's perspective. Nine times out of ten, the guest is only looking for a reasonable resolution to the problem. Consider service recovery an opportunity to keep guests satisfied after the worst happens.

Remarkable service recovery means handling the service breakdown in a way that makes the guest even more devoted to your establishment after the issue has been properly resolved. Consider service gone awry an opportunity for excellence!

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