

Grab the Opportunities

A few days ago my husband and I introduced another couple to one of our favorite restaurants. I've eaten there for over twelve years, watched the current manager grow up in the family business and introduced perhaps a hundred people to the place. As usual the food was good and the service was fine, but we may never go back again.

After the meal my husband placed his credit card in the plastic flap inside the vinyl envelope. The waitress picked it up, took three steps and returned to the table to ask how we wanted to pay. When we looked puzzled she held up the envelope and pointed out, "No cash. No credit card." We had all seen it there. Where was it?

We began a quick and intensive search around where she had walked and found nothing. If you had asked me at that point if I would ever return to this restaurant I would have said, "Of course!" But then our friend, the young manager, got involved and the opportunity for him to retain us as customers began to evaporate as his self-centered perspective obliterated any customer-centered viewpoint.

Cavalierly he offered his phone so we could call and cancel the card, not a wisp of empathy in his words or eyes for that complex and frustrating process. When we tried to explain again what happened he offered his phone again. After a few frustrating minutes of attempted explanation we realized that we were mistaken to assume that we had a relationship with this seller of food. We paid by another credit card and left.

The next day he had one of his hostesses call to say we could come in and pick up the card. It had slipped into a tear in the vinyl and one of the other waitresses had checked because it had happened to her once before. I asked the young woman to let him know I was upset enough that I might well not come back. He called a few hours later and spoke to my husband.

My husband tried a dozen times to interrupt a monologue about how it had never happened (Huh?) before and how he hoped we would come back. He ran on talking about a gift certificate and how he had trained his staff to handle this stuff differently next time. When my husband finally pushed his way into the explanation he said, "We just wanted to feel trusted and what's important to us now is an apology." Finally we got a direct, heartfelt apology. My husband then said we had thought we were friends as well as customers and he hadn't treated us like friends. He apologized again.

It's simple, stop explaining until your client is ready to listen. Start by listening and paying close attention. What does the person want in order to feel you understand and care? Don't miss opportunities to repair a relationship; often a repair will build an even stronger client relationship than before.

If your instincts for repairing client relationships aren't currently leading to successful recoveries from missteps, you might want to learn some new, easy approaches. Contact us for a staff training session or individual, one-on-one coaching. Your best client is your current client – don't let an opportunity to retain valued clients slip by.