

## Don't Let Mistakes Be a Dead End

A few days ago my husband and I brought another couple to one of our favorite restaurants. I've eaten there for over twelve years, watched the owner grow up in his business and introduced perhaps a hundred people to the place. As usual the food and the service were excellent, our friends loved it, but we may never go back.

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." The four of us had seen it there. Where was it?

We began a quick and intensive search around where she had walked and found nothing. At that point, if you had asked me if I would ever return to this restaurant I would have said, "Of course!" But then our friend, the owner, 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; "You can call and cancel the card", not a trace of empathy in his words or expression. This was not the solution I wanted. When we tried to explain again what happened he offered his phone one more time. After a few frustrating minutes of attempted explanation, we realized that the relationship we thought we had with this business owner made no difference. We paid with another credit card and left.

The next day he had one of his hostesses call to tell us 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 this 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.

This man could have had us as customers for life if at the time of the incident he had said any version of: "I am sorry. I know what a pain it is to cancel credit cards and have to redo all the direct withdrawals. Wait until tomorrow; we'll clean carefully and check everywhere. I'll call you. Just leave your number."

It's simple: If something isn't going right—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 you had before.

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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.