

# SMALL BUSINESS NEWS

## Service with a smile isn't always enough

### BETTER RESTAURANT TRAINING CAN IMPROVE PROFITS AND TIPS

By NANCY RICHISON

"Two?" asked the hostess in between bites of her lunch.

Robert Welcher had to laugh. He couldn't have asked for a more textbook case of what not to do when seating guests in a restaurant.

But it wasn't a set-up, and the situation got worse as the president of Restaurant Consultants, Inc. dined at a northwest-side eatery recently. The manager asked if he wanted a glass with his beer. Welcher asked for a mug. The manager said he didn't have one that was chilled. Welcher settled for a glass and received a warm mug instead.

The waitress was asked if the chicken wings' sauce was extremely spicy. "I don't know," she replied. "I don't eat chicken wings."

There were no attempts to "suggestive sell," and he had to eventually flag waitress down later to ask for the bill.

Earlier that same day, Welcher had excellent service as a "mystery shopper" at Schmidt's Sausage Haus and restaurant, where he has provided manuals and mystery shopping services to train the service staff. Mystery shoppers pose as regular customers and observe such fundamentals as customer service, cleanliness, food quality and suggestive selling which is reported back to management and to the reviewed employees.

At Schmidt's, Welcher was greeted with a smile and friendly "Hello" and told how long his wait would be. The hostess presented menus and told him the name of his server. The server offered suggestions for entrees, described specials, sold appetizers, soup, salads and checked back

That's the way Welcher and most customers like to be served. Restaurant owners should like it, too, Welcher contends, because it means people will keep coming back and will buy more food and when they're there.

Chip Weiant, executive vice president of Schmidt's, says the four-restaurant local chain scored 60 to 70 percent range on service when RCI Service Solutions., a division of Columbus-based Restaurant Consultants, Inc. first started working with the company in 1988. Now the figure is in the 90 to 95 percent range, which is considered extremely high for the industry.

Welcher's company "custom-fits" its program to what the restaurant expects its employees to do.

Weiant says mystery shoppers observe 750 to 850 details per visit, checking such basics as whether a name tag is on straight, if the bathrooms are clean and whether the menu has food stains on it as well as vital areas such as rules of service, service procedures and suggestive selling.

To make sure the program works, Schmidt's compares guest's comment cards with the reports it gets back from Welcher's company.

It's hard to put a dollar figure on what the training has done for Schmidt's bottom line, he says, but obviously it's important enough that the company has continued the service for the past six years.

"Our service and our product quality is what the whole company has been built on," Weiant says. "But more and more research has shown it's still not enough to have the best products and the best service.

Welcher says one of the ways restaurants can impress their customer is if the server knows the menu and talks it up, especially the specialties. Suggestive selling, he says, is where most servers fall down.

"It's hard to get people to sell," Welcher says. "They just don't feel comfortable with it, until you give them the right tools."

But once they have the tools and learn the rewards selling can reap, both the restaurant and server will want to do more of it, he contends.

Hoster Brewing Co., one of Restaurant Consultants, Inc. clients, showed a \$181,300 increase in profit from suggestive selling in the course of a year, Welcher says.

In seminars, Welcher show a restaurant can increase its yearly profit by more than \$60,000 if each server sells one more menu item per shift, which in turns increase the amount of their tips.

The cost for Welcher's services, which runs from \$250 to \$450 per month depending on the type of restaurant and on the number of shops per month, can be recouped, he said, by each server selling an extra cup of coffee during each shift.

"Our business is designed to provide and effective on-going training program," Welcher says. "We set the standards of service excellence."

Restaurant Consultants, Inc. has 24 clients in Columbus including Double Tree Guest Suites, Schmidt's and Hoster's and 60 clients in a 24-states, employing several hundred re-shoppers.

"We're not for the masses, Welcher says. "We're for operators who want to use our system as a training tool to improve customer service and increase sales."

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