



Just say 'no' to naysaying

The other day, I went to my usual café for a latte. It was late afternoon, and I really needed a boost.

But once I stepped inside, much to my surprise, I saw that in just one day's time the café had released its entire staff and replaced it with a new one. Not one familiar face greeted me.

Uh-oh, I thought, this does not bode well.

The old staff was professional. They'd worked there for years. They knew my order without asking; cut me a deal every now and then; piled on extra sandwich meat whenever I asked; and called me by name. They gave me freebies on my birthday, shared stories about their kids and were quick to serve me.

But this time, when I strolled to the espresso bar to place my order, I waited. And waited. And waited...for someone to help me. No one did. Two guys stood in the back, chit-chatting. The cashier was shooting the breeze with a coworker as well. And the new manager sat at a table talking on his cell phone — looking right at me.

The grossly untrained cashier finally came over to take my order. I happily told her what skim milk is and where the refrigerator was. I would have explained how to make a latte as well, but we didn't get that far.

Because I had ordered a large.

"Coffee drinks only come in medium," she said, standing next to a stack of large cups.

"Really?" I asked. This was new to me. "But I'd really like a large, and the cups are right there," I said. "I'm willing to pay for it."

She called the manager over. When he finally did come over and heard the situation, he had just one thing to say: "Lattes only come in medium."

And that was that. I left, sans latte.

Now, I could easily have accepted the medium. It would have tasted the same. But it was the principle of the thing.

I used to go to that cafe nearly every day. Now I

go only in times of desperation (read: never).

I've worked in the service industry many a time. I've worked at cafes. I've worked at clothing stores, record stores, even a frozen yogurt stand. In every one of those jobs, my managers drove home one thing — if a customer asks for something, just say "yes."

Whatever we had to do to make it happen for the customer, we did it. If a customer wanted to return clothes after they'd clearly been worn, we shut our mouths and gave 'em a refund. If the food was taking too long to come out of the kitchen, dinner was on the house.

And guess what? Our customers appreciated it, or at the very least were placated. And they returned time and again, to spend money.

When it comes down to it, there is no word more irksome to a customer than "no". Have you ever said it? How did that work out for you? As a customer yourself, have you ever heard it? How did that work out for them?

In today's competitive marketplace say "no" even once and there's a good chance the customer won't be calling on you again. It sounds dramatic. It's not. There are just too many other businesses out there willing to do whatever it takes to ensure customer satisfaction. Let yours be one of them.

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