Slow Motion Sandwich

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In a world of immediate gratification, we often have to remind ourselves how to exercise patience — even when we're on our way home, hungry after a very long day, and stop for what we think will be a quick bite.

I thought this would be a quick stop because I've been to this particular sandwich shop, literally, hundreds of times. For the sake of anonymity, let's call it "Bus Station." I walked in last night to a wall of people, all waiting (sort of) patiently for their made-to-order sandwich. My immediate response was one of sympathy for the two high school students who were responsible for keeping this line of demanding people moving. I've worked my fair share of long nights in the service industry and I know what it's like to be understaffed by management that is looking to save a few bucks on labor.

So I put my hands in my jacket pockets and tried to put out an understanding vibe as the line crawled at a snail's pace. But as I watched the two boys working, I was struck by the difference between them. Boy 1 was scrambling around in his own sandwich-making routine, implementing moves he'd perfected over time that had likely resulted in valuable seconds being shaved off his sandwich production time. He was swift and efficient; a producer.

Boy 2, on the other hand, was the classic bottleneck. Not only was he visibly unhappy with the line, but he was slow, deliberately awkward, and his indifference carried forth in every green pepper slice he lazily tossed onto the deli meats and cheese. Boy 2 kept his visor pulled down, avoiding eye contact and mumbling — fighting the battle of who could care less, and winning.

I know teenage boys don't always see the big picture, but I wish I could have pointed out to him how his performance was not only affecting himself. In fact:

- Boy 1 was dealing with more anxiety than he deserved because of Boy 2's indifference. The crowd was becoming impatient and unfortunately Boy 1 could only do so much, so ultimately this would probably prove a negative work experience for Boy 1, even though he was doing the best job he possibly could. Not to mention, I'd guess it's only a matter of time before Boy 1 realizes that he's doing the job of two people and getting paid for one. This can be a real de-motivator and could cause a talented worker to look elsewhere.
- The proprietor (clearly not present) will likely suffer from some lost business. Anyone in a competitive market knows that there is always someone else ready to take your customers if you get the reputation for slow deliveries or poor customer service. It only takes one bad attitude to outweigh the impact of one good attitude. It also inspires customers (especially since we had so

> long to think about it) to ponder other, more convenient ways to get what they need. I'd guess more than a few were taking mental inventory of nearby sandwich shops and calculating the time and resources it would take to make their own dinners.

This was a good example of how sometimes an apathetic associate can be just as toxic to the surrounding team as someone who is hostile. It was also a reminder that every process can be streamlined. Had there been a supervisor here during the busy dinner rush, or any other checks and balances in place, the problem could be easily pinpointed. Instead, management might find out the hard way — through fewer customers and lost revenue.

As I mentioned above, I've been a customer of Bus Station's for many years. I have had hundreds of experiences as a customer, and this is the first one that's spurred me to write a column about it. I guess what they say is true: When a customer has a good experience, they tell one person, but when they have a bad experience they tell five (or in my case, 70,000).

All I know is that bottlenecks and bad attitudes exist everywhere. Whether it's on an automotive production line or over bins of lettuce and banana peppers, there is always an opportunity to succeed just as much as there is one to fail. Do you know which members of your team are choosing which outcome for your business? If not, you may want to take a fresh look before you find out the hard way.

I finally made it to the front of the line, and by then I was so amused by Boy 2's attitude that I couldn't help but smirk as he applied the cheese in slow motion. Tomorrow, I thought, I'll be eating dinner at home.

Do you have a "Boy 2" in your workplace? Email me: anna.wells@advantagemedia.com [1].

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