

THE FRONT OFFICE

OPINION PAGE



On Service

When my wife left her job and went back to school three years ago to pursue a Ph.D., I moonlighted as a waiter to make up for the lost income. Four days a week I'd leave my office and head for this madhouse restaurant in Los Angeles, wait tables until midnight, then drive home. I'd usually get to bed by 1 a.m., get up at 6:30 a.m., and be back at my desk by 7:30 a.m. For two years, that was my schedule.

Now if this is starting to sound like one of those stories your grandfather used to tell about walking barefoot through snow to shovel coal 26-hours-a-day, forget it — I enjoyed it, at least for the first year. The money was great,

the people I worked with, most of them younger than I, were full of life and promise. Plus, in many ways being in the service business, and being good at it, is immensely satisfying.

The restaurant was almost always crazy — line out the door every night, loud bar, louder kitchen, and many, many regulars. You would “turn” your six-table station no less than five times in a night, meaning you'd wait on at least 30 tables in a five- to six-hour period.

The regulars were often demanding and difficult. They knew the menu better than most of the servers and felt perfectly comfortable making up their own dishes. (One item became so popular the owner put it on the menu.) They were also our bread and butter, especially on those rare slow nights.

One Friday evening, I waited on one of my favorite regular customers. He was one of the more popular regulars — he used “please” and “thank you,” and if you served well, he tipped well. On this particular evening, he wanted something special from the kitchen, something we'd done before many times, but couldn't always do. There was a rather “gray” policy on special orders, usually left to the server's and the kitchen's discretion.

On this night, I said no. The customer went through the ceiling. He cited instances where we'd done it before. I tried to explain that there were reasons we couldn't always make the dish, the primary one being the general craziness of the kitchen at the moment, but the customer challenged any explanation I gave. Being human, I became defensive, and started to argue when he said, “This is the worst service I've ever had. I can't believe you'd treat a good customer this way.”

I stopped right there — it's amazing how a moment of lucidity can penetrate even the darkest rage. I knew I'd always given him excellent service before. I also knew that at this moment the past didn't matter. Service is a matter of today, right here, right now, not yesterday. I was saying no because I was busy, didn't want to make the extra effort, and because *I could*. It was my call, not his — he knew nothing about the business.

I was saying no for all the wrong reasons and would have kept on saying it had he not challenged my “service.”

I apologized and brought him what we wanted. The rest of the night went beautifully. Most importantly, a regular customer was not lost.

How does this apply to sports turf management? We're all in the service business, folks, and it's easy to say no. Sometimes it pays to pause and look at why we're saying it.

Matthew Trulio

EVENTS

CALENDAR

SEPTEMBER

14-15 Southeastern North Carolina Professional Turfgrass Conference. Wrightsville Beach Holiday Inn, Wilmington, NC. Contact: Dr. Bruce Williams (919) 253-4425.

26-29 Florida Turfgrass Association's 41st annual conference and show. Tampa Convention Center, Tampa, FL. Contact: FTGA (800) 882-6721.

OCTOBER

11-13 47th Northwest Turfgrass Conference. Holiday Inn & Conference Center, Yakima, WA. Contact: Northwest Turfgrass Association (206) 754-0825.

NOVEMBER

1-3 National Institute on Park and Grounds Management annual educational conference. Sheraton Denver Tech Center, Denver, CO. Contact: National Institute (414) 733-2301.

15-18 Green Industry Expo '93. Baltimore Convention Center, Baltimore, MD. Contact: Green Industry Expo Management (404) 973-2019.

16-18 Penn State Golf Turf Conference. Nittany Lion Inn, University Park, PA. Contact: Peter Landschoot (814) 863-1017.

DECEMBER

2-3 Arbo Expo. Valley Forge Convention Center, Valley Forge, PA. Contact: Susan Sweitzer (619) 770-4370.



Send announcements on your events **two months in advance** to: editor, sportsTURF magazine, 68-860 Perez Road, Suite J, Cathedral City, CA, 92234. Fax (619) 770-8019.