

# I'M SORRY

I am sure all of you reading this have been customers at eating establishments other than your own. You read in my columns about the various and assorted types of problems customers face. These problems can pop up any time during the "experience" and depending upon the when and the whys of the problems, the responses are different but in some ways the same.

"I'm sorry it took so long for your table to be ready", "I'm sorry your drink does not meet your approval", "I'm sorry I forgot your salad", "I'm sorry your dinner is not out yet", and on and on it goes. Any more, it seems almost impossible to get through a meal *anywhere* without someone saying, "I'm Sorry"! What is going on? The concept seems simple. You show up, order, eat and leave. Whether it's McDonalds or one of the expensive steak houses, it doesn't seem to matter. Something always seems to happen that requires the mandatory "I'm Sorry", from some employee of the business. This last weekend I was traveling and had the opportunity to eat at a high end private restaurant. Everything was fine until I saw a charge on the bill for a drink I did not order. I was almost around third, heading for home when it came. "Please accept my apology, that was the other tables order, I'M SORRY!"

Now I understand more than most how complicated and difficult it is to run a mistake free operation, and I recognize all of the things that might go wrong during the course of a patrons visit, but what motivated me to write on this issue was the number of apologies I have received during the last couple of months prior to this writing. You know what it is like when you buy a new car and suddenly you are unusually aware when the same exact model drives by? Before buying it, you never noticed, it never came to mind. Well a couple of months ago while at a "fast food" joint, everything that could go wrong, did. Trust me when I tell you that the manager was sorry. Since then, I decided to make notes on the number of 'those type' of apologies I received at bars and restaurants prior to this writing and couldn't believe the numbers.

Have you ever seen those signs in, or near, factories or steel mills that say, "ACCIDENT FREE FOR 200 DAYS"? To those companies, that is their way of expressing success in the operation of their business. The more days they can go without an accident says something, not only about management but about the employees as well. To me it says they take their job seriously and are conscientious of the message the company attaches to the quality of its products.

And so, be more aware of the number of times when you or your employees have to say those words to your customers. Use that number as a barometer as to how well you are listening to and treating your customers. Reward your employees for getting through an "I'm sorry" free month, or a sorry free day for that matter. You know very well that mistakes which require those apologetic words, "I'm Sorry", have got to cost you, in the end, lots of money and serious good will.

**Being profitable means *never having to say, "I'm sorry"*.**