

Empower your front-line employees

By Jeff “Chief” Urbaniak
COLUMNIST (www.AdviceChief.com)

I recently ate out for breakfast and had an interesting encounter. I ordered a plate that consisted of bacon, sausage, eggs, hash browns, two pancakes, and two pieces of French toast. I know, it sounds like more than I needed to eat, but anyway, I asked the waitress if I could exchange the two pieces of French toast for two pieces of regular toast. I was surprised to hear her say she had to ask for permission before she could approve that.

As I waited for her to return, I thought there'd be no way they'd say no. After all, two slices of plain toast must be cheaper than two pieces of French toast dipped in egg and milk batter. This was a no-brainer, no big deal, no inconvenience, and a bigger profit margin for the restaurant. But the waitress returned and said she couldn't

do it. I didn't ask her why not, but I was certain she could tell I was disappointed. If I was quicker on my feet I would have restated my order like Jack Nicholson did in the movie *Five Easy Pieces* and said: “For the French toast, leave off the egg and milk batter and toast it instead of grilling it.”

The food was very good, but I'll be reluctant to ever return there because other places I frequent allow me to switch out bacon for sausage or pancakes for waffles, etc. So this particular place lost a potential repeat customer over a petty rule. How many other places do you know of that stick to rules and policies regardless how it impacts the customer?

Rules, policies, and/or regulations are meant for things that have to be enforced, complied with, or consistent. Occasionally, though, common sense or exceptions to those rules should be applied or considered for matters

that aren't life or death or costly to the organization. And employees on the front lines should be empowered to make those common sense decisions for the benefit of the company or organization. This could speed up processes, save money, keep customers/clients happy, and improve job satisfaction. If the waitress had the authority to allow me to trade my French toast for regular toast, I probably don't write this column and I would have been a satisfied customer.

Most customers or clients won't give extra chances when frustrated or disappointed with a service rendered to them or a product they purchased. So listen to them carefully and if accommodating them doesn't take much effort or cost, then accommodate them. The small cost incurred will be recovered many times over on their repeated returns for business.

~ The End ~