



## Ask SCORE for Business Advice

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### Column Title: Resolve to be Better

One of my favorite restaurants was bumped way down on my list last week. In an effort to increase profit, the restaurant is charging extra for things that used to be included with a meal. I don't like coleslaw, and wanted to substitute a different side item. "That'll be an extra dollar," the server reported. "We no longer allow substitutions unless you pay extra. And, if you want more bread, that'll be an extra buck fifty."

The server was apologetic. Her job had suddenly got more difficult. Not only did she feel the embarrassment of reporting the changes, she also had to listen to the complaints. She felt especially bad when the protests came from long-time, loyal customers.

I wondered what the restaurant owner was thinking. With the vast number of restaurants to choose from, the competition for business is steep. This owner has loyal customers because they like the menu, the service, and the ability to select from a variety of sides. As he charges for services that are free at other restaurants, he is telling customers that their business doesn't matter. As a result, a lot of those customers will go elsewhere.

While I recognize his plight to be profitable, a price increase would have been much easier to, pardon the pun, swallow. I like substituting, and sometimes our family would like another loaf of bread. It seems petty to charge me extra for that.

The "nickel and diming" of customers is something that has become common in other businesses including the airline industry. As fees have been added or increased for checking luggage, traveling with pets, redeeming airline miles, and other items, customer satisfaction has decreased along with air travel. In October, Amadeus conducted a survey of 2,000 random adults in the United States. The survey found that 85% were unhappy about the new fees. The sentiment reported over and over was, "Don't charge me for my luggage!"

As much as the fees bothered customers, some understood that the increase was necessitated by record fuel prices. But, why do fees continue when those costs decline? A local business owner told me that she's still being assessed a fuel surcharge by one of her suppliers even though the cost of crude oil has dropped by more than \$100 a barrel. Since her supplier charges her, she has to pass on the fee to her customers thereby upsetting them. As a result, she may look for a new supplier.

Offending customers is bad business. It is bad for a local restaurant, a national airline, or any business that wants to keep customers. Obtaining loyal customers is expensive. Doesn't it make sense to do everything you can to keep them? It's a new year, and a good time for renewing solid businesses practices. Let your customers know they're valuable with good service and perks that will make them want to come back.

If your business would like ideas for good customer service, contact the Green Bay Chapter of SCORE. Visit [www.greenbayscore.org](http://www.greenbayscore.org) or call Cindy Gokey at 920-496-8930 for information.

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