

Eating out in Macon – fatter selection, leaner service

By Rick Maier

The service at some local restaurants can be so slow and frustrating these days you wonder if the wait staff has received any training, or if the owners have any idea how much money they're leaving in our pockets.

Sure, there are many establishments, especially the nicer ones, that still treat us very well. But there are more and more eateries around Macon that my family and I leave saying "that's the last time we're going to that place!"

The problem isn't necessarily the kids waiting on us - it's that they're not getting sufficient coaching or leadership. What happened to the owner-operators that used to make sure we left stuffed and smiling?

Come on servers, how about a little enthusiasm and salesmanship! Use our name or remember what we got last time. Tell us about the daily specials. Bring us a sample and see if you can talk us into an appetizer or dessert.

If we bite you get more tips, and if we decline you still get a bigger tip because you paid us some attention and let us show off our resolve.

Where's Southern Hospitality?

New restaurants are popping up all over Middle Georgia, helping fuel the local tourism economy. But do travelers receive such friendly, prompt service that they will go out of their way to come back?

We are so lucky to have investors who are willing to pour big bucks into these new restaurants. But are they impressed by the way they're treated when they dine at their own establishment? Are they getting a good return on their investment?

Some solutions to problem

An old boss told me never to complain without offering a solution, so here are eight steps to improve your dining experience:

1. Seek out restaurants with local food and atmosphere. It's more likely to be a memorable and distinct experience.
2. Go only to places where the owner is present, or where the owner has figured out how to motivate the manager on duty to think and act like an owner. Owners ought to be proud enough to post their name and phone number where we can see it.
3. If you're going to complain, yell at the manager – that's the person who hired, trained and supervises the employees.

4. Don't patronize places that spend more money on toys than food, or where they spend more on promotional table tents or special menus than they do on teaching customer service and teamwork skills to the help.
5. Leave if there isn't something cold to drink in front of you within 4 minutes of being seated. Quickly getting ice cubes reduces the chances that an iceberg of bad service will slam you later.
6. Remember that tip means "to insure promptness". Reallocate your tipping funds – tip little or none if the service stinks, and tip generously when a server goes out of their way.
7. Agree that it's okay to get up and get your own catsup or a clean fork from another table, but you have to pay the other customer a \$1 fee, which comes out of the server's tip.
8. Pass a new law: if a customer yells "Will someone *please* take my money?" twice in the presence of at least 8 customers and 2 employees, and waits 3 minutes without a response, they don't have to pay.

If I don't start getting better service eating out, I'm going to learn to cook Southern-style and open my own restaurant. It won't be pretty, but it will be quick and unique.

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