

# Sorry, we have no decaf.

*(Folks, today we have another knock-your-socks-off spectacular guest essay for you. Tim Kist, Managing Director of TK3, shares a short story with us that has a powerful message. After you read this take a moment to think about the little things you may be overlooking that your customers are noticing. And if you still need more examples why this stuff matters, read about [Ryan's scary hotel room.](#))*



My wife, Gwen, and I like to go out for breakfast on Saturday mornings if we have a lot of errands to run. We especially like to visit local restaurants, not the big chains.

Over the years we have established our regular “go to” spots that never disappoint. **You know, where the owner hugs you and genuinely thanks you for coming in.** We also like to try new local venues that are recommended by friends and family. We went to one of these newer spots that we had only visited once before and this time, **things were different.**

It started when Gwen ordered decaf and was told “**sorry, we have no decaf.**” This was at 9 AM on the Saturday of a long weekend. I can’t believe she would be the only person ordering decaf all weekend. And this opening event had a longer term impact that the young man serving us likely didn’t think of.

After placing our order, we talked about the lack of decaf. I was OK because they had regular. But, we ended up looking for more missing items.

**The salt shaker was empty. The hot sauces on the table had stuff running down the sides. And the floor was quite dirty – more than it should have been even with the warmer weather melting some snow.**

When we were paying at the register, I mentioned to the smiling server/cashier that they had no decaf. Without missing a beat, she said “our supplier didn’t deliver any this week.” **I just smiled and wished her a good day.**

The main point is that this restaurant had options.

There is another local restaurant across the street that sells coffee by the pound. **Problem solved.**


There is a local coffee shop one block down selling by the pound. **Problem solved.**

Some enterprising staff person could have phoned a colleague to pick up some decaf at a store on their way to their shift. **Problem solved.**

This leads to questions for management and owners to be mindful of in their expectations of their staff.

Here are a few tips for your service business to make sure the problem can be solved:

- If you don't have decaf what else don't you have? Do all of your staff know about the missing ingredient and have they been given a message to deliver to customers while you are actually solving the problem?
- Is there a "get it done" department to solve problems raised by customers or staff? Hopefully everyone. If not then someone must be assigned and accountable to deal with the issue.
- What is the communication process between management/owners and front line staff? Everyone needs to have a clear expectation about their role in delivering service to customers.



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- Tim Kist

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**Peter Drucker said there is only one valid definition of business – to create a customer.** Nobody that served us seemed willing to realize we were the ones with the money.

## **We are the customers.**

In this case, the absence of decaf means our next outing will be back to the restaurants we know we can count on because their staff act like, and are treated like, owners who care about their customers.

We hug their staff. And they always have decaf.

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Thanks Tim Miles!!!