

We Never Seem to Learn



I am constantly amazed that we, as a people, have lessons that we cannot seem to learn. Even those lessons that come at a high cost both financially as well as the suffering and loss of human lives. I am afraid that I may bruise a few egos. I would like to say up front that this blog is not about support for the minimum wage increase. The problems go much deeper and are not simply financial.

The food service industry is one of the lowest paying yet most prolific of jobs in the United States. Many a doctor, nurse, lawyer, engineer, actor and teacher have worked in the food industry to help pay their way through college and yet, most of the food service jobs are actually held by moms and dads just trying to put food on their tables for their families.

It's hard work for these employees, standing on their feet all day in an effort to make our dining experience enjoyable, if not at least tolerable. Whether anyone

who has never done this type of work understands the stress on both the body and mind, food services is a skill that requires dexterity, dedication, diligence, stamina, attitude, grace, attitude and a genuine desire to please people. I truly wish that people that do not understand this could work as a waiter, waitress, buss person, or cook for just one week to gain an appreciation for the challenges faced each day by a food services worker.

I've heard people that say, "Well, they may not get paid much but look at all the tips they make." Many restaurants pool the tips and split them among the workers. A person not well-versed in food service etiquette can lower the size of that pool greatly, not to mention that there is a learning curve that effects their service interaction.

It is said that if we pay these workers what they need to survive, then it will be the end for the small restaurateur and grossly affect the overall food service industry. That may be true. But it doesn't make it right.

We have a history of using that excuse as we sacrificed workers on the alter of profit. From child labor to slave labor to sweat shops to migrant workers, we have looked the other way in order to not have to stare into the eyes of poverty and suffering. It makes us uncomfortable.

Again, I have heard people say, "Well, if they don't like how little they make, then they should improve themselves, go back to school, gain new skillsets, find a different job." But I have to tell you that most of these workers love their jobs. They find fulfillment in these jobs. We would truly miss them if they were not there. We get upset when stores install automatic tellers because it cuts down on the number of employees and yet, we do not want to pay more for the clothes, food and the odds and ends that we buy there. We want to dictate social justice, but we do not want to pay the cost. We want the employers to step up and take the higher costs out of their profits. But, the truth is, we live in a capitalist society that is driven by profit.

This is an ongoing social issue and not easily overcome. It is a constant struggle as businesses struggle to keep their footing in an ever-changing market and employees simply trying to put food on the table. That does not mean that either the companies or the employees are greedy. It is the fabric of a capitalistic society.

For those of you who are not old enough to remember, we used to have attendants at every gas station. They would pump our gas, check our oil, wash our windshields and check the pressure in our tires, all as part of the price for buying gas at that particular gas station. Then we went through an era of self-service and full-service gas stations. If you paid a little more for your gas, you would get all those additional services. Today, I'm not sure that a full-service gas station exists in this country. We hardly noticed when all those service jobs disappeared. But they disappeared because we did not want to pay extra to have someone pump our gas, check our oil, wash our windows, and check our tires. And we do not do it ourselves, either.

We are living in an age where the service industry, as a whole, is changing. More and more automation leads to fewer and fewer jobs. Then we complain about the unemployment numbers. And the words we hear are "Look at all these people who do not want to work. Why should we help them?" We want the service, but we don't want to pay for it and then ignore the domino effect that generated, but we appreciate the complexity of the Rube Goldberg device that gives credence to our complaints.

We forget that the cotton and tobacco industry were built on the backs of slave labor, that most of our clothes are made in sweat shops in foreign countries, that child labor is still a common thing in other parts of the world. And still, we complain that prices are too high. Will we never learn?

I challenge you today, when you eat out, look that waiter or waitress in the eye and tell them how much you appreciate them. Wave at the buss person and give them a big smile. And when the check comes, forget about this 10%, 15%, 20% mathematic problem that you are trying to calculate in your head. Instead, be

generous. Show them in a tangible way that you appreciate their hard work. It's what Jesus not only wants, but expects of us.

Rev Walt