



ED BURCHER

is the president of Burcher Consulting, a foodservice and c-store consulting firm. Contact Ed at (289)-681-6378 or ed@burcherconsulting.com.

When Passion Is Not Enough

We knew that when we moved to Canada, we would miss a lot of things in the States. There are many differences, obvious and subtle, between the countries—not the least of which is food choices.

The Toronto area where we live is very multicultural, with food choices from around the world. But what we really missed was Tex-Mex-style cooking. There are no carne asada dinners to satisfy our cravings in Toronto.

However, this changed six months ago. We saw a restaurant renovation going on, and the sign in the window said Casa Bonita! We were getting a restaurant where I could order a margarita, fajitas and enchiladas. Plus it was within walking distance of our house.

On our first visit, the owner greeted and welcomed us warmly. When we said we were from the United States and had been waiting for his restaurant to open, he proudly described where he was from in Mexico, told us he used family recipes and had friends and family as staff to help keep it authentic.

When ordering, we found that the restaurant did not serve wine. OK, so onto the margarita. What came was a watered-down version of what we expected. We asked what was in the margarita, and the server said she had just started and followed the recipe written down for her. The experience deteriorated from there. The appetizer was tasteless and very small. The main courses were bland and lacking something.

We chalked it up to the restaurant's newness. We figured it would improve.

A month later, we tried again, thinking that it would be better ... but it was not. Something told me business was not that great—the restaurant was almost empty on a Friday night, yet others in the area were full.

Over the next few months, we watched as the owner put A-boards on the sidewalk with specials, repainted the front to bright colors and put a large banner featuring the restaurant name over the entrance.

Are there **observations and valuable feedback** you can gather at **“the moment of truth”**?

Employees handed out fliers and coupons.

About six months after our first visit, friends wanted to try the restaurant. With hesitation we joined them, not telling them of our previous experience. Well, nothing had changed in the food, service or offer, including the lack of wine.

You know how this finally ended—the restaurant closed its doors. It was not from lack of trying or commitment from the owner, but perhaps a lack of business sense. The idea was right, but it lacked in execution, delivery and follow-up. The owner certainly had passion, yet passion is not enough.

Don't Make the Same Mistakes

There are lessons we can learn from this:

► Know your market and guest. Do your homework and understand who will shop your stores. Is your menu and store

geared to the hot-dog-and-chips crowd when you should cater to the soccer mom?

► Train your staff to not just follow procedures, but also to read and react to situations. The server did not know how to prepare what I would consider a core item. Does your staff know how to make every item and know what the finished product should taste like?

► Get feedback from your guests on your products and their experiences. Opportunities for gathering feedback arise every day in our stores. And staff can solicit feedback on the products and services you sell. When was the last time you ran a point of sale or deli counter and talked to your guests? Are there observations and valuable feedback you can gather at “the moment of truth”?

► Know your competitors and their standards for quality, freshness and service. I would have thought adding wine was an easy task at a restaurant, especially with a popular wine bar nearby. I'm sure that we were not the only ones to ask for a glass of chardonnay. What is your “wine moment”?

► There is no fix for poor food and service except better food and true hospitality. You can't fix the wrong offer with promotions, new paint colors or more signs. Quality products served with care and attention go a long way toward building a business.

I am not sure what's next for that owner or the lessons he has learned, but take a look at your store, speak with your guests about how they like the food and service—and ensure you are not on the same path. ■