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Complaint Communication: How Complaint Severity and Service Recovery Influence Guests' Preferences and Attitudes

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Abstract

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Keywords

restaurants, guest complaints, communication

Disciplines

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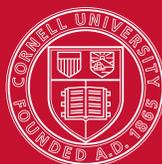
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Complaint Communication:

How Complaint Severity and Service Recovery Influence Guests' Preferences and Attitudes

by Alex Susskind, Ph.D.

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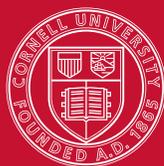
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School of Hotel Administration

Complaint Communication:

How Complaint Severity and Service
Recovery Influence Guests' Preferences and
Attitudes

by Alex M. Susskind

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Alex M. Susskind, Ph.D., is an associate professor at the Cornell University School of Hotel Administration and a member of the Graduate Field of Communication at Cornell University (ams76@cornell.edu). With a Ph.D. focusing on organizational communication and organizational behavior and an MBA with a concentration in personnel and human relations, Susskind's research is based primarily in organizational communication and organizational behavior. He is currently researching: (a) the influence of customer–service provider interaction as it relates to organizational effectiveness and efficiency from the perspective of guests, employees, and managers; and (b) the influence of communication relationships upon individuals' work-related attitudes and perceptions surrounding organizational events and processes such as teamwork and downsizing. His experience in the restaurant industry includes a degree from the Culinary Institute of America.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A survey of 802 travelers found a connection between the mechanism that restaurant guests use to voice complaints and the nature and severity of the problems that motivate those complaints. Guests bring the most severe problems to management's attention in one of two ways. As one might expect, most complaints about severe problems are made face-to-face, but contrary to expectations, some guests are just as likely to write a letter. The respondents viewed food issues and failures in food and service combined as the worst failures, but these also gave restaurateurs the best chance to cure the situation, earn the guest's satisfaction, and improve the prospects for a repeat purchase. The guests tended to raise issues relating just to service directly with the server, again giving the restaurant the chance for a rapid recovery. Most puzzling were complaints relating to other factors, such as atmosphere, that are not related to food or to service. Although the respondents generally considered failures in those issues to be the least severe, these were also the complaints that were most likely to cause the guest to decide never to return to the restaurant, even when the problem had been addressed to the customer's satisfaction.

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Most operators of service-based organizations recognize the importance of properly managing complaints as they arise in their operations. Creating a better understanding of how service failures and subsequent complaints influence guests' perceptions and attitudes toward the restaurants they patronize should improve guest satisfaction and increase repeat patronage. In many ways complaint management offers restaurant operators insight into how well their operations perform and how their guests react to service failures and recovery.

I present and test three main ideas in this report to further our understanding of the complaint process and guests' reactions to service failure and recovery. First I present the elements of media richness theory,¹ which applies to the mechanism that consumers use to complain—sometimes to a manager in person, for instance, but other times by comment card.² Next, I discuss how the type and severity of service failures influence guests' perceptions and attitudes, and last I discuss how service remedies and intentions to return emerge from and are influenced by the complaint process.

Media Richness

Guests use any of several channels to lodge a complaint about a service failure. Their choice depends on factors relating to the timing and severity of the failure. In large part the theory suggests that the choice depends on the “richness” of each communication medium. Richness is described by the following four qualities of information-carrying ability and exchange: (1) the capability and desire to provide feedback to the receiver of the message once it has been delivered, meaning that feedback can be instantaneous, delayed, or not possible; (2) the complexity of the message itself, that is, the communication channels and cues used to convey the message, such as oral communication, written communication, non-verbal communication, or a combination thereof; (3) the ability to tailor communication to individual circumstances, and (4) the source and focus of the com-

munication, that is, to whom the message is directed (in this case, a line-level employee or a manager) and for what purpose (e.g., simply to relate the experience, or to request an adjustment).³

Based on these four elements, face-to-face communication is considered the “richest,” because it allows for immediate feedback, is capable of utilizing multiple cues, can be customized to individual circumstances, and can be directed at or received from multiple sources simultaneously.⁴ Therefore, when faced with the need to communicate a complaint, guests will determine which communication channel or combination of channels they believe will best deliver their message.

In a study I conducted of media richness theory as it relates to restaurant guests' complaints about a service experience, a pure media richness framework did not completely describe guests' complaint-communication behavior. While face-to-face communication with a manager was associated with a higher propensity to complain about restaurant experiences, the same was not true for complaints made to line-level employees. Guests in most cases preferred to make their complaints to management either face-to-face or in writing.⁵ A limitation of that application is that the type of complaint (i.e., food, service, or other) was not considered in the analysis, nor was the severity of the service failure surrounding the complaint. It was, therefore, not possible to discern from the study whether the type of complaint and the severity of the service failure influenced guests' determination of how and why they complained.

¹ R.L. Daft and R.H. Lengel, “Information Richness: A New Approach to Managerial Information Processing and Organizational Design,” *Research in Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 6 (1984), pp. 191-233; and R.L. Daft and R.H. Lengel, “Organizational Information Requirements, Media Richness, and Structural Design,” *Management Science*, Vol. 32 (1986), pp. 554-571.

² A.M. Susskind, “An Examination of Guest Complaints and Complaint Communication Channels: The Medium Does Matter!,” *Cornell Hospitality Reports*, Vol. 6, No. 14 (2006) chr.cornell.edu.

³ Daft and Lengel (1984), *op.cit.*; Daft and Lengel (1986), *op.cit.*; and *Ibid.*

⁴ Daft and Lengel (1984), *op.cit.*; and Daft and Lengel (1986), *op.cit.*

⁵ Susskind, *op.cit.*

Type of Complaint

While a restaurant experience can be considered single event, it is composed of interrelated components that can be evaluated individually and collectively.⁶ Of these components, food and service are, needless to say, key factors influencing a restaurant's success.⁷ When it comes to complaints, several studies have shown that the cause of service failures (i.e., food, service, or other factors) has an influence on how guests communicate with others regarding their experience,⁸ and how guests view and respond to recovery actions in response to their complaints.⁹

Severity of the Service Failure

The severity of a service failure will be evaluated by the guest based on his or her perceptions of and expectations for the service episode.¹⁰ Researchers believe that the severity of the failure and the conditions surrounding it will influence how guests choose to communicate their complaints, as well as the requested remedy.¹¹ The severity of service failures can range from minor, such as a server forgetting to bring a piece of silverware needed for a course, to severe, such as a server being disrespectful to a guest, spilling food on a guest, or delivering incorrectly prepared food.

Remedies

The extent to which service providers correct dissatisfying elements of a service experience is also likely to vary depending on the specifics of the situation.¹² It could be argued that a minimal service failure, such as a time delay in offering a guest a beverage refill, would likely require a smaller remedy than would a more substantial service failure, such as serving a guest an overcooked steak. In the former case a server might only need to bring a beverage refill and apolo-

gize for the delay in service, while the process of replacing an overcooked steak is time consuming and disruptive to the meal.

A study of restaurant consumers' complaints about service experiences defined a set of recovery actions according to the necessary degree of correction. The study suggested that offering free food, discounts, or coupons, or intervention by a manager involved a high degree of effort, while making minor adjustments, offering apologies, or doing nothing to correct the problem were presented as low-effort corrections.¹³ This range describes the situation in a restaurant or hotel,¹⁴ where service recovery actions can be evaluated on a continuum that ranges from high-level corrections to low-level corrections. It seems clear that the degree of correction that is negotiated or offered following a service failure is one key to a successful service recovery.

Intent to return. A chief factor in consumers' decisions to return to a restaurant following a service failure is whether those guests feel that they have received fair treatment that involves an appropriate remedy.¹⁵ A growing body of research supports this connection,¹⁶ highlighting the importance of the connection between satisfied customers and repeat patronage intentions.

This report examines how guests react to service failures by looking at: (1) the nature of the complaint lodged (i.e., food, service, or other elements), (2) the mode of communication used to lodge the complaint (i.e., in person, by letter, or by comment card), (3) the severity of the service failure, (4) the resolution, and (5) how the service failure and rem-

⁶ A.M. Susskind, "A Content Analysis of Consumer Complaints, Remedies, and Repatronage Intentions Regarding Dissatisfying Service Experiences," *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (2005), pp. 150-169; and S. Gupta, E. McLaughlin, and M. Gomez, "Guest Satisfaction and Restaurant Performance," *Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly*, Vol. 48, No. 2 (August 2007) 284-298.

⁷ A.M. Susskind, "I Told You So! Restaurant Consumers' Word-of-mouth Communication," *Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (April 2002), pp. 75-85.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Susskind(2005), *op.cit.*; and Susskind (2002), *op.cit.*

¹⁰ A.M. Susskind, "Efficacy and Outcome Expectations Related to Guest Complaints about Service Experiences," *Communication Research*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (2000), pp. 353-378; and Susskind (2005), *op.cit.*

¹¹ Susskind (2006), *op.cit.*

¹² M.L. Richins, "Negative Word-of-mouth by Dissatisfied Consumers: A Pilot Study," *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 47 (1983), pp. 68-78.

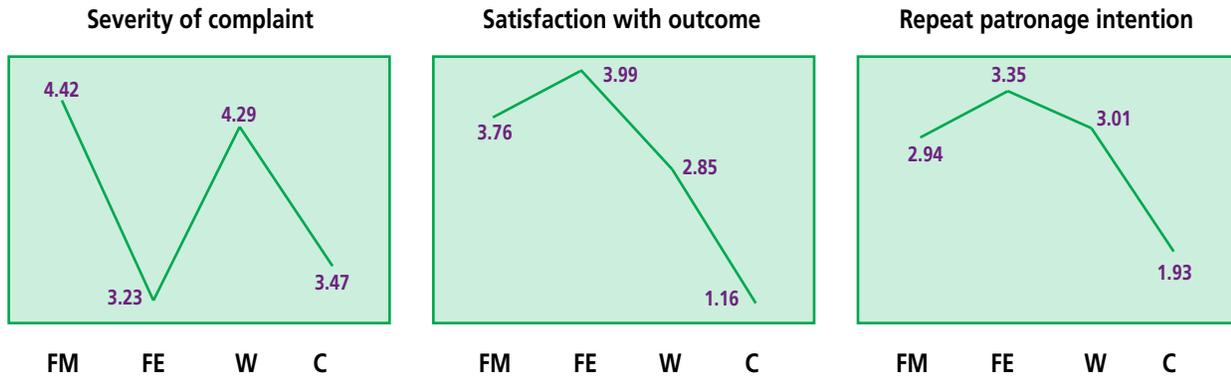
¹³ K.D. Hoffman, S.W. Kelley, and H.M. Rotalsky, "Tracking Service Failures and Employee Recovery Efforts," *Journal of Services Marketing*, Vol. 9 (1995), pp. 49-61.

¹⁴ See, for example: K.D. Hoffman and B.G. Chung, "Hospitality Recovery Strategies: Customer Preference versus Firm Use," *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research*, Vol. 23 (1999), pp. 71-84; and D.S. Sundaram, C. Jurowski, and C. Webster, "Service Failure and Recovery Efforts in Restaurant Dining: The Role of Criticality of Service Consumption," *Hospitality Research Journal*, Vol. 20 (1997), pp. 137-149.

¹⁵ C. Goodwin and I. Ross, "Consumer Responses to Service Failures: Influence of Procedural and Interactional Fairness Perceptions," *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 25 (1992), pp. 149-163.

¹⁶ M. Davidow, "The Bottom-line Impact of Organizational Responses to Customer Complaints," *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research*, Vol. 24 (2000), pp. 473-490; M. Davidow and J.H. Leigh, "The Effects of Organizational Complaint Responses on Consumer Satisfaction, Word-of-mouth Activity, and Repurchase Intentions," *Journal Consumer Satisfaction, Dissatisfaction and Complaining Behavior*, Vol. 11 (1998), pp. 91-102; Gupta et al., *op. cit.*; A.K. Smith, R.N. Bolton, and J. Wagner, "A Model of Customer Satisfaction with Service Encounters Involving Failure and Recovery," *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 36 (1999), pp. 356-372; and R.A. Spreng, G.D. Harrell, and R.D. Mackoy, "Service Recovery: Impact on Satisfaction and Intentions," *Journal of Services Marketing*, Vol. 9 (1995), pp. 15-23.

Results from the one-way analysis of variance for complaint communication mode



Note: Numbers on the charts are the mean responses for each variable by communication channel.

FM = face-to-face with a manager; FE = face-to-face with an employee, W = written complaint (letter, e-mail, or web), C = formatted comment card.

edy influenced repeat patronage intentions. I tested the following two research questions, each of which has three parts.

Research question 1: Is the richness of the communication channel used by a guest to lodge a complaint related to: (a) the severity of the complaint, (b) the satisfaction with how the complaint was handled, and (c) plans to return to the restaurant?

Research question 2: Is the type of service failure experienced by a guest related to: (a) the severity of the complaint, (b) the satisfaction with how the complaint was handled, and (c) plans to return to the restaurant?

Participants and Procedure

To test the two research questions proposed above, I surveyed 802 travelers at airports, at convention centers, and in transit to vacation destinations. These data were collected over a six-month period as part of larger study investigating travelers' behavior. Participants were asked to fill out the survey in exchange for a \$2.00 gift certificate for a beverage at a national coffee house chain. The survey asked participants who had complained about a restaurant service failure (in a casual-dining restaurant) to report their general perceptions about the complaint process. The survey asked the nature of the service failure—specifically, whether it was: (1) food related, (2) service related, (3) related to a combination of food and service, or (4) related to atmosphere or another element. The participants were then asked to specify the communication channel they used to lodge the complaint (in decreasing richness): (1) face-to-face with a manager, (2) face-to-face with an employee, (3) written (whether by letter, email, or the web), or (4) using comment cards. Respon-

dents rated the severity of the service failure and the level of satisfaction (both on 1 to 5 scales). They also were asked to rate the probability that they would return to the restaurant, again on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 meaning that they definitely would return.

The participants were between the ages of 18 and 70 (mean = 32.74, SD = 14.74, median = 28), and 58 percent were female. To get a sense of how often the respondents patronized casual dining restaurants, I asked them to report how many times each week they dine out for lunch and for dinner. The range for both meals was zero to seven. For lunch the mean was 3.07 (SD = 2.15, median = 3), and for dinner the weekly mean was 2.51 (SD = 1.94, median = 2), showing that these guests were experienced diners.

Analyses. To answer the two research questions, I compared the mean rating values of severity of the complaint, satisfaction with the outcome, and repeat patronage intentions to the four channels of complaint communication (i.e., face-to-face to managers, face-to-face to employees, written, or comment cards) and to the four categories of complaints (i.e., food, service, combination of food and service, and

¹⁷ One-way ANOVA was used to test the significance of the differences along with a post-hoc Duncan's multiple range test. The one-way ANOVA procedure examines the differences for a quantitative dependent variable (in this case, severity of complaint, satisfaction with outcome, and repeat patronage intentions) by a single factor independent variable (in this case, preferred mode of communication or nature of the complaint). Analysis of variance is used to test the hypothesis that several means are equal and is an extension of the two-sample t-test. After the means are compared and differences have been noted among the means, post hoc tests show which means differ specifically (SPSS for Windows, Release 14.0 2005. Chicago: SPSS Inc).

atmosphere or other). I was looking for notable differences in consumers' reactions to the complaint process based on the mode of communication and the nature of the complaint.¹⁷

Summary and Discussion of the Findings

Communication mode. Contrary to the implications of the media-richness framework, the respondents did not uniformly use the richest communication channels for complaints of the greatest severity, nor was the channel richness always related to satisfaction with the outcome or to repeat patronage intentions (see Exhibit 1, previous page).

With regard to question 1a, guests who reported a severe service failure indicated that they preferred to complain directly to a manager in person (mean = 4.42), which is in keeping with the model, but some guests with severe complaints said they would draft a letter to a company manager (mean = 4.29), an approach that is not predicted by the model. Likewise, guests who reported a less severe service failure preferred to direct their complaints to line-level employees (mean = 3.23) or use an organization-provided comment card (mean = 3.47).¹⁸ Using the comment cards in preference to face-to-face communication with an employee is contrary to media richness concept, again because the theory would suggest that a face-to-face communication is better able to address service failure.¹⁹ However, when guests determine that a line-level employee is not likely to help them, they are more likely to look toward management for a resolution. These findings are consistent with earlier studies that show guests view complaints given to line-level employees differently from those made to management.²⁰

I did, however, find support for the media richness framework in conjunction with satisfaction. Guests who used a rich communication channel by lodging their complaints in person were more satisfied with the outcome than those who used the less-rich approach of writing. So, for instance, guests who complained directly to an employee (mean = 3.99) or in person to a manager (mean = 3.76) were significantly

more satisfied than those guests who either sent a letter to management (mean = 2.85) or filled out a comment card (mean = 1.16).²¹ I conclude that guests who dealt with their problem in person at the time of the service (by speaking with either an employee or manager) were relatively satisfied with the complaint resolution. On the other hand, letters directed to management provided a moderate level of satisfaction, and comment cards rarely satisfied unhappy guests.

The test of question 1c, regarding repeat patronage, also provided general support for a media richness framework. In this case reported repeat patronage intentions were highest when a guest addressed their complaint with an employee (mean = 3.35) and were nearly as high for guests who communicated their complaint to a manager either face-to-face (mean = 2.94) or via a written message (mean = 3.01). Similar to the satisfaction outcome noted above, a complaint lodged via comment card was associated with the lowest level of repeat patronage intentions (mean = 1.93).²²

Complaint Type

The study revealed that the majority of the complaints from the guests stemmed from food-related concerns (42.7%). Complaints involving a combination of food- and service-related concerns ranked second at 26.4 percent; service-related complaints ranked third at 25.2 percent; and complaints about the atmosphere or a topic not directly related to food or service accounted for 5.7 percent of the guests' complaints.

Food-related failures, whether alone or in connection with service, stood out as the most severe. Examining research question 2a, the reported severity of the service failures was highest for failures involving issues of food and service combined (mean = 4.39) and problems with food alone (mean = 4.30). Complaints relating to atmosphere or an issue not directly related to food or service were

¹⁸ The one-way ANOVA results revealed significant differences among the means for the severity of service failure variable ($F[3,799] = 66.66, p < .001$). Results from Duncan's multiple range tests indicated that face-to-face communication with a manager and a written letter to management were statistically different from both face-to-face communication with an employee and an organizationally provided comment card at the $p < .05$ level.

¹⁹ Susskind, (2006), *op.cit.*

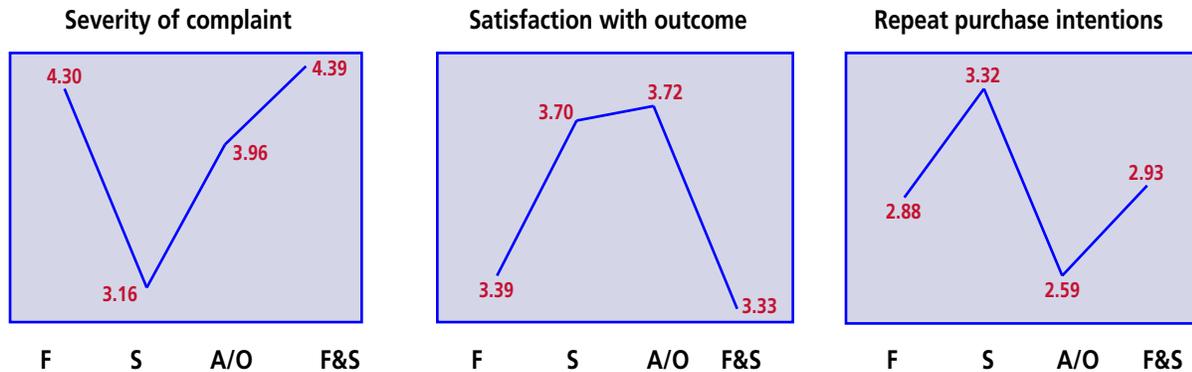
²⁰ Susskind. (2005), *op.cit.*; and *Ibid.*

²¹ The one-way ANOVA results revealed significant differences among the means for the satisfaction with outcome variable ($F[3,799] = 112.02, p < .001$). Results from Duncan's multiple range tests indicated that face-to-face communication with an employee and face-to-face communication with a manager were statistically different at the $p < .05$ level from a written letter to management, which was also statistically different from a complaint lodged through an organizationally provided comment card at the $p < .05$ level.

²² The one-way ANOVA results revealed significant differences among the means of the repeat patronage intentions variable ($F[3,799] = 20.39, p < .001$). Results from Duncan's multiple range tests indicated that for the repeat patronage intentions variable face-to-face communication with an employee was statistically different at the $p < .05$ level from face-to-face communication with a manager and a written letter to management, which were also statistically different from a complaint lodged through an organizationally provided comment card at the $p < .05$ level.

²³ The one-way ANOVA results revealed significant differences among the means for the severity of service failure variable ($F[3,799] = 59.75, p < .001$). Results from Duncan's multiple range tests indicated that food-related and a combination of food- and service-related complaints were significantly higher than a complaint relating to the atmosphere, which was significantly higher than service related complaints at the $p < .05$ level.

Results from the one-way analysis of variance for complaint type



Note: Numbers on the charts are the mean responses for each variable by complaint type: F = food-related, S = service-related, A/O = atmosphere or other, and F&S = a combination of food and service

reported as being moderately severe (mean = 3.96), while the reported severity of problems with service alone was the lowest (mean = 3.16).²³ These findings echo those of earlier studies that found that errors in service delivery alone are generally viewed as being less severe than food-related errors.²⁴

Failures relating to food were also most damaging to customers' satisfaction, regardless of resolution. The test of research question 2b showed that guests who experienced a problem with food and service combined (mean = 3.33) or food alone (mean = 3.39) reported the lowest level of satisfaction with the resolution of the complaint. Satisfaction with the outcome of the complaint for service-related problems alone (mean = 3.70) or the atmosphere (mean = 3.72) was significantly higher. Again, complaints relating to food or the combination of food and service appeared to be the most difficult for guests to overcome.²⁵

Last, the test of research question 2c showed that the respondents' repeat patronage intentions varied as a function of complaint type. The survey found that respondents who reported a service-related failure were the most likely

to return to the restaurant (mean = 3.32), followed by guests who reported a combination of food- and service-related problems (mean = 2.93) and problems relating only to food (mean = 2.88). Guests who complained about the atmosphere or some other problem that was not food or service related were the least likely to return (mean = 2.59). As was the case with satisfaction with the outcome, those who made service-related complaints reported a higher intent to repeat their patronage, when compared to customers whose complaints related to food, the combination of food and service, or atmosphere.²⁶

Managerial Implications

The respondents who experienced a severe service failure preferred to communicate their concerns directly to management. While it's true that some wanted face-to-face communication and some complained in writing, it seems clear that a manager must be involved when something is seriously wrong. Once the complaint is made, managers need to quickly and completely respond to a guest's complaints and concerns.

²⁴ Susskind (2005), *op.cit.*; and Susskind (2002), *op.cit.*

²⁵ The one-way ANOVA results revealed significant differences among the means for the satisfaction with outcome variable ($F[3,799] = 3.48$, $p = .02$). Results from Duncan's multiple range tests indicated that food-related and a combination of food- and service-related complaints were significantly higher than a complaint relating to the atmosphere and a service related complaint alone at the $p < .05$ level.

²⁶ The one-way ANOVA results revealed significant differences among the means of the repeat patronage intentions variable ($F[3,799] = 7.19$, $p < .001$). Results from Duncan's multiple range tests indicated that repeat patronage intentions following a service-related complaint were significantly higher compared to repeat patronage intentions following a food-related or a combination of food- and service-related complaint, which were significantly higher than a complaint relating to the atmosphere all judged at the $p < .05$ level of significance.

The data on respondents' satisfaction with the resolution point to why a prompt response is needed when guests complain. Those who complained directly to the manager or to a server indicated greater satisfaction with the outcome. I infer that voicing concerns at the time of the service failure to either a line-level employee or manager affords service providers with the opportunity to fix the problem on the spot. By contrast, guests who write letters or complete comment cards have eliminated the possibility of immediate service recovery and have complicated the timing and execution of any remedy. This underscores the point that it is best to address guests' complaints and concerns before they leave the restaurant.

Managers are not the only ones who should be prepared to remedy a service failure. As reported in the test of question 1c, guests who lodged their complaints to a line-level employee reported the highest level of repeat patronage intentions. This finding confirms the server's position as the first line of defense in fixing guest complaints. When a guest has a concern with food or service and the server addressed it properly, it makes sense that the guest would intend to return—and that is what this survey found. More to the point, guests who experience a service failure that is not severe normally take it up with their server. This finding suggests that the kinds of complaints that are addressed face-to-face with servers are those that are handled and remedied with relative ease. On the other hand, when a complaint gets as far as the manager, the stakes are higher, as indicated by the findings from question 1a. Guests who reported that they lodged their complaint directly to management (either via letter or face-to-face), reported a moderate level of repeat patronage intentions, suggesting that even when a manager is able to resolve a service failure, that does not guarantee that a guest will return.

Complaint Type

Since this is a survey of restaurant customers, it shouldn't be surprising that food was a key factor in service failures. The results showed that problems were rated most severe when they involved food alone or a combination of food and service, as compared with complaints regarding the atmosphere or other factors, and complaints related only to service. The respondents to this survey appeared to be more forgiving of service-related mistakes when the food wasn't an issue or when the service compounded a food-related issue. An outcome that one might not anticipate was that complaints regarding the restaurant's atmosphere were viewed as being nearly as critical as those relating to food and to food combined with service.

Problems with the atmosphere are difficult to manage, as the results of questions 2b and 2c show. While respondents who had problems with the atmosphere reported

the highest level of satisfaction with the complaint remedy, those respondents were also the least likely to return to the restaurant. This set of findings suggests that even though errors made with food are the most critical, they can be repaired. Guests seem to be relatively forgiving (or at least less critical) of service-related mistakes. However, if guests find your restaurant uncomfortable or have some other structural issue, they seem to be less likely to want to return, even if you've attempted to remedy the cause. If a guest does not like the music, décor, or the other guests, these elements are the most difficult to change. That would explain why guests who experience problems with the atmosphere are the least likely to return.

An examination of guests' satisfaction with the outcome of their complaints adds to the conundrum. Respondents reported higher satisfaction with both service-related and atmosphere-related complaints when they were remedied, as compared with problems involving the food.

While satisfaction is a useful measurement, the most important gauge of customers' reaction to service failure and recovery has to be whether the customer will return to the restaurant. As supported by the findings regarding complaint severity and outcome satisfaction, guests who experienced a service-related problem reported the highest level of repeat patronage intentions (slightly above the midpoint of "maybe I will return"), followed by those who had problems with a combination of food and service, and mistakes regarding food alone (slightly below the midpoint of "maybe I will return"). The lowest level of repeat patronage intentions was reported by guests who complained about the atmosphere or another issue not related to food or service. This underscores the idea that if elements of the atmosphere are not pleasing to the guest, they are not likely to return, regardless of the remedy.

The implications for managers are not as clear cut as one might wish. What is clear is that restaurant guests do have specific preferences about how they complain, based on the nature and severity of the problem. For example, managers should not discount the severity of a complaint based merely on the fact that the complaint was made in writing. Complaints made in person, whether to management or to servers, must, of course, be addressed immediately and thoroughly. However, having done that, managers should not necessarily expect that the guest will plan to return, even if the guest was satisfied with the resolution to the problem. In that regard, the type of failure seems to make a difference. Appropriate remedies for service failures or food failures seem to satisfy customers and promote intentions to return, even when the problem was severe. On the other hand, other issues, such as the atmosphere of your restaurant, may mean customers will stay away, even if the problem was resolved to their satisfaction. ■

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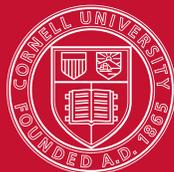
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