

The Illegal Burger

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The Burger Barn, a national fast food restaurant franchise recently opened an outlet in Smallville, Ontario. The new outlet has a very attractive decor, featuring cushioned booths, pictures and various wall ornaments, smoking and no smoking sections, and a variety of plants.

The restaurant also has an "open" beverage counter. When customers purchase beverages, they are given beverage containers which they fill themselves. A variety of soft drinks and coffee are available. Only one size of coffee container is utilized. Two sizes of soft drink containers are used (regular and large). Ice machines and napkin and straw dispensers are positioned beside the beverage dispensers. The "open" beverage counter allows customers to obtain free refills. There is no sign anywhere in the restaurant describing the "open" beverage counter policy.

Another feature of the restaurant is the "open" salad bar. Customers purchasing a salad are given a plate to fill, and refill, to a limit of three visits to the salad bar. There is a small sign on each side of the salad bar stating that there is a three-serving limit.

On this one particular day, a severely intoxicated male patron entered the restaurant and purchased a large burger (The Barn Buster!). Upon picking up his meal, he headed for the salad bar and proceeded to garnish his Barn Buster with various salad items.

An assistant manager (a young female) spotted this criminal event taking place and confronted the guilty party, who, by the way, because of his condition, wasn't even sure which planet he was on. The assistant manager seized the "illegal" burger and disposed of it in a garbage container behind the cashiers. She informed the customer that he was not allowed to garnish his burger with items from the salad bar. The assistant manager proceeded to give the customer a new Barn Buster. At this time, the customer purchased some fries.

The above confrontation took place at a time when a number of other customers were in the restaurant. Some of them were fully aware of the entire episode. No one, however, interfered with what had transpired.

After receiving his meal, the intoxicated customer sat at a table beside the front window and quietly ate his food, enjoying the outdoor scenery and the passing traffic. Soon afterwards, he left, disturbing no one. A few minutes later, two police officers arrived at the restaurant, even though the police station was only one block away. The police officers talked to the assistant manager and then left. Obviously, the assistant manager had called the police about the customer in question.

Focus: Marketing strategy, customer perceptions, management perceptions, customer relations.

Questions

1. Using the appropriate theories and concepts, describe the nature of the marketing strategy implemented by The Burger Barn.
2. Evaluate the actions of the assistant manager. Did she act appropriately? Explain.
3. How do you think the assistant manager would have acted had the customer not been intoxicated?
4. How do you think the assistant manager would have acted had the customer been an intoxicated female?
5. How do you think the assistant manager would have acted had the customer been a non-intoxicated female?
6. If you were the assistant manager, how would you have handled this situation?
7. Is the design of the restaurant and/or the policies of the operation (i.e., “open” beverage counter policy and 3-serving option for the salad bar) somehow contributing factors to the problem situation in the case. Explain. If the design and/or the policies were contributing factors, what recommendations would you make?

For all questions, use the appropriate theories and concepts, when necessary. Do not just present case facts.