

# MIDWEST FOODSERVICE NEWS

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Serving Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, West Virginia and Kentucky

## Shopping service offered as management tool

by Molly Greenberg

COLUMBUS, Ohio—She sat at the bar. The bartender ignored her empty glass. In the dining room, the hostess led her to a table and uttered the classic, "Enjoy your dinner" with the enthusiasm of a wet noodle.

The waiter took her order politely but without suggesting a crispy chicken wing appetizer or a cup of creamy broccoli soup. Later, he forgot to bring her the dessert menu.

An adequate performance? Not according to the woman diner—a mystery shopper sent by a shopping service to evaluate the restaurant for the management. She saw a restaurant with an excellent menu, but with a staff suffering from a lack of training.

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**"Friends can't bring themselves to tell you the truth about your restaurant and relatives won't."**

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A few minutes later in her car, she recorded a detailed report on the establishment's cleanliness, ambiance, and service and food rating each item on a scale of one to ten.

Later her "shop", as the professional visit is called, would be combined with other "shops" to obtain a scored report on the facility, hosts, bartenders, servers and the food.

A dream scheme for tomorrow? No, part of a growing trend among professional restaurant owners, both big and small, to bring in trained,

objective professionals either to revive a slumping business or to polish and increase profits of a successful one.

Today's mystery shopping services function at various levels. Some still maintain the original function employing private detectives to keep the bartender's fingers out of the till. Others send in shoppers to fill in a simple checklist,



giving a picture of their employees and operation at that moment. The more sophisticated ones, like the shopping service designed by Restaurant Consultants, Inc. of Columbus, Ohio, shops a restaurant as part of an overall plan to help management train employees to be gracious ambassadors for the business and subtle, profitable sales people.

Owned by former restaurateur Robert Welcher, Restaurant Consultants, Inc. uses a shopping system of trained professionals who "shop" restaurants, rating the service,

efficiency and staff's salesmanship performance—all with an eye to helping employees and management develop a more profitable restaurant. Though some shopping services end up as punitive report cards for employees, Welcher, a former teacher with a degree in educational psychology, sees things differently. "It costs enormous amount of money to attract, hire and train an employee," he says. "It is necessary to monitor your staff's performance on an on-going basis to ensure they are doing what they are supposed to be doing—providing excellent guest service and selling food and beverage products."

To help employees improve their job performance, Restaurant Consultants, Inc. also provides custom service procedure manuals to teach service personnel the finer points of their job, and allow management to reward their valuable employees for service and selling excellence.

Along with learning how to welcome customers with genuine warmth and sincerity, employees absorb selling techniques, depending on persuasive, colorful descriptions rather than high-pressure tactics to sell profitable items such as appetizers and desserts. At a bare minimum, a staff member can learn to sell six additional specialty items a day. Over a year, that can increase profits over and above the cost of training.

When the staff becomes more effective, and the popularity and profits increase, Restaurant Consultants, Inc. encourages management to reward its employees through an incentive/reward system.