“Get a job or I’ll find one for you, and trust me, you won’t like it!”

“What?? A job? You want me to find a job? That thing you work and get money for? Wait a minute, does this mean you’re cutting me off?”

All parents nag their kids to get a summer job. I had just turned sixteen, and I wanted nothing more than to have money for everything I wanted. Getting a job wasn’t hard a few years ago. I applied at Woodlake Market in Kohler, Wisconsin, and received the job a few days later. I dreaded my first day of work, fearing that I would fail the first day and I’d be without a job the rest of the summer. I started in the deli where I met my co-worker and supervisor, and soon to be good friend, Matt. His advice has helped me through the world of customer “service” to this day.

I met Matt on the fourth or fifth day in the deli. He was pale, slender, and had long brown hair under his black hat. My first impression was that we wasn’t going to
befriend me, and that I’d probably never talk to him. He seemed as though he was an outcast from what I thought was normal. To tell you the truth, I preferred not to associate with people who seemed unlike me. By the end of the week, we were discussing school, work, families, and salaries.

"Hey, Matt, since this is my first job and I’m doing pretty well at what they expect of me, is $6.50 an hour a good salary?"

Hit like a punch in the kidneys, Matt said, "You make $6.50 an hour? Are you sure? Is that what they told you?"

"Yeah, that’s what was written on my profile, and the lady from orientation told me that’s the starting pay at Woodlake. Why?"

From the tone in his voice I knew that something was wrong. I should have kept my mouth shut. "I've been working here for two years! I started at $6.50 and they haven't given me a raise since. Well, I'm going to talk to Mary and see what's going on."

My first week at work and already I was in trouble. "Hey, Matt, you're my favorite person to work with, so could you keep my name out of it?" He didn't. He notified
Mary and Ken the store manager that he wasn’t happy because the new girl was starting off at what he was currently making. After a few months, he received the pay he wanted from the beginning.

After this was done, he came up to me and said, “Hey Al, I know this is your first job and all, and you can’t help but not know what to discuss and what not to, but just remember this as a lesson. Besides, it’s not all bad, I got my raise!” This is when I learned my first lesson about work, don’t ever discuss salary with other co-workers.

In every job the first few months seem to be okay, until you get used to the idea, then get sick of the routine, and get tired of the customers who nag and complain about the food and the service. “Can I get some service around here?” “Do you take a number in this place or how does that work?” From eleven to one is the lunch rush from the surrounding Kohler companies. Every employee behind the counter is madly dashing to serve every customer within only seconds of their arriving on the deli turf. From hot food to salads, to custom made sandwiches the deli will provide whatever the customer wants.

One instance I recall was when I was left up front all by myself to attend to the customers. I was in the
middle of taking an order from a tall, dark haired man who had been patiently waiting when a rushed, blonde woman walked quickly up to the counter and demanded immediate service. “I need a sandwich with mesquite turkey, tomatoes, lettuce, absolutely no may or mustard, Swiss cheese, and make sure it’s on rye bread. Oh, and I’m in a hurry!”

As I was helping the man, I told the lady I would be with her as soon as I was finished with the other customer. As I finished up the sandwich and had boxed it “to go,” I head “What’s taking so long?” As I gave the man his sandwich I looked at the lady and said, “I’ve been serving this customer, and there’s no one else here. I’d appreciate it if you’d be patient with me and will serve you as soon as I’m done.”

“Excuse me? I don’t understand what could possibly take you so long! Where is everyone else? Where is the manager? Fine, you will be hearing from him!”

After she left, I received a page from over the air phone system, “Alison, line two please; Alison, line two.”

“This is Alison.”

“Alison, did you just give a customer attitude about not helping them?” I couldn’t justify being crabby
after an eight hour shift, so I plead guilty. I received a bad behavior report and was reprimanded. Matt gave me some words of advice, “When you enter a store with an angry or sad attitude and you leave happy, it’s probably because the person behind the counter said hello or gave you a smile. She came rushed, and left upset. Next time, be patient and give her a smile, and usually the attitude will change. As hard as that is, that’s the way the world works.”

Is this really the way the world works? Why? Why is it that every American now days can’t live on a twenty-four hour day? Why is it that we are always too busy and are usually in time debt to work, school, or even our loved ones? Even though times have changed, the amount of time in each day hasn’t. This particular incident involving a hurried customer has left me wondering what could possibly be so important to customers that they think it is my responsibility to make their day go faster and be able to serve everyone at once? Workers are just as busy as customers. Looking back, I thought I was pretty nice and tried to explain to her that I was busy too, but it didn’t change anything. It didn’t change the customer’s attitude or my being reprimanded. Is it part of my job to try to change the attitudes of customers who are crabby? Is their
doing business with Woodlake Market all the managers care about?