



## The SMMarT Guy

# The Waiter Test

By Kim Robinson

I was finally in my airline seat after a long delay when the

pilot announced that our flight was canceled. A mechanical problem had surfaced and we all had to be rebooked on another flight. The pilot apologized for our inconvenience and directed us to the customer service agent at the gate.

The line was long, but moved forward at a good pace because the gate agent was efficient.

The man standing in line directly in front of me grumbled as he waited to be served, and his grumbling turned to screaming when he got in front of the agent. Waving his cell phone above his head like it was the sword of justice, he declared to the agent in a loud voice thick with patronizing contempt, "This is UNACCEPTABLE! I have to be at an important meeting. Get another plane!"

She calmly responded to his rudeness. "I'm sorry for your inconvenience sir, but you will have to wait for the next flight."

You can tell a lot about a person's character by how well he or she treats clerks and tellers and (in this case) airline employees.

People of low character treat such front-line workers poorly because they perceive these workers to be in a subservient position. Therefore, it's OK to be rude and is, in fact, necessary to "show them who's boss . . ." They act as if being rude is a sign of leadership.

Rubbish.

People of good character know that rudeness and leadership are incompatible. They treat everyone with dignity and respect, regardless of their position because they feel no need to "lord it over" someone who has a front-line job. In fact, a common final screen among Fortune 100 executives when they consider a candidate for hire or promotion is "The Waiter Test." These top executives

take the candidate out to lunch and watch how the candidate treats the waiter because they know that someone who will bully a waiter is likely to also bully his or her staff.

This arrogant businessman at the airport showed everyone his lack of character with his bullying behavior toward the agent. He clearly failed "The Waiter Test" and most likely treats his staff just as poorly as he did the airline agent.

The comical part was that although the agent was in a *perceived* position of subservience, she was *not* powerless.

The businessman had a coach ticket, but demanded to be upgraded to first class on the next flight for his "inconvenience."

The agent said nothing more until she handed him his boarding pass. "The best I can do for you on the next flight is a center seat, row 28." He snatched the boarding pass out of her hand, glared, tossed out another "unacceptable," raised his nose even higher, and punctuated his exit away from the podium with his promise to "never fly on this airline again!"

It was my turn to be rebooked. I smiled at the agent and received one in return as I gave her my name and destination. I

added that although I needed to be on the same flight as the man previous, and we were both flying coach, we were definitely not together and I would gladly take any seat she could find.

We chatted about rude people in general, and I complimented her ability to remain calm while dealing with the rude businessman. She then handed my new boarding pass to me with a smile. "Here you go, Mr. Robinson," she said. "The best I can do for you is a seat in first class. Is that all right?"

"Yes, thank you. That will be fine."

The rude businessman passed me sitting in first class on his way to the rear. I made a point of stretching my legs and settling into the big seat as he passed. *You sure showed her who's boss*, I thought. *You sure showed her.* ■

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