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A dash of this, that and 'something extra special'

By Ron Kitchens
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Lagniappe" is a Creole term for adding "that something extra."

For example, when you order a bowl of ice cream at the local ice cream shop, the server adds whipped cream on top without you asking for it. Or, you get that 13th donut free when you buy a dozen. It strikes me that, these days, we all could use a little Lagniappe in our lives.

When I think of Lagniappe, I am reminded of an anniversary that my wife, Lyn, and I spent in New Orleans several years ago. As a child of not only the South, but also of the Mississippi River, New Orleans has a special place in my heart ... and stomach.

To celebrate this special occasion, we selected Commanders Place, which is truly one of the nation's great restaurants. After being seated on time, we were served a great meal by attentive servers who were knowledgeable about the food and wine — but that wasn't Lagniappe.

The Lagniappe came when the head chef, Jamie Shannon, the guy who succeeded Emeril Lagasse, came out from the kitchen with the owner and thanked us for selecting their restaurant for such a special occasion. They then presented us with a signed and inscribed menu of the evening. That's Lagniappe!

I have eaten a lot of great meals at famous restaurants, but I only remember one because of that something special.

What are you doing to make your customers feel special? Here is a story a little closer to home for you to consider.

Another great reminder of Lagniappe, for me, took place this past winter at the Radisson

Plaza Hotel in downtown Kalamazoo. It was a cold, wet evening, and my wife and I went to another one of our favorite restaurants, Zazios (seems like I eat out a lot in these stories). We pulled up to the valet parking, dropped the car off and went into dinner.

Following a great meal, we retraced our steps, expecting to wait in the hotel foyer while our car was retrieved but, lo and behold, it was already there waiting on us with the heater running.

When I asked the valet how he knew we were coming, he explained that our server saw the valet ticket in my pocket when we were first seated at our table. Later on, when she presented our bill, she called the valet stand to let them know we were just about ready.

Lagniappe? You bet. But that is not the end of the story.

When I jumped into our car, my heated seat was on, always a good feeling. I would have thought that the valet could have done it for his own comfort had not the heated passenger seat also been turned on. Think that made my wife feel special? Absolutely it did! We just had a classic Lagniappe experience.

In a time when consumers are savvy and cautious, how do you add that little Lagniappe in your business? How do you provide that little extra that binds your customers to your company? How do you create raving fans, not casual consumers?

I challenge you this week to find three Lagniappes you can add to your life — one for your customers, one for your team and one for your family.

Do it correctly and you will see more business, a more productive team and a happier home life. Remember, a little Lagniappe goes a long way!

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