People and their Popcorn

I have work at 5:30, so I leave an hour early to get ready for the unsuspecting guests that come to my till at the concession stand. I have to decide my procedure ahead of time to make the guests as frustrated as possible.

I march into the theatre and exchange conniving looks with the other employees arriving the same time I do. We all funnel into the back room and assemble around a very large round table. I see one of the workers has pigtails today. That’s genius! No guest will question her innocent façade. I clench my fist in jealousy because I know I could’ve thought of that sooner.

Our leader opens the assembly with a cackle and the lights begin to dim. The prices of our large, medium, and small sodas are displayed on the big screen from last weekend’s midnight showing of a long-awaited movie. Pig-tails girl sold her large soda for $4.24! She holds the record and is getting the most praise from everyone around the table. The guy with the lazy eye only got a customer to pay $2.23 for a large soda. He’ll likely be fired tomorrow with those results. No one points out that he has the lowest selling price, but you know he definitely feels the disapproval as he brings his gaze to the floor.

We quickly move on to prices for the candy which are rising every weekend. Our leader’s face beams with pride, but everyone knows that’s not where the real competition lies. I wait in anticipation as the results slide onto the screen. I hear a gasp. That gasp came from me. I hold the highest ranking for the popcorn selling price. All eyes move to my face to size up their first place competitor. If I work hard and keep in first place for two months, I could move up in this company faster than a movie-goer’s post-popcorn heartburn.

I sold popcorn last weekend for $6.75. People paid almost seven dollars for a large bucket of popcorn. They totally believed me, but honestly, it was just chance. I was closing in ten minutes, and this lady and her two daughters were really ticking me off. My evil strategy for that night hadn’t worked on them, and I was not going to see them walk away content. They asked the price of a large popcorn, and I blurted out “It’s $6.75.” Her countenance changed to disgust as she reached for her credit card to pay for two large popcorns. I just thought up a price for the popcorn right off the top of my head and based it solely on how much I liked her attitude. How much she paid for the popcorn would only work for my personal benefit. I had her in my trap. If she wanted the large popcorn, there was nothing she could do but fork out the money.

Since that day, I’ve told each customer as high of a price for soda, candy, and popcorn as I dare. I can make them pay a really high price just to be mean and cruel. Or, if I’m not feeling the competitive juices flowing, I can tell them a dollar lower. Customers complain and get mad, but the prices are my entire fault so I understand their anger. I try to see full-grown adults through full-on tantrums about the prices. If I can manage that, then I know I’m doing my job well.

Once in a while, when I’m feeling especially perturbed with a customer’s satisfaction in my popcorn service, I like to pull out a little bottle of Nyquil from underneath my till. I excuse myself to the stock room with the guests’ large refillable soda in hand. A twist of a cap and three tablespoonfuls of Nyquil later, the customer falls into a deep sleep throughout their whole movie, making them upset, confused, and frustrated that they missed the whole thing after waiting four months for this particular movie to come out. Revenge complete. The bottles of Nyquil are complementary of the theater, of course. It’s all about the employees satisfaction and comfort. Whatever we want as employees always trumps the wants of any customer. What’s that you say? You want popcorn? Huh. Do it yourself.

A man comes up to my till and asks for a large plain popcorn and a medium diet cok. Wow, really. I want a challenge. I need a jumbled and complicated order from every customer that comes to my till. I want to stay confused and befuddled at my station twenty minutes into my break time. Forget that I’ve been working seven hours straight. I want to embrace the large woman that waddles up and asked for four large sodas. Two of them filled three-fourths of the way up with Diet Coke, then top it off with Mr. Pibb. The last two she absolutely has to have half Sprite, on-fourth lemonade, one-fourth Mr. Pibb. Then she needs two kids combos with extra butter on the popcorn and the kids drinks need to be filled with half Hi-C and half Sprite, and then right when I already have her rung up on my till she forgets she wants two large buckets of popcorn with extra butter. “And when I say extra butter, young lady, I mean buttered in three or four layers. I want it all the way through. They didn’t do a very good job last time. Can you do that for me, please?” Sure lady. I don’t care that I get off in five minutes. I would love to pick apart your monstrous order when all I see ordering this food is you.

She looks satisfyingly upset at me because of my futile attempt at trying to butter her popcorn in four layers. I should know how to butter every single kernel since I work here, and so it’s completely understandable for her to be shooting fiery darts at me with her pudgy eyes. She hands me five gift cards to cover forty dollars-worth of nourishing food. I want to jump on the sparkly theatre counter and do a jig. I just can’t get enough of this wonderful woman. I love that I have to click through four pages of information every time someone wants to use a single gift card, so five gift cards just makes me ecstatic. I’m clicking way as fast as I can and just keep my eyes on the twenty receipts that print out with each gift card. The guests behind her look furious. They’ll be raging by the time they get to my counter. I giggle to myself in anticipation. This is so great. I should’ve been clocked out twenty minutes ago, and I’m so happy to be here dealing with healthy, realistic customers.

I begin to make a plan for the next day of work. one image slides to the forefront of my mind: $7.00 for a large bucket of popcorn. They’ll never see it coming, and I’ll continue to hold my gleaming record of first place popcorn seller. $5.00 for a large soda? Done this record is mine to shatter.

As the lady walks away, I wonder how I landed this wonderful job. I begin to give a guy that looks very much like a mountain man his third free refill. We both know this is his third when he’s only supposed to get one, but he scares me so I don’t say anything.

Around his unbelievably hairy head I unintentionally make eye contact with the customer right behind him. Did he just wink at me? I automatically give him a look of utter disgust as I leave to slip some Nyquil spoonfuls into mountain man’s drink. He won’t be coming back for a refill anymore tonight, that’s for certain.

I just can’t get enough of these lovely people that climb out from underneath rocks to come to a movie. They’re so easy to manipulate and control, it’s no wonder the public feels the need to throw their improperly buttered popcorn on the floor and then proceed to chew me out enough to make my ear shrivel. Thei rmovie is of the utmost importance and nobody has the right to keep them two seconds late from seeing the precious opening credits of pointless camera shots. When I make up the prices for their large popcorn that’s more than thirty seconds old, they have the right to completely rage. Go ahead and send personal jabs my way while I’m putting together your ridiculously complicated order. If I don’t have everything exactly the way you ordered it, in less than thirty seconds, I should be utterly ashamed. If you want to see the greatest side of the human race, just work at a movie theatre concession stand with people and their popcorn.