

To the woman and child who sat at Table 9,
I did not introduce myself to you. My name is Tony Posnanski. I have been a restaurant manager for 15 years now. My day consists of making sure my restaurant runs well. That could mean washing dishes, cooking and sometimes even serving tables. I have also dealt with every guest complaint you can imagine.

A few weeks back you came into my restaurant. I was very busy that night. I was running around helping the kitchen cook food. I was asked to talk to a table close to yours. I did and they said your child was being very loud. I heard some yelling while I was talking to that table. I heard a very loud beep from a young girl.

I started to walk to your table. You knew what I was going to ask. You saw the table I just spoke to pointing at you. I got to your table and you looked at me. You wanted the first word. You said...

"Do you know what it is like to have a child with autism?"

You were not rude when you asked the question. In fact, you were quite sincere. Your daughter could not have been more than 5 years old. She was beautiful and looked scared that I was at the table. She looked like she thought she was in trouble.

In 15 years I do not have a lot of memorable moments as a restaurant manager. I remember some guests who were mad that their burgers were not the way they wanted them. I remember a woman who called corporate on me because she said I gave her a regular Coke instead of a Diet Coke. I remember having to cut people off from drinking alcohol and I remember having to tell tables to have their child be quieter.

However, I do remember everything about the day my son was born. How I cried when I heard him cry. How I stood there and told him I would do anything for him and be the best father possible. I remember the day I married my wife. How I cried and promised to be the best husband possible. I remember the day my daughter was born. I did not cry that day. I was just so relieved because I lost a child two years earlier.

I know what I was supposed to say when I went to your table. I was supposed to politely tell you to please not have your daughter yell. I was supposed to offer to move you to another area. I was supposed to offend you by not offending you...

I did not do any of that.

Instead I just told you I hoped your meal was awesome. I high-fived your daughter and then I told you that your meal was on us tonight. It was only \$16. It meant more to me than that. I do not think the other guests I spoke to were happy about it. At that moment it did not matter to me.

I do not know how you reacted. I had to leave to go cook because the kitchen was not doing very well that night. When the server asked me why I bought the food I just said you did not enjoy your steak. I did not tell anyone what you said to me. I was thankful you did say it to me, though.

You asked me a question that I did not answer. The truth is I do not know what it is like to have a child with autism. I know what it is like to be a father. I know what it is like to be a husband. I know what it is like to not tell your wife how much you love her enough. I know what it is like to want to spend more time with your children.

You asked me the question right away. You have been through this before in other restaurants. I did not want to be like other managers for one moment. I did not want to tell you what you always heard. Honestly, I wrote this to you and your beautiful daughter because I wanted to thank you both.

You have given me a great restaurant memory. One that I needed for the last 15 years.

You also taught me a valuable lesson...

Sometimes doing the right thing does not make everyone happy -- just the people who need it the most.

Sincerely,

Tony Posnanski