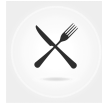


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September stinks in Florida. We sit around sweating each day, as we do for five months in a seemingly endless summer, watching the news to see if the next tropical disturbance off the coast of Africa is coming to blow our little town away in two weeks.

After a hot week in the shop, a cold beer and free appetizers really hit the spot. So, my trip to Bobby's that Friday wasn't that big of a chore, especially because my wife was visiting her Mom in Orlando with the kids.

I arrived around 5:30 and found Harry, as usual, sitting at the corner of the bar, talking to Bobby himself. Bobby is iconic: always there with a smile, a story of a recent sports-related travel adventure, a warm slap on the back and an icy cold beer.

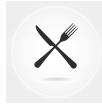


Over the years, I had come to learn Harry's story as I worked on his cars. He was a retired executive and had been all over the world doing big things. Harry was one of the special people who came to our town after remarkable careers somewhere else. Many of them devoted their experience, their money and their time to the various charities around. Every once in a while, Harry would tell a story from his long career. There was a lot of wisdom in the many tales from around the world.

Harry reminded me of a lot of the clients I worked with in New York who dealt with a lot of responsibility and lived with large amounts of stress. Harry could get angry but was smart enough to return quickly to being reasonable, especially after determining that being reasonable was going to work better than being angry.

Harry waved at me and I walked around the corner of the bar, grabbing a small plate of conch fritters and some spicy sauce from the little table in the corner on the way. I love conch fritters, a Florida and Caribbean delicacy, misunderstood by many of our snowbirds who pronounce the name to rhyme with "launch". The name conch sounds instead like "bonk" which is sort of descriptive of what you do with a hammer to the spiraled shell of the large mollusk to remove the meat from inside.

The shell is polished for sale next to oil portraits of someone who looks vaguely like Elvis and those small rubber alligators used by returning middle schoolers to terrorize their Minnesota classmates in the weeks following a Disney World vacation. These unique and authentic Florida products are generally available at any of Florida's garish souvenir stores that line International Drive in Orlando. The stores draw millions of tourists looking for something to do other than mortgage their home for another day in an Orlando theme park.



Once removed from the shell, the chewy, tasty conch meat is chopped into small bits, rolled into a spicy dough ball about the size of a golf ball and dropped into a deep fryer. A minute or so later, a tasty tropical bite emerges. This Friday batch looked promising.

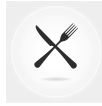
I sat down next to Harry at the bar, Bobby made his signal for a free beer and Doug reached in front of him into a cooler behind the bar. Doug smiled as he plopped my usual Miller Lite and cold glass in front of me. I continued the wordless exchange by motioning to Doug that I wanted to buy Harry a drink. Harry was distracted, talking to the guy on his right about the time he read the riot act to the roofing contractor on the renovation of the Indonesian rubber plant and made the guy cut his price by 20% because he was late in finishing. Harry turned my way, saw the fresh, free drink and smiled.

With Harry, you had to get to the point or else another story might start at any minute. “Harry, do you know Pete Pentristo?” I asked.

His head jerked toward me. “That guy might be the World’s Worst House Painter. He came in and destroyed my dining room and is now holding me hostage.”

“Harry, that’s weird. Everybody loves Pete. Tell me what happened.”

Harry took a big sip of his Maker’s Mark. “We were over at Pat Skelly’s. We had a lovely dinner in his dining room and I just could not get over how great the room looked. I asked him if he had recently painted the room and he gave an enthusiastic, ‘Yes! Peter Pentristo did a wonderful job. He was meticulous and it turned out great. The guy is the best house painter I have ever encountered.’”



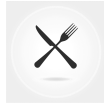
“I got to thinking that my dining room was looking kind of tired and that it could use some freshening up. So, I got Peter’s number from Pat and gave him a call.”

My hunger was distracting me from Harry’s comments. The conch fritters were good but barely touched my hunger spot. Beer jump-starts my appetite, not that my appetite needs much assistance. I caught Richie’s attention and signaled for a menu. I always ordered the Steak Tidbits, but, maybe tonight there was something else, something healthy, that would catch my eye. Richie grabbed a menu and reached around Doug to grab another Miller Lite on the way over. I love this place!

Harry was still talking. “I called Peter and told him how much I liked Skelly’s dining room. I told him I was leaving in three days and would be gone for a week. I asked him if he could repaint my dining room and he said yes. I told him I would leave a key for him under my mat with a check for \$1,000 and he could get started...you know, I was thinking, half down, half to finish...that kind of thing...”

“When I got back from my bareboat charter in the British Virgin Islands, I expected to walk in and see a completely refreshed dining room. All the joy that came from being unplugged for a week evaporated in a minute. I walked into my house and half the house was covered in thick plastic sheeting everywhere, taped up tight as a drum. I couldn’t use two bathrooms and the kitchen.”

“One of the four walls of my dining room was painted...in the wrong color. All I wanted was a re-do of my lovely “Oh, Pistachio” paint job from Sherwin Williams...And...get this: there is a large hole cut into one of my dining room walls...there was equipment everywhere...it was a disaster....”



I could see that Harry's frustration was rising. He grabbed his glass and drank the rest of his bourbon in one gulp.

"I called Peter and asked him what was going on. He said he tried to call me. He told me that he would not be able to finish until the rest of the paint arrived in about three weeks and one of his guys got out of the hospital. He went on to say I owed him \$6,000 and that he would not finish until he had been paid for his work so far and that the rest of the job was going to cost another \$5,500. I asked if he could come and take down the plastic sheeting and he said he could but that would cost another \$1,000."

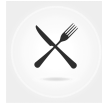
I couldn't help but notice that my two friends' very different stories had a lot in common...and yet they reflected entirely different perspectives. How did so simple a project get so messed up?

I said to Harry, "So, what are you going to do?" I gestured, caught Richie's eye and made a gesture at the menu.

"Experience tells me I have no choice. Back in the day, our General Counsel would be lighting this guy up with Nastygrams and we'd have this thing resolved in a day or two." I remembered that phase of my life and started to shudder a bit.

"Life is different now, of course. This isn't a Supreme Court case and I don't want to hurt the guy. But, to be honest, I don't really trust him to finish. I'm stuck and I'm kind of mad." He shook his head and took another sip of bourbon.

I was wondering if I should proceed. I had heard both of their stories. This was one giant disconnect. Each of these guys had their own idea of what should have happened. At the same time, neither had worked to figure out what the other had wanted. Most



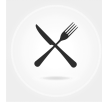
importantly, they had not taken the time to establish an agreement between them about what would happen.

I thought I could help my two friends. “How hard could it be to help them sit down and work this out? I used to do this on New York business deals all the time!”

I dipped my last conch fritter in the plastic cup of spicy sauce and chewed while I thought. “What the heck?” I pressed forward hoping that the bad memories of my work in New York would not come flooding back.

“Harry, I wonder if I might try to help two friends. I know Pete. You’re both good guys. Pete takes great pride in his work... just like you do. What if the three of us sat down to try to work this out?”

Harry smiled. “You’d be willing to do that? It was one thing to call up the legal department but, now, all of this will take place on my nickel. It’s not that big of a dollar issue but, as I said, I don’t know what to do. If you think it will work, I’m in.”



## **The Hungry Mechanic's Top Secret Recipe Card #1**

### **Commit to Create Your Jointly Shared Expectation With An Attitude of Service and Trust**

*When two people or entities begin a project, they should first make sure that they share expectations. Without a shared understanding of the fundamental elements of what will occur, there is virtually no chance that the expectations of either party will be met. At the outset, then, the parties should commit to a process to communicate clearly at the outset. They will work to mesh their potentially differing expectations into a single shared view of how the project will unfold: the Jointly Shared Expectation.*

*Business relationships work best when built upon trust and an attitude of service. The customer won't trust you, if you don't trust them. Even more importantly, one can safely assume that customers have an underlying expectation that their interests and expectations come first. They expect to be served. Maintaining an attitude of service confirms your intention to meet their expectations. Indifference to service, on the other hand, raises doubts about whether expectations will be met and erodes trust.*

*Most people hold good intentions, believe things will go well and seek good outcomes in every transaction. With that in mind, approach the concept of creating a Jointly Shared Expectation by believing that the process will build trust and knowing that an attitude of service consistently reinforces trust and confirms your desire to meet the customer's expectations.*



The Steak Tidbits soon arrived. Ok, I have no will power.