

The Land of Smiling Faces

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The following are just a few of the huge number of amazing experiences I have had in Korea and I know many of you will have similar experiences if you come with the right attitude.

Our local E-Mart (supermarket chain in Korea) has a really nice fish section, always clean and filled with lovely fresh fish, including the most wonderful salmon. Upon seeing the salmon the first time I tried as much as possible to order 2 fillets of 150g. After much confusion (language barrier) the manager came out and said ‘How can I help you?’ He quickly introduced himself as Jonny and promptly organized my order. Since that day I have been ordering fresh salmon fillets, as well as the freshest salmon sashimi, at least once a week.

One Sunday afternoon I opened a pack of chicken I had bought the previous day only to find that it was off. Having planned a nice chicken meal I quickly went down to E-Mart to get another pack. As I was standing at the meat section, Jonny walked over to ask how I was doing. I explained that I had rushed down to get some chicken as the one I had bought was off. Jonny quickly asked me to choose a new pack of chicken, he took the chicken from me, walked over to the manager of the meat section, ushered a few words to him, then came to me and deeply apologized on behalf of E-Mart. He then asked me if there was anything else I needed, which I didn’t, walked me to the entrance, handed me his business card for any further issues and asked me to please come again. No questions asked, no receipt asked for...just an apology and a complimentary new fresh pack of chicken...

After gym one day I had a real craving for some sashimi. As I got to the fish section I asked for my usual order of sashimi. The staff member in the fish section explained in his broken English that he couldn’t cut my sashimi. Thinking that he couldn’t understand me I phoned Jonny. Jonny asked me to hand the phone to his fellow staff member who after a quick chat with Jonny organized my order. Jonny explained to me that I would have to give his staff member 20 minutes in order to prepare my sushi. I duly gave his staff member the 20 minutes he asked for then headed back to the fish section. As I arrived I saw Jonny waiting for me with a big smile. He was dressed in formal clothing about to have a dinner or some

sort. He handed me my sushi and said to me “Matt, there is something that I need to tell you but please don’t take it the wrong way.” Jonny explained that his staff member was not permitted to cut fresh sushi after 6pm and as such had refused to process my order. He explained that if I ever needed some fresh sushi, I was to phone him any time before 6pm and he would ensure my order was waiting for me when I arrived. He had driven down to his workplace on his off day, in his dinner attire, to gently explain to me in person that sushi orders needed to be made before 6pm...

I bought a printer from the very same E-Mart. After arriving home I realized that for some reason it wasn’t working. I lazily left it for a week before returning it and unfortunately, a friend of my spilt some bright blue nail polish on it. I sheepishly took the printer back on a Monday evening and after an hour of trying to fix it with me, the shop manager explained that they would have to send it to their service center and asked if would I mind fetching it the following day. All the while I was waiting for him to say something about the nail polish? The next day came and as I walked into the computer area, he quickly scurried off to get my printer. He explained to me that they hadn’t been able to fix my printer, and as such they have replaced it with a brand new one and gave me a ream of paper to apologize. No receipt asked for, no questions asked about the nail polish, just a thousand smile service, a heart felt apology, a new printer and a ream of paper...

Those are just three of the countless extraordinary acts of service I have received in Korea. I have yet to enter a coffee shop without a thousand smile service, I am now familiar with most of the bus drivers on my regular route, whom all greet me with a smile, every one of my fellow teachers at my school smiles at me...yes I often get stared at while walking through E-Mart, but every single time I meet their eye, we smile at each other...

If you are a confident, open, friendly person who enjoys kids I have no doubt you will have an amazing experience in Korea and you too will bask in the world class service it provides...If you are set in your ways, only believe in one educational style, you can’t handle being stared at (smiled at) then perhaps you should rethink coming to Korea to teach

In short, come with the right attitude and you experience here will be life changing!



Jonny from E-Mart (on the right)



Delicious Bulgogi & Mandu (Korean dumpling)



A beautiful Korean baby's smile



My wife (on the right)