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Staffnotes



Sometimes leadership involves a spanking!



Thomas Keller is one of the greatest – arguably among the most famous – chefs in this or any other country. He opened the **French Laundry** in Napa, and then wrote a best-selling cookbook by that name (there is probably a copy in Tom’s office). His restaurant **Per Se** in Manhattan is certainly the city’s most expensive; where dinner for four can cost upwards of \$3,000. Plus tax.

In 2004 a New York Times reviewer described a meal at Per Se as:

“...mouthfuls of food that instantaneously bring a crazy smile to your face and lodge in your memory for days and even weeks to come.”

Here is what a Times reviewer wrote about a caviar dish in 2011:

“The appetizer is not food so much as a poem about creaminess, a meditation on brine, a sculpture about the delicious.”

Last month Per Se, and so Thomas Keller, had another review in the Times. Here is what the reviewer said about one of his many courses:

“Draining off the gluey, oily liquid would have helped a mushroom potpie from turning into a swampy mess. I don’t know what could have saved limp, dispiriting yam dumplings, but it definitely wasn’t a lukewarm matsutake mushroom bouillon as murky and appealing as bong water.” Wow – that’s a New York Moment!

So how did Thomas Keller respond? Did he rant and rave and call his lawyer? Did he issue a scathing reply to the Times? Did he throw things around the kitchen, then fire everyone in sight? Did he act like one of those lunatics on the Food Channel? Did he grovel and then disappear with a bowed head and a bottle of Jack Daniels?

No, actually he apologized. And then he went back to work.

“The fact that The New York Times restaurant critic Pete Wells’ dining experiences at Per Se did not live up to his expectations and to ours is greatly disappointing to me and to my team. We pride ourselves on maintaining the highest standards, but we make mistakes along the way. We are sorry we let you down.... We believe we can do better for ourselves, our profession and most importantly our guests.... When we fall short, we work even harder.”

That is not only an incredibly classy response to what may have been one of the worst moments in his life, it is Thomas Keller at his best. As a leader. You are all so talented and passionate. But sooner or later you will stumble. When that happens; when things get tough, we can all take a lesson from this guy!