3335 The False Opening

People Book · https://kb.jeffreysummers.com/docs/3335-the-false-opening/

My wife and I walked into a restaurant four weeks after it opened. We'd been there on opening night — the kind of opening that makes you believe the operator had finally figured it out. Hosts at the door with genuine enthusiasm. Managers everywhere, talking to Guests, supporting the staff. One server for every two or three tables. The kitchen producing beautiful food in record time. The bar alive with energy. Guest comment cards that night said keep up the great work.

Four weeks later, we walked in at 3:30 in the afternoon. Nobody at the front. We waited ten minutes while the bartenders talked to each other and eventually yelled back to the kitchen for the host. The host who appeared barely made eye contact. "Two? Smoking or non?" Threw menus on the table and disappeared.

Ten minutes before a server arrived. "Are you ready to order yet?" She didn't write anything down — she was very good at remembering things, she told us. Two of the four items came out wrong. When I pointed it out: "Well, I guess I could have misunderstood what you were telling me." No check-back until our drinks were completely empty.

I spoke to the manager before we left. His response: "We had hoped it would last longer than it did, but we knew that eventually business would drop off. Now we're all about our bottom line."

That statement is one of the saddest things I have ever heard in forty-four years in this business. They knew. They expected it. They accepted it as inevitable.

The opening wasn't a standard they built. It was a performance they put on — overstaffed, over-managed, energized by novelty — and when the novelty faded, so did the standard. There was no Coaching infrastructure to sustain what the opening had produced. The false culture collapsed the moment operational reality set in.

The panic response that followed was predictable: coupons, discounts, quick-fix marketing that did nothing but tell their Guests that the price they had paid at the beginning was too high. It wasn't a marketing problem. It was a Coaching problem. And no promotion fixes that.