

# One serving of charcoal burnt steak, please

James Loi Chun Han

IT was the night you have been waiting for. You were going to propose. You had it all planned, a romantic candlelight dinner at an expensive restaurant and a diamond ring in your pocket. She was smiling, you were smiling, both very much in love, enjoying the moment; while your heart raced away at 120 beats per minute within you.

The waiter placed your Caesar salad in front of you. The romaine lettuce was soaking wet and resembled Chinese pickled vegetables, while her seafood chowder was nothing but tasteless brown water. Not a bit of seafood in sight. She made a comment about the (lack of) quality of the food. You brushed it aside, trying your best not to ruin the moment.

Then the main courses arrived. Your fillet mignon was charcoal black, obviously burnt, not salvageable. Her grilled salmon was slightly better, still salvageable, as it was almost raw. You thought maybe you could send it back and have the chef put it on the grill a bit longer?

You looked at her, she looked back at you, and you realised, the moment was gone. What would you do?

As a general rule, Malaysians are polite people. We do not like hurting others' feelings and we do not complain, even when we have the right to. Most of us would just grumble about the bad food quality of a restaurant and avoid going back there again, and will forever remember the time we wasted a couple hundreds of ringgit on a bad meal.

As consumers, we have quite a number of rights granted to us in the Sale of Goods Act 1893 (applicable in Sabah, Sarawak, Melaka, and Penang) and Sale of Goods Act 1957 (applicable in the remaining states in Malaysia).

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Among others, the law requires sellers to ensure that the goods supplied must correspond with the description of the goods.

In our example above, if the menu described the seafood chowder as "creamy chowder with bits of mussels, prawns and calamari", then that is exactly what one is entitled to receive. If the chowder that was served did not match the description above, then as consumers, we have the right to reject the chowder and either ask for a replacement or a refund. If the restaurant is to refuse our demand, then we are entitled by law to take legal action against the restaurant.

Of course, the purpose of this article is not to suggest that we should file lawsuits over a piece of steak or a bowl of chowder. The last thing this country needs right now is more courtroom drama. However, as consumers, we should be aware of our rights, and when necessary, demand that our rights be honoured.

It is not just as consumers that we have rights. It is quite normal that we hear our friends and relatives (and even ourselves) grumble about being overworked or underpaid, or both. And we all have that one neighbour that would always park his vehicle haphazardly along the road outside of his house, blocking the traffic flow of the entire housing estate. We all know that one shopkeeper that is not honest when it come to the weightage of his sundries. The list goes on and on. As typical Malaysians, we would just tolerate it all.

I must admit, it is nice to know that we are peaceful and kind people, that our colleagues won't mind putting in a few extra hours when we need them to, and that our

neighbours won't mind the congested traffic flow outside our houses during festive open houses. But there has to be a limit of how much we are to tolerate.

There are those of us who are courteous and then there are those who take advantage of our courteousness. Hence, our overbearing bosses will get more overbearing, our inconsiderate neighbours will become more inconsiderate, and bad restaurants and dishonest businesses will continue to survive. All because we, as Malaysians, would just shrug our shoulders and say "Tak apa lah (never mind)" as it is not a big matter. But should it be so?

The law is there to protect us. As said, we have rights as consumers not to be taken advantage of. Same goes with employment, community living, and almost everything else in our day to day living. We have rights as consumers to be given what we paid for, we have rights as employees to be treated fairly, and we have rights as residents and occupiers of our homes to not have our neighbours being a nuisance to us.

So, maybe it is time for us to learn of our rights, not so that we can be confrontational or litigious, but at the very least, not to be taken advantage of. By all of us taking an effort to educate ourselves of our rights, then we would not just be better protected, but we would also be more aware of how we should be treating those around us. As we learn of our rights, we would also learn to respect the rights of others too.

In the meantime, if anyone is thinking about proposing over candlelight dinner, may I suggest you try the food there prior to the special day?

James Loi Chun Han is a lecturer of law from the School of Foundation Studies at Swinburne University of Technology, Sarawak Campus.