

RULES ARE NO CURE FOR NOT THINKING

We're waiting in line at a drive-through window behind a girl who has a little, slobbering dog. She pulls up to the drive-through, and her order is handed out. Now the little, slobbering dog wants some attention. He sticks his head out the car, presenting himself to the girl in the drive-through window. She eagerly accommodates the cute fellow and vigorously scratches his head. Without breaking stride, she uses that very same dog-scratching hand to pluck unwrapped straws from a box and plunk them into our drinks. She doesn't understand our request to pick out our own straws.

Another day we're standing inside a restaurant watching a fellow make sandwiches. Unlike me, he has a full head of hair... and he's proud of it. Every so often, he jauntily shakes his head around, running his fingers through that greasy-looking mane. These same hair-stroking fingers then continue to assemble sandwiches. When we ask to speak to the manager about this unsanitary behavior, we are told, "He is the manager." They soon went out of business. Hopefully they didn't die.

Then somewhere else we see a sick girl making sandwiches. We know she's sick because of her deep, rasping cough. But she's careful not cough directly on the food. That would be against health rules. Instead, she lifts the top of her thin T-shirt up over her mouth and coughs several times into it. She apologizes, "Sorry 'bout that, guys." But who knows what went straight through that thin fabric onto the very hand that was plunged right back into the sandwich ingredients? I don't really want to know.

We have reports (from a friend who shall remain unnamed) of goings-on among the employees of a fried chicken place. It's reported that on slow days, they would toss pieces of chicken back and forth. A simple game of catch could cure a lot of tedium, I suppose. And pieces that were dropped could be slipped back onto the platters with no one the wiser. No sense in being wasteful.

Now to a pizzeria, where some fellows in the steamy kitchen are vigorously cutting pizzas into slices. Their cutters are little wheels with sharp teeth that are rolled back and forth to make the cuts. Without warning, a fellow with one of these devices quickly rolled it up and down the back of his companion, giving him sort of a back scratch. Maybe the lubrication from a sweaty back helped it slice the pizza better. Couldn't hurt the taste much, either.

If some of these incidents weren't so serious, they could really be funny. Don't get me wrong. I believe that we need health rules in restaurants. With so many serious diseases being passed around, we just can't be too careful with how food is prepared and served. But there's a weak link in the process, and it's not the rules. It's people who just don't think about what they're doing.

Rules are no cure for not thinking. I think we better eat at home tonight.