

CUSTOMER SERVICE – WHERE THE CUSTOMER IS ALWAYS RIGHT?

It may surprise you to learn that even though I have managed shopping centres off and on for over thirty years, I actually hate shops and shopping. You could say it is a “man thing” but before you decide this is a definitely a man thing, here’s my evidence for the jury...

Tesco’s – we all go there. Their motto, “Every Little Helps” – really? I question this mandate. When you arrive in Tesco, the first thing that hits you is the piped music which is inevitably a selection of soul classics with no bass so all you get is a tinny return. But! Fear not! The piped music is rudely interrupted by a customer service announcement that splits your ears... “Can the duty manager come to customer service, customer waiting!”

So, after negotiating the fruit and veg, of which there are never any King Edward spuds, it’s the bread aisle... and the first of several tall trolleys of half opened stock or piles of cardboard left unattended to be encountered and swerved in the next nine or ten aisles... I mean, what is that all about? – ah, yes, it’s “sod the customer who can’t get to the Hovis or pickle or cereals or frozen chips or bacon... don’t get me started!



Have you ever been caught in the “Tap and Go Waltz”? Our bank cards are contactless. Amazing how a small chip knows everything about you – your bank details, where you live, how many pairs of socks you own, when you last had a tasteless prawn sandwich from Tesco, you know the thing... and you’re pleased you’ve found what you want in the shop and you get to finally pay for your items and your contactless doesn’t work. The checkout person looks as though she’s about to press that button under her till – you know the one: it automatically makes the shutters on the shop come down, the sirens go off, the lights start to flicker, and ten armed SAS officers appear from nowhere aiming for every deadly spot on your torso!

The checkout person reluctantly resets the pay machine and says, “yer card doesn’t work” “try putting in the machine and entering yer pin” or” ‘ave you another card as that one’s faulty.”

You mop your brow, your palms are sweaty, and the queue behind you are ready to start accusing you of “nicking the card!” “Yeah, he’s one of them, you know, he’s nicked that card. Someone should call the police.”

Meanwhile, you push your bank card firmly into the machine and bang! What’s my pin? Oh lord! I have forgot it! ...”see, he’s nicked it. Doesn’t know the pin!” comes the growl from the queue. The Manager and Security Guard (who have ignored the sirens at the exit of the shop where another shoplifter leaves the premises without a problem) starts to make their way toward you. There’s an another inaudible announcement, “Can the duty manager go to checkout 15, Customer waiting” ...oh I’m a customer now! That’s good. I calm down. Pin remembered. Payment goes through.

“Want the receipt?”

“Absolutely I do, I mean I wouldn’t want people to think I was a criminal now, would I?”

Don’t get me started...

Now, the other day, I decided to go looking for a Hawaiian shirt for a fancy dress party coming up at a friend’s house. In order to look like a canary, the only place to go was of course, Primark in Watford. Typical array of clothes that nobody actually wants, but, wait I actually find a shirt that is half ok – I could do a decent “Rock-A-Hula-Baby-Elvis” impression in the shirt I have found. Now, where do you pay in this god-forsaken jumble house? Oh no, the bank of tills where the queue is longer than Christmas! and one by one, people are served with the opening line of “sorry to keep you waiting” as if the checkout person really means it. I’m getting to the front of the queue now and just as I make it to the front, till number two closes and there is a hand in the air and the mouth opens of the checkout person with an almighty bellow “NEXT!!!!” Now I am hard of hearing but even I have to accept that the bellow could be heard down at Cassiobury Park.

I start to walk to till 20 and then it comes again, "OVER 'EAR, NEXT!!!" ... "sorry to keep you waiting" "card or cash?" ...

"...how about a cheque?!"

"What's that?"

...I made up the last bit but I am clearly a valued customer! "want a bag?"

"sorry, I must have drifted off."

"want a bag?"

"ok that'll be nice."

"extra 20p"

"fine, ok"

"got cash for that as you've just paid by card?"

Leaving the shop, I decide that I must have a word with the Manager about customer service. Then I abandon this idea on the grounds that I may have spoken to the Manager at the checkout?

Have you noticed that the days of the shop uniform have gone? I always used to admire Marks and Spencer staff for their smartness. Nowadays, I can't tell who is staff and who isn't... don't get me started on that one...

Members of the jury, you are welcome to retire to consider your verdict!