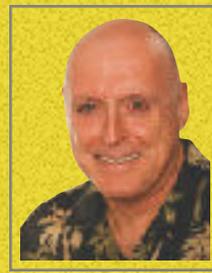


THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



913 How Long Should a Customer Wait for Five Bucks?

Question. How long will you make a customer wait over a five-dollar transaction? Question two, how many people have to get involved to make a five-dollar decision? I'm Jerry Roberts, and let's talk customer service, next, on The Extra Point.

I train companies in customer service, so I'm always on the lookout for both good and not-so-good consumer experiences. While they may wind up here on The Extra Point, or in my weekly column in the Guam Daily Post — they'll almost certainly find a spot in a future training class, and students can learn from the positives and negatives I see in my travels.

I had to return an item yesterday. It's only happened a couple of times with this particular retailer, and I didn't anticipate any difficulties. I'd bring it back and get a credit, which was fine as I had to pick up some other things. On the way out the door, I grabbed the four most recent receipts from that store, and figured it had to be in there somewhere.

Arriving, I presented the item to a lady at the service counter, and indicated something was wrong with it and I'd like a refund or credit. The first thing she said was, "We don't refund unless you have a receipt."

I pulled out the receipts from my pocket, handing them to her. I had four, dating back to August 27. I'm actually in this company's operation about twice a week, so I was missing a couple of receipts. Among the missing receipts was — you guessed it — the one that included the transaction for the item. The lady said, "Sorry sir, but we need a receipt for this item."

"I suppose I left it at home," I said, "but this item is only sold by your store. Nobody else in Guam has it." She turned away and consulted another woman. When she came back to me, she said again, "I'm sorry, we can't refund unless you have a receipt." I had now been at

the counter for about five minutes. I asked if there was anybody else I could talk with.

After a couple of minutes, a youthful manager came to me and he repeated the process. Basically, he used the same statements the woman had made, and he seemed a bit miffed that I had not taken the hint and left. I again mentioned that his store was the only one that sold this particular item.

He walked away from the counter, and picked up the phone to call someone. I had spoken to two people with some level of authority, and had now been standing there for maybe eight minutes.

As he was talking on the phone, I looked behind me and saw a line of customers waiting to come to the counter, so I stepped aside to let them handle their business. The young manager finished his call, and I figured had an answer. Instead, he picked up the phone again and was discussing the issue with the same person, or perhaps someone else.

I was about to tell him I needed to find a couple of things, and would come back when finished, when he ended his call, and walked back to the counter. He agreed to grant me a store credit for the five dollars, but made it clear that a refund required a receipt.

I thanked him, and went looking for the items I was after. I noted the time. It was now over 15 minutes since I first presented the item. Four, perhaps five people had been involved since the beginning.

Let me be clear. I like shopping at this store, and I will continue to do so. I also understand that if I'd found the receipt, it would have eliminated the problem. I accept that I bear responsibility.

(Con't.)

However, some questions popped into my mind about this situation, and I think it's valuable to ask them.

1. The item is sold only by this company. The managers I spoke with would almost certainly know that, or should. Receipt or not, why not just give the credit right away?

2. My handful of receipts, with dates just a few days apart, indicated I was a regular customer. Somebody should have noticed that. Would you give a regular customer a break in a case like this? I would.

3. The line of customers behind me was growing. The retail value is five dollars. How long would you haggle with me over that amount, and how long would you make the others wait?

4. What dollar limits of authority do the managers of this company have? The young man had to make two calls to authorize the five-dollar credit?

For years, I have advised retailers and service providers alike to set dollar limits for the authority of everybody to solve a customer issue — and not make that customer wait. The limits will vary by position and experience, but everybody has to participate.

I can't tell you what your minimum should be, but it would be nice if it was at least five dollars. You trust your workers with five dollars — right?

That's The Extra Point. Be responsible and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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