

THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



1298 An Unexpected Brush With Excellent Service

Customer service is a regular topic of this daily feature. It's something I'm keenly interested in, and have trained a large number of companies on how to do it better. In restaurants and retail environments, I can almost smell a good or bad experience before it unfolds. That being said, once in a while I'm surprised by an event that seems to be going one way, and then it turns into something unexpected. I'm Jerry Roberts, and that happened yesterday. I've got details coming next, on The Extra Point.

After a good day of training yesterday, I called my wife and son and said I'm taking you to Ross. You see, they both enjoy shopping at Ross. However, I do not.

Let me say that I have nothing against Ross and I have found some things there I liked, but I'm not a fan of standing in long, often very long lines.

So this was a gift for them. I didn't care if I walked out with nothing for myself.

We shopped for maybe 40 minutes, then got into the checkout line. Maybe there were 30 customers ahead of us. I was hopeful we might get through in 20 minutes. Those hopes were dashed, as we hadn't even got halfway in 20 minutes. Things were slow.

My guess is that we actually got to a cashier in 40 minutes, and it might have been a bit longer than that. When we reached the front we saw the reason why the line had moved so slowly. There were only four, maybe five registers in operation.

I thought, "Hey Ross, only a handful of registers are going and this is Geezer Discount Tuesday? Er, I mean Senior discount Tuesday. So, I feel an Extra Point forming — long lines, too few cashiers, you get the picture.

Then, out of the blue, the experience changed. My wife and I were caught totally off-guard by a cashier by the name of CJ.

It would take a while to process our purchase. It wasn't for a ton of money, but there were a lot of items and CJ went about his work of ringing everything up.

While he did so, he engaged us in conversation and displayed a casual friendliness, talking about a few of the items we had selected. We enjoyed it and chatted back at him. Then, he surprised us.

He noticed a dress next to him that another customer had apparently decided against, he grabbed it and went to put it on the rack for rejected items. My wife made a positive comment about the dress, and CJ seamlessly shifted into dress-selling mode. "You'd look great in that dress...it's you!" he said. I saw my wife nod in agreement and CJ went into a higher gear, "It matches your hair," he said.

With that, I knew we had added the dress to the purchase. Come on, I'm not an idiot. The guy tells my wife that the dress was essentially made for her and matched her hair — what am I going to do? I smiled and said to her, "It matches your hair, you gotta get it." She got it.

Having scored the sale of the dress, CJ then downshifted back into scanning the rest of the items. He still chatted and so did we, and it was not lost on me how effortless it seemed for him.

I asked him how long he's been with Ross, and he said two years. He likes his job, and it shows through his friendly manner and professionalism. He finished up, we paid, and as I walked away I realized that the few minutes spent with CJ had made me forget all about the long time spent in line.

CJ is not the only praiseworthy cashier I've had at Ross, but he is absolutely exceptional. Too many companies put inexperienced, sometimes timid, and sometimes impersonal people in positions that face off with their customers. It's a big mistake. (Con't.)

Often, these are some of the lowest-paid people on their payroll. Another mistake.

People like CJ can help transform customer relationships, and encourage people to come back again.

I know that businesses are looking to save money any way they can, but settling for average performance — or worse — among servers in restaurants or cashiers in retail stores — or any similar work — just screams of shortsightedness on the part of the people who make decisions.

The people who touch your customers need to be among your best. You need to treat them the way you want them to treat those customers.

CJ at Ross made our day, and that's the way it ought to be where you do business. I hope that it is.

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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