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Kelly Alderfer

"The Most Wonderful Time of the Year"

THE HOLIDAY SEASON HAS CHANGED through the years. There was once a time when no one would ever dream of leaving their Thanksgiving dinner early and businesses were closed on Christmas Eve and Day. Times have changed drastically. It seems as though many Americans are losing touch of what is important and have moved their attention and energy to materialistic desires.

Each year, companies open earlier and earlier on Thanksgiving for Black Friday sales. What consumers forget is that for these stores to be open, there need to be employees working there.



As seasonal worker at a toy store, I was lucky enough to not have to work on Thanksgiving. We are required to work at some point during Black Friday, and there had been a sign up sheet hanging in the break room weeks beforehand so everyone could sign up for the hours that worked best for them. Since I went home for Thanksgiving and the store I worked at was up near my university and was about an hour away, I decided the best shift for me would be Friday afternoon until midnight. I enjoyed Thanksgiving night with my family and set my alarm for Friday morning.

The drive was easy, at least until I got closer to the strip mall the store is in. I don't believe there are studies that look at the consequences of people's hysterical driving on Black Friday, but it is terrifying. I feared for my life as I made my way towards the parking lot. What should have taken two minutes turned into twenty, leaving me late for my shift.

I pulled into the parking lot and found it to be completely full so I had to park in the further lot. This made me significantly more nervous about what was in store for me. I hung my employee lanyard around my neck like a death sentence was attached to it, got out of the car, and made my hike through the parking lot. It felt essential to be extremely cautious due to the crazed drivers who were either anxious to get into the store or were trying to get away as fast as they could. Already feeling regret, I made my way through the glass double doors and was terrified by what I saw.

People were everywhere, scrambling from one toy to the next, throwing them into their carts like they were on fire. Some carts were so filled with toys that people actually had a second cart with them, pushing them both at once. I could see the troubled looks on my coworker's faces as they rung up customers as fast as they could, moving them through the check-out lines like cattle with Mad Cow's.

I made my way through the crowd trying to avoid eye contact with customers so I could get to the service desk to figure out where I would be for the day. I picked up the clipboard full of everyone's names and looked for mine.

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KELLY: SERVICE DESK

"Kelly!" one of my coworkers said to me, "thank God you're here. I'm done for the day. Here," she handed me the keys. "Good luck."

She was out of there before I could even say hello. I looked around, realizing that I was the only one working the desk. It couldn't be true. I went back to look at the clipboard and realized that I was indeed alone, at least for a short while. Realizing there was a line, I scrambled to the register so I could deal with the customers waiting to be helped.

Raincheck Please?

"Excuse me?"

I saw a woman peeking her head around the side of the desk, holding one of our catalogs. Pointing at a toy, she asked me, "Do you have this in the back?"

Ah, the golden question. It seems as though almost every customer believes that behind those green double doors for "associates only" awaits a magical land of toys that houses everything they could ever want, in massive quantities. For today in particular, the unsaid rule was "if it isn't on the floor, we don't have it," but since there was a surprising lull from the madness at guest services, I figured I could help her.

I looked for the item on the computer and found that we didn't have anymore.

"Actually," I said to her, "we are all out of them."

"Well I want a rain check then."

"Unfortunately we don't do rain checks."

"Oh yeah? There isn't anywhere on this catalog that says 'no rain checks. I want to speak to a manager right away.'"

I have been told is we don't do them, but I called over a manager and she was there in a quick second.

"How can I help?" she asked.

"I want this item," the woman said, "but it seems you don't have it. I want a rain check please."

"We typically don't do rain checks—"

"That's ridiculous!" The woman replied.

"—But I can print out a form for you that you can fill out, kind of like a rain check," the manager replied.

"Okay, good."

The manager printed out the paper and I began helping another guest to keep the line down. Although preoccupied, I still listened in to the conversation to see how it went.

"The way this works is that when we get the item in, if you happen to come in the store you will be guaranteed one of them. We will not call you

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to let you know if it arrives, and we will not email you." The manager said to the woman.

It seemed pointless to me; the woman was filling out a form but wouldn't be doing anything different than just coming back to the store to check for the item again. I guess it was just the principle of it.

"Okay, thank you very much," the woman replied with a fake smile. I couldn't believe she was so happy about something so stupid.

The Mario Bros. Bandit

An older woman pushed her cart towards the register, cutting off the line and leaving people angry. One of my coworkers was following behind her, weaving in and out through the lines of people.

"Ma'am," he said, "excuse me!"

She turned around and looked at him. "Yes?"

"I made a mistake and accidentally rung up an item that wasn't yours and was for someone else. Would you mind if we returned it so I could get that to her?"

She gave a puzzled look at first, but then it registered in her head.

"Oh," she said, "and I was just coming here to compliment how nice and helpful you have been," she said, "what did you say the problem was?"

My coworker was new and looked very concerned about his mistake, so I explained it to her further. I suggested we return it once again. With an offended look, she said to me "No way," and put the game back into her cart and practically jogged out of the store.

My coworker and I both had our jaws on the floor just as the man who was supposed to buy the game arrived at the service desk to receive his game, which we had to explain was not going to be his after all.

Since it was the kid's fault for selling it to the other lady, I had spent the next hour being sure that somehow, someday, the man could get the game at the sale price either at another store or online. Eventually we figured it out, and I made a point to kindly suggest that my coworker is more careful with his sales.

At the end of the twelve-hour shift, it was 12 A.M. and time to clean up the store. We had twelve carts full of toys sorted by locations in the store to help us put them back as quickly as possible. As exhausted as we were, my coworkers and I found some final courage and energy to put everything away, at least until 12:30 when we had to go home.

Lucky to not fall asleep at the wheel, I made it home and passed out the minute I hit the bed.



Christmas, for the most fortunate, is a time of giving. It's a time of being with the ones you love and sitting back in front of a warm fire with some hot chocolate, forgetting all the troubles in the world for a short time.

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For employees of retail companies, Christmas is a countdown for two reasons: one because the season will soon be over, and two because Christmas is coming. The closer the countdown gets to Christmas, the more stressful the working conditions become and the closer I am to giving up on humanity for good.

The toy store I work for takes pride in being open 24 hours the day before Christmas; God forbid someone needs to buy a toy at 2 a.m. but can't because the store is closed.

The wonderful thing about us seasonal hires is that we are only around for a short time. Since we barely mean anything to the company besides being extra bodies to help keep things moving in the store, we are greatly taken advantage of.

So for Christmas Eve, instead of being at home with my family, I had the pleasure of assisting last-minute shoppers in their frantic states, returning things they thought their children would like but discovered later that they had made the wrong decision. Before coming into work, I naively assumed that the store would be empty, as most people would be spending time with their loved ones rather than shopping. I was so very wrong.

Three Generations of Confused Females

A girl, her mother, and her grandmother walked up to my register.

"Hi," I said to them, "What can I help you with?"

The mother pulled out an opened, used tablet.

"My mother bought my daughter this tablet last year for Christmas and it isn't working anymore."

"Okay," I asked her, "what's wrong with it?"

"The screen doesn't lock."

"Did you call the company's customer service to see what they could do?"

"Yes, they told me to come here."

"Okay...did you get a protection plan when you bought it?"

She gave me a blank stare. "No, I didn't. Actually, we didn't buy it here."

"And the manufacturer told you to come here."

"Yes."

I walked over to the computer to see if we still sold the item, and we didn't.

"It doesn't look like we sell it here anymore," I told them, walking back over. "But let me have a manager come over and we can see what we can do."

"Okay," the grandmother said.

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"I just bought a gift card on here to buy apps and books, will I get those back?"

"Um, that's something you'll want to ask the manufacturer."

The manager came over.

"What's up?"

I began explaining the situation but thought it better that one of the ladies did instead.

"So you didn't buy it here?" The manager asked them.

"No. I already said that," the mother replied.

"Well I'm sorry, but there really isn't anything I can do for you here."

"Well what should we do then? They are telling me one thing and you're telling me another!"

"I think you will just have to call them back and maybe the next person you talk to will be more helpful."

"Yeah, I'm sure that they will," she answered sarcastically, "thanks anyway."

The Disgruntled Housewife

She approached me with a cart in her hands and a smile, though I saw through her weak attempt of looking sane. Her brown hair was a wild mess and her eyes looked exhausted. She calmly placed her bag full of toys onto the counter.

"Hello," I said to her, "what can I help you with?"

"Well, I bought these toys for my kids the other day and found out that some of them are on sale and weren't when I bought them. I also changed my mind on a couple."

I gave her a nod, and opened the bag and started pulling the toys out. There were little boxes of animal figurines, a toy truck, and a set of blocks. She began to separate the toys by what she wanted to do with them.

"These," she said, putting her hands on the boxes of little animal figurines, "are what are on sale now and weren't when I bought them."

"Okay," I tell her, "I can just make a return and then repurchase the items so you can get the sale price, and you'll get a refund for the difference."

"Well hold on," she told me. "I don't know if you want to do that."

She put her hands on the toy truck and blocks.

"I need to return these too and make an exchange, but I think it would be easier if we did separate transactions."

I thought about her suggestion but was confident that it could all be done in one transaction. I tried explaining to her what I planned to do.

"I understand what you're saying, but what I'm going to do is return

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everything, and then I will repurchase the animal figurines so you get the sale prices for them. Do you have the items you want to exchange the truck and the blocks with?"

"Yes," she told me, motioning towards a few toys in her cart.

"Okay, so we will do the return and then use the money you get back to pay for those other toys," I told her.

She gave me a blank stare.

"You know what," she said, "why don't we return it all so I can get my refund completely, then I will get the other things separately."

At that point I was frustrated and slightly confused, but knew that the best way to do it was how she wanted it done. I returned all of the items and explained to her that some of the refund would go back onto her credit card, some would go onto a store card, and some would be in cash.

"No. See, that's what I didn't want to happen. I want it to all go to cash."

"Well, what happens is when you return things, you get your money back in the way that you paid for the items." I motioned towards the receipts. "It looks like you didn't just use cash."

"I don't have my card on me," she snapped back.

I took a deep breath and called a manager over to help with the situation. I explained the issue, and the manager decided it wasn't worth arguing with the customer about it so she gave me the ability to refund her with cash.

When the transaction was finally complete (it had been nearly ten minutes), I rang up the animal figurines along with the new toys she wanted. She used the cash I gave her to pay for it. As she was walking away, she stopped and turned around.

"You scanned my rewards card, didn't you?"

The damn rewards card. The entire time I've been working in the store, I haven't once forgotten to ask a customer for their rewards card until now.

"No, I didn't. I'm sorry."

"Well, could you do that?"

"Unfortunately we don't have a way to do that on our end once the transaction is complete. The only thing I can suggest is voiding the transaction and starting over."

"Fine by me."

As long as she got what she wanted, that woman could have stood up there all day. I called the manager back over so she could void the transaction and I could start over. At this point, I was completely stressed out and wanted more than anything in the world to get the "guest" out of the store ASAP. I rescanned everything, and as I was finishing up, accidentally hit the total button before scanning the rewards card.

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Realizing my mistake, I shamefully admitted I had forgotten it again.

"Are you stupid?" She asked me.

That was it. The tears started coming, and once they started I couldn't stop them. I called the manager over again. She gave me a concerned look.

"I can't do this," I told her. I handed her the checkout gun and practically ran to the break room where I cried for a few minutes. I refused to go back onto the floor until the woman left, but every time I peeked my head through the break room door she was still standing at the service desk.

I paced in the room for about fifteen minutes but it felt like forever. Looking past the door one more time, I saw that she finally left and I went back to the service desk.

"I am so sorry," I told the manager. "She was one of the most horrible women I've ever dealt with and I just couldn't do it anymore."

"Don't worry about it Kelly. She was crazy. It happens all the time."

She walked away and left me to my misery. I had only two hours to go. My eyes were red and looked like hell. I was a hot mess. I attempted to pull myself together and continued helping customers, most of whom were friendly.

When the shift was finally over, I got out of there like the place was on fire and went home to spend the rest of my Christmas Eve relaxing. Later, when I got into my bed to dream of sugarplum fairies, I remembered that I would have to go back to work in less than 48 hours so I could help customers return the items that they bought and children didn't like. Such a pity.