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Retail Hell: The Sequel

Just in time for the holidays

By Kat Avila | Web Published 12.19.2004

This past October I wrote about Retail Hell (at <http://www.latinola.com/story.php?story=2131>) - "the world of undertrained, under-appreciated, minimum-wage earning cashiers and retail salespersons." (Perhaps this holiday season you've even joined us employees in Retail Hell to earn some extra dollars or to save up toward college tuition.) Now, I understand that the salespeople you get may not be the most professional or friendliest at times, but since I've been on the other side of the register I'm starting to understand why.

It's a MINIMUM-WAGE job - not the same as a LIVING WAGE! Some stores are lucky to have a warm body to staff a register. Also, the burned-out supervisors aren't likely to notice or even give a damn about the evil salespeople who ignored you and your mother but helped the European-American next to you instead, or who threw your credit card back at you instead of placing it in your hand, and so on (grumble, grumble).

Decent salespeople can be transformed into evil salespeople by evil customers. (Evil is contagious!) There are very manipulative customers; you can easily figure out why they're driving BMWs because they make their living screwing people. There are customers who get their self-esteem fix by bullying salespeople. There are customers with a very bad sense of humor (no, I don't think your imitation of an ethnic accent is funny).

There are bitchy customers who complain, and complain, and complain. If you are complaining to the cashier, you are complaining to the wrong person. Cashiers can't change anything. My brain shuts down whenever a customer starts whining. A good effect of all this is that I am so sick of hearing other people complain



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that I've stopped complaining myself half as much; I try to think of a more productive use of my time.

Customers can help themselves get better service by meeting the cashier halfway. A customer who engages in pleasantries ("How are things going?") and treats the cashier like a human being is going to get a cashier who will move heaven and earth to fix a problem. Nasty customers just put cashiers on the defensive; we may even get a little vindictive (Oh, did I say that? Bad cashier! [SFX: hand slap]).

To make things at the register easier for yourself, please estimate ahead of time how much you have purchased and have the money or your credit card ready. If you are using a credit card, automatically present it with a photo ID (if your card doesn't include a photo). Cashiers should be asking for a driver's license or something similar, especially if you have "Check for ID" written in the signature space on the back of your card. Watch the monitor as purchases are rung up; sometimes the computerized register doesn't pull up the sale price or the merchandise is labeled incorrectly. Review your receipt before you sign anything. Check to make sure you have everything before you leave the store.

You're tired and stressed out (all that shopping and those Xmas parties); so am I - because I haven't had a break and I've been on my feet for hours. Let's help each other survive another busy holiday season. Happy Holidays!

Kat is currently listening to Ozomatli's super cool CD "Street Signs," which was recently nominated for a Grammy in the category Best Latin Rock/Alternative Album of the Year. See their web site at www.ozomatli.com

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(323) 259-0388 Fax (310) 496-2972 info@latinola.com

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