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## Retail Hell #7: Store Returns

*Most stores will take back almost everything to keep customers happy*

By Kat Avila | Web Published 11.21.2006

I have a working class person's hands. There's a slightly inflamed paper cut on my left pinky and a dark purple spot below that where the fleshy side of my palm got pinched. The tips of my fingers are dry, flaky, and sensitive enough that they pain me while typing.

And the Sally Hansen "Instant Strength" enamel I reapplied yesterday to protect my nails shows the abuse of today's labor.

I have a working class person's body. The vague aching of my body after a day of heaving boxes, shelving and selling, and being on my feet the entire time makes me reach for the aspirin bottle. I don't like doing drugs, but I don't like doing pain either.

This is the life of a person working retail, the dark and scary place where "Poor Dad" thinking (see Robert Kiyosaki's book "Rich Dad Poor Dad") will take you. When I'm working the register, I meet people who have worked retail before or are working retail now, and an instant bond is forged. They can quickly read the look on my face to know what kind of day I have had so far.

This month I want to grouse



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about customer returns.



I understand you may have perfectly sound reasons for returning merchandise. Maybe the item is broken or defective, the clothing does not fit, or someone already bought it for you. At a bookstore, the usual reasons are the book is an unwanted gift or a duplicate, it was the wrong book for class, or there is a defect like missing pages.



What I do not understand is when I see a receipt that shows a person has previously returned books and is now returning books they bought with the refund to buy additional merchandise they will undoubtedly return later. In other words, they think our commercial establishment is the public library.

Today I had register duty. In the hour I was scheduled, I would say a quarter of the transactions I processed were returns. Half of those were returns without receipts, which included an unwanted graduation gift (books related to job hunting), an audio book exchange ("I want an unabridged edition"), and victims of bad reviews ("I read them and didn't like them;" "I found this other book that had all the information of these five books at half the cost").

A few returned items will be tagged as damaged. Some books look as if they sat in the back seat of a car for too long. Customers expect a full refund for that? How do bookstores stay in business?

Because our store accepts returns without receipts, dishonest customers sometimes try to bring unpurchased merchandise to the

registers for credit. "Hey, I want to see who you're talking about," I say over the walkie-talkie as coworkers swap stories about a seemingly regular visitor whose wallet is padded with return credit and who never seems to have receipts for the books he returns.

Most stores-despite strict return policies-will take back almost everything to keep customers happy.

Heaven won't take back my tired body, but the local retailer probably would if they could.

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