



IS THE CUSTOMER ALWAYS RIGHT?

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I would like to tell you a true story, told to me by people who run a large camera store in the Los Angeles area.

One day, a woman walked in and said she was looking to buy a camera. She asked one of the salesmen to show her various cameras. And then she spent about half an hour with the man figuring out which camera she really liked.

Finally, after deciding, she asked the man if he might give her the name of a website where she could buy that camera at a cheaper price.

Now, I hope that you realize something is very wrong here! But can you identify exactly what that is? Take a moment. Here's what was wrong: That woman stole that man's time and that store's resources. And she did so deliberately. In fact, had she taken money from the man's pocket or from the store's cash register, it would have been no different.

Why? Because this woman went into the store knowing in advance that she was not going to buy a camera at the store, but on the internet. She didn't go to the store thinking she might buy a camera there. She went into the store solely in order to use the store's building and inventory, which cost money to provide, and the expertise of a salesman, in order to choose what camera she will buy on the internet cheaper.

What this woman did was wrong -- yet people do it all the time. In fact, what she did violates a law found in a book called the Talmud. The Talmud is the second holiest book of the Jewish religion, after the Bible itself. And it contains a law that changed my life when I first learned about it: "If you enter a store, you are not allowed to ask the storekeeper the price of an item if you know in advance that you won't buy it." Now, let me make this clear. If you don't know whether or not you'll buy an item at any given store, of course you can ask the price. You can comparison shop. And if there's a chance that you will buy it at that store, you can legitimately take the time of the storekeeper to figure out what you want. But not if you know in advance that you won't buy it there. Then you're just taking up the store's time and resources, and that's wrong.

The power of this law to change a life is quite remarkable. First of all, it says to you that you, the consumer, have obligations, not just rights. We always hear about consumer rights. But what about consumer obligations? In our time, we are preoccupied with rights. Which is too bad, because in order to make a better society, people have to think of their obligations as much as they think about their rights. When I walk into a store, I have moral obligations as a consumer, and one of them is not to ask the price of an item -- or how it works, or how it

compares to competing items -- if I know in advance that I won't buy it there.

I gave the camera store example. But this happens in all types of stores. People who manage department stores tell me that there are women who come in and "buy" a dress solely in order to wear it for an event on a Friday or Saturday night, and then come back on Sunday or Monday, saying that they didn't like the dress and asking for a refund. That is a form of stealing, not to mention deception.

And the storekeeper law doesn't apply only to stores. I once talked about this law in a speech to a group of singles. Afterward, a woman stood up and asked: "Does this apply to a man when dating?" This was a brilliant question. She was asking: Can a man tell a woman that he is "in love" with her when he knows that it's not her love he wants? That's another example of how this law applies to so much of life -- it's wrong to fool people into giving you their time or their expertise, or, for that matter, their body.

I'm Dennis Prager.