

A Rule is a Rule, Except...

Recently, another store owner called me as part of the NARTS Ask A Mentor program, asking what I thought she should do. She had a customer wanting to return an item and she didn't normally take returns. She explained this to her customer, who became irate. There was nothing wrong with the item. The customer had just changed her mind within a couple of days of purchase.

I asked the store owner if the item was something she would have no trouble selling again. She said it was an item in high demand and would sell again. I suggested she make an exception in this case, as it would be easy to sell it again and making an exception would create goodwill for the customer.

Yes, I know there are some people who will try to take advantage of you if you bend a rule for them. If you make it clear to the person that you will make an exception this one time only, rarely is there a problem later. If the one person takes advantage, just tell them no in the future. Most people will be grateful if you lend an understanding ear, as long as their request is reasonable. Put yourself in their shoes.



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This brings up questions about rules. Who will your rules benefit? Are they to make your life easier or do they have an advantage for your customers? Did you institute a rule because of one customer who took advantage? Why do you have such a rule? Is it because it's something you put in place twenty years ago and just never changed or does it serve a real purpose? If your rules give you more customer complaints and headaches than prevent them, it's time to consider change.

At one time, I worked for a major retailer that had lots of stupid rules, most of which just angered customers. As a department manager, I was caught between maintaining the company rules and being harassed by angry people. As an owner of the company, I now have the power to change rules that anger people or no longer apply.

I'm not saying we don't have rules in my store. It's just that I try to look at what effect a rule will have on everyone involved.

It's also not to say that I don't bend the rules for an exception now and then, either. But it's just that . . . an exception. If it's a safety thing, there's no room for argument. If the exception will not hurt us and will maintain goodwill with a good customer, then I say "go for it." ♻️