

## **Happy Birthday to You!**

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### **Abstract**

Rosa, a wealthy young woman, planned an elaborate celebration for her twenty-first birthday. She planned a weekend of activities for her friends in Barcelona, rented a beautiful house next to the beach, booked an expensive restaurant dinner, and for the end of the night made a reservation and paid a deposit for a private party at the most upscale bar in Barcelona. Everything went smoothly until a bouncer at the bar ruined her night.

*Key words:* birthday party; high expectations; customer care; training

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### **The Story**

Rosa started planning her twenty-first birthday celebration a month before the event. She gathered her closest friends and told them she was planning a weekend away in Barcelona and asked them to confirm as soon as possible whether they could come. Her friends were enthusiastic and looked forward to a weekend dedicated to having fun.

She spent two weeks looking for the perfect house to rent and found a beautiful big white house with an amazing view of the beach. It was a special offer, she secured the house at half its original rental price.

The plan was to arrive at noon on Friday. She hired someone to greet them at the house with food and drinks. Then they would spend the whole day at the beach and have a small party with some of her friends from Barcelona at the house. The next day she planned a tourist trip with all her friends, visiting Gaudi's buildings, particularly his most important creation, "La Sagrada Familia". They intended to be

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back at the house by three in the afternoon, have a nice lunch, spend some time at the pool, and rest in preparation for the party at night.

Rosa decided to have her birthday dinner at one of the best restaurants in Barcelona. She booked a shuttle from the house to the restaurant and following dinner she planned to have drinks at Barcelona's most exclusive bar. She made the reservations for the restaurant and bar even before renting the house. She had called the bar and said, "Hello my name is Rosa, my birthday is in one month, and my friends and I are going to travel all the way from Pamplona to celebrate it. I want to make a reservation for fifteen people, with two bottles of Champagne included, and five drinks of whatever they request for each of my friends." After 40 minutes of defining further details about the night, they agreed she would pay 30% of the cost in advance.

The night before Rosa and her friends were traveling, she had everything ready. She had hired a hairdresser and a make-up artist for her and all her girlfriends and her outfit for the weekend was perfect and exactly as she had imagined it. The next day she went to the station and met all her friends: everyone was excited and ready to celebrate Rosa's birthday.

The house was superb. Her friends loved it, and the food and drinks were deliciously refreshing after the long trip. Rosa and her friends enjoyed some time at the beach and pool and had a relaxed afternoon. That night she met with old friends she had not seen in years and had a most enjoyable party. Next morning they woke up ready to explore the attractions of Barcelona, and then went back to the house to have some lunch, enjoy the beach, and rest. They then had an excellent dinner at the restaurant, and when they finished, the shuttle was waiting to take them to the bar.

Everyone was happy to be there with Rosa, celebrating her birthday and enjoying the weekend. The group had already had some drinks at the restaurant and in the shuttle while going to the bar, so everybody was already a little tipsy. They had a whole room reserved for them.

She arrived at the entrance and excitedly said to the bouncer, "Hi, I am Rosa, we have a reservation for 15 people under my name." At this point, she unthinkingly gave her purse to one of her friends and waited until everybody had joined them. Everybody went inside the club, but when it was her turn to go inside, the bouncer asked her for her passport. She replied, "I don't have it with me; one of my friends took all my things inside." The bouncer replied, "Without a passport, or another acceptable ID, you can't come in." Rosa started to panic; all her friends were inside, and she was alone with no phone and no ID. She said to the bouncer, "Please let me in, I am the birthday girl, this is my reservation and my friend has all my stuff inside with her, please let me in I can bring you my ID back, I swear it is inside." The bouncer answered, "I already said with no passport or ID you can't go inside, I am sorry." She tried to ask him again, "Please just let me call my friend, she has all my belongings. I made the reservation and this is my party, please let me in." While she was outside struggling to get in, one of her friends noticed she was not there and asked another friend if he knew anything. He answered, "I think I saw her outside with one of her Catalan friends, maybe they are just talking." While everyone

thought she was fine, Rosa was outside crying, trying to convince the bouncer to let her in. The bouncer started to act aggressively and pushed Rosa away from the door while she was trying to call out to one of her friends. Rosa started to get stressed and angry, and people outside were starting to stare; she could not believe a bouncer was ruining her night.

After about 40 minutes the bouncer seemed to be enjoying the situation. Rosa had tried everything she could, including asking for the manager of the restaurant, but the bouncer refused to call him. She was crying alone outside, and the bouncer did not care, or make any effort to help her. After trying to argue her case quietly and politely, she became so stressed and upset that she started screaming and shouting to the bouncer, "Let me in, let me in" and saying, "You don't know who I am; I want to talk with the manager." It was not until the manager heard the screams that he went to the front door to see what was happening. When he arrived, he saw Rosa crying and fighting with the bouncer, and he asked "What is going on? Why are you both screaming?" The bouncer told him that she did not have her passport or any ID. John, the manager, told Rosa "If you don't have an ID that can assure us that you are not underage, we can't let you in." She answered, "I'm Rosa, it's my birthday and the reservation was made by me. Of course I am over 21, I just don't have my ID here because one of my friends has it inside."

John recognized Rosa, because he had been in charge of her reservation, and he told her "Ok, tell me the name of the friend who has your documents and if I can find her I'll come back." He went inside and asked a bartender to look for Rosa's friend, so she could go to the entrance and show Rosa's passport. As soon as they found her, they told her to go outside because Rosa was waiting for her.

Rosa's friend Amelia went outside with her purse, and when she realized what had happened, she felt very bad because she had left her best friend outside alone and cold. Amelia tried to comfort her and showed Rosa's passport to the bouncer, who finally let her in. While Rosa was inside, she tried to enjoy the rest of the evening, but the bouncer had ruined her night.

### **Possible Solutions**

- A) The manager should have advised her over the phone how strict the bouncers at the club were.
- B) The club manager should have given Rosa at least a discount for completely ruining her night.
- C) The manager should have involved himself more in helping Rosa, and tried to compensate her for all the problems she encountered.
- D) The manager was right not to get involved in the problem and just find Rosa's friend.
- E) The bouncer should have apologized to Rosa for causing so much trouble and he should have been disciplined for creating such a bad reputation for the club.

**Assessments****Surface Assessment**

The club chosen by Rosa for her birthday was well-known to Barcelona's high society and Rosa's good friends. Given that the club is such a chic place, the people that go there are elegant and chic as well. The bouncer should have known this and treated the customer appropriately. Such bars depend on the reputation they create for their customers, and they have to be very careful how they treat those customers. The involvement of the manager in this situation was crucial because it would have shown Rosa that the bar was sorry about what had happened and that they were willing to do whatever they could to make it up to her. Rosa was very upset by the time the manager appeared. She thought she did not deserve to be treated the way she had been and that it was not appropriate for the bouncer to behave in that manner. It was her birthday, and the bar ruined the night for her. The bouncer treated Rosa in a disrespectful way and embarrassed her. By the end of the episode, she no longer wanted to be there. The bouncer should have shown more respect because she was a customer, and in this case, a special one.

**Deep Assessment**

Clearly, in this case, the problem was not with the service inside the bar, or the food or drinks. Rosa had planned everything well, and she chose the bar based on its reputation and the recommendations of her friends. Her expectations were so high that she had no concerns about the extremely high price she was going to pay. The bar's service was superb apart from the bouncer's behaviour, which could have ruined their reputation. The way Rosa felt about it, neither she nor her friends might ever go back. In this case, the bar failed to make sure the birthday girl was having a great night, and the bouncer ruined the perfect night she had planned.

Clearly, the bouncer overreacted, shouting to Rosa "You are not allowed to come in, if you don't have ID you are not coming in. In this place we have some rules and you are going to follow them." This obviously affected her and made her feel unwelcome. For Rosa, this was one of the most important nights of her life, and the bouncer ruined it for her. She felt angry that someone with so little authority had treated her so meanly and offended her so much. He should have been more understanding and made some effort to help her, not least because she was the one who had paid for everything that night. The bouncer obviously reacted the wrong way, and the manager should have tried to fix this to save the bar's reputation. The situation was handled very poorly; the bar upset the birthday girl, who was also the one that was promoting them that night to her friends. The bar should have been aware that her birthday was important to her and the bouncer should have made appropriate enquiries with the manager.

After finding out what was going on, the manager should have helped her and tried to make things easier for her. The manager had planned the reservation with her, so he already knew what the night meant to her. The way the bouncer treated

Rosa could create a bad reputation for the bar, given that many of her friends were frequent customers. Rosa was so affected by the way he treated her that her whole night was ruined. Given that she was used to being treated well, this situation affected her badly.

**Solution Points Awards for Multiple Choice Section**

- A. The manager should have advised her over the phone how strict the bouncers at the club were. 1 Point. This could have avoided problems for Rosa, the birthday girl, and her friends. If the manager knew how strict the bouncers were, he should have told her to avoid trouble. This would have also helped the bar to avoid problems.
- B. The manager should have given Rosa at least a discount for completely ruining her night. 5 Points. After all the stress induced, the manager and the bar should have given Rosa at least a discount on the price of the reservation. If Rosa made the reservation with them is because she trusted the bar enough to hold her birthday party there, so the problems probably shocked them.
- C. The manager should have involved himself more with helping Rosa, and at least tried to compensate for all the problems. 3 Points. Given that the manager already knew Rosa, and he was aware of how important the party was for her, he should have tried to help her by doing more than just calling her friend. He should have tried to make her feel that he was on her side and that he was willing to help her.
- D. The manager was right not to get involved in the problem and just find Rosa's friend. 0 Points. The manager at that point was the face of the bar, and it depended on him to save its reputation or at least try to. The harm to Rosa was already done and there was nothing he could do, other than to show some respect to her and help her as best he could.
- E. The bouncer should have apologized to Rosa for causing so much trouble and he should be punished for creating such a bad reputation for the club. 1 Point. Punishing the bouncer would have made Rosa feel better at that moment but not the next day when she realized he had been punished but she had still experienced a bad night.

**Editorial Commentary**

This case explores how the behaviour of an employee in handling a customer's problem can ruin the service experience for the client, even though the product meets expectations. As noted in the case explained, there was no problem with the food or drinks, not even with the service provided by the barmen. The experience offered by the bar once you got inside was perfect. The only problem was the behaviour of a bouncer outside the bar, but that was enough to ruin the whole experience for the client, who is unlikely to ever return to the bar and will probably

talk negatively about it to other people. This incident could thus damage the bar's good reputation. As research has shown, on average, people tell more than fifteen people about their bad experiences with products and services (American Express, 2014). In this case, it will probably not be only Rosa who will tell other people about the incident, but also her friend Amelia and her other friends at the party, too.

There are five skills on which companies should focus when training customer service professionals (Markidan, 2015):

1. Empathy, the ability to step into the customer's shoes and understand exactly how they are feeling in each situation
2. Positivity in the language used to communicate with customers. Word choice can make a huge difference on customer perceptions: negative phrases such as "unfortunately" or "I'm afraid that..." are likely to put the customer on the defensive, while positive phrases can make customers interpret what you are saying in a completely different way.
3. Patience: there will always be angry customers and difficult situations to deal with and losing control is the worst thing you could do. Customers are not always right and may place unreasonable demands on customer service providers. Dealing with such customers requires lots of patience.
4. Clarity: making things clear from the beginning can avoid problems and increase customer satisfaction with the service.
5. Improvement: continuous improvement is necessary to keep ahead of competitors.

In this case, the bouncer shows no empathy at all, which is probably the most important service skill of all. His behaviour demonstrates he is completely unable to understand how Rosa feels about the whole situation and therefore does nothing to try to help her, thus making her feel completely frustrated. Empathy in this situation would have meant being nice to Rosa and getting someone to look for Rosa's friend.

Clarity at the moment she made the reservation about the strict rules bouncers had to allow people in might have also helped things go smoothly that night. If Rosa had known how strict those rules were, she would have been more careful with her identification documents and would not have given them to a friend. Option answer A, however, does not get but 1 point because it makes all responsibility for the incident rest on Rosa, and even if the strictness of rules had been clearly explained to her, that is no excuse for the bouncer displaying such rude manners toward her.

Option answer B gets the most points because the whole situation has been poorly managed by a bar's employee (bouncer), who is blameable for the stress and frustration caused to the client (Rosa). The way the problem is handled by the bouncer does not keep up with the expectations generated by an upscale bar, and the manager should offer something to amend matters and show Rosa there is a reason for their good reputation and that the bar cares about their customers.

**References**

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