

## **Hot Chocolate Scalds a Child**

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### **Abstract**

A mother drove her daughter to Burgers & Beverages\*, a fast food restaurant, for apple pie and a hot chocolate. After the mother obtained the food, she returned to her car and gave it to her daughter. The kid was excited so she immediately opened the hot chocolate. Unfortunately, a misfortune occurred as the hot chocolate scalded her. The mother, holding her daughter, rushed into Burgers & Beverages and argued with an employee about her kid being scalded.

\*Brands and names are disguised to protect individuals and corporate brands.

*Key words:* Burgers & Beverages; hot chocolate; scalded

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### **The Story**

On a cool spring morning, I drove my daughter to Burgers & Beverages for her favorite breakfast of apple pie and hot chocolate. I parked my car at the front of Burgers & Beverages and then walked into the restaurant and placed my order. After being served, I returned to the car and gave the pie and drink to my daughter, who immediately opened the hot chocolate with a great deal of excitement. Unfortunately, a tragedy occurred. She spilled the hot chocolate on her legs and the car seat, and with the temperature of the drink being high, it scalded her legs making her scream loudly. Holding my kid, I rushed into Burgers & Beverages and shouted at an employee, "Your hot chocolate scalded my kid." "How did it happen?" she asked me. I described the process. She said, "I am sorry for that. I hope your daughter is alright." She continued to say, "Actually, it is inappropriate for such a little girl to open the hot chocolate in that way. It would have been better to open it at a table.

"To express our care, if the little girl still wants, I will offer you a discount or a coupon for the next cup of hot chocolate." I was angry with her answer, and replied loudly, "The cup lid was not on right and the chocolate was so hot that, rather than what usually happens when we get this treat, my daughter got scalded." Apparently, our argument attracted the attention of the manager. She came over to see what the

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argument was about. I explained to her everything that had happened in the process, including how my daughter usually opened the hot chocolate in the car but how this time the hot chocolate popped open, scalded my daughter and dirtied my car seat.

The manager said, "Now, the most important thing is to take your daughter to the hospital to be checked." Accordingly, the manager drove us to a hospital. After receiving treatment in the hospital, we went back to the restaurant. On returning to my car, I found a cup of free hot chocolate with a mild temperature and realized that the dirty car seat had been cleaned already. I left Burgers & Beverages with gratitude after asking the manager to thank her staff.

### **Solutions**

Select (circle) one of the following alternative solutions:

- A. Similar to the employee, the manager may also express sorrow with a coupon as compensation.
- B. The manager and the employee may offer an apology with a coupon as compensation.
- C. The manager and the employee may offer an apology and a cup of free hot chocolate as compensation.
- D. The manager may offer an apology and a free hot chocolate as compensation, but also provide ice therapy for the little girl.
- E. As the manager did, the manager may drive the customer and her daughter to the hospital for care and then provide free hot chocolate at a mild temperature and see that the car seat is cleaned for the customer.

### **Assessments**

#### **Surface Assessment**

Choice D may have been the best choice from a shallow point of view. "Never doubt a customer unless you have rock-hard evidence that he or she is lying or wrong," as David Freemantle said. It was possible my daughter was scalded due to the cup lid not being on properly and the drink being too hot. Besides, there is no notice in Burgers & Beverages saying that children must not open a hot drink. Offering a cup of free hot chocolate may satisfy the crying girl's wishes. Considerate ice therapy will warm the mother's heart. Therefore, this choice is worth seven points.

#### **Deep Assessment**

Good service recovery must touch a customer's heart. Actually, the mother in this story was surprised and angry about her daughter being scalded rather than the loss of the hot chocolate or the dirty car seat. What has not been mentioned in this story is that the customer lives in an exclusive residential district and has a high social status. Of all the customers, people of high social status are most likely to

complain when encountering service failure, and then spread negative word-of-mouth, whilst being dissatisfied with the service recovery. Thus, being careful when handling a customer's complaint is of the most importance in this case. Choice E provides the customer with a warm and moving experience because the little girl was taken to the hospital for treatment and the car seat was cleaned. Moreover, in Taiwan the cost of going to a hospital, one cup of free hot chocolate, and the cleaning of a dirty car seat, is relatively low. Acquiring new customers is costlier than keeping existing ones, and the company stands to get good word-of-mouth publicity that may get a bit more business. Therefore, choice E is worth nine points.

### **Solution Points Awards for Multiple Choice Selection**

Select (circle) one of the following alternative solutions.

- A. As in the case of the employee, the manager may also feel sorry and express that with a coupon as compensation. 0 points; "feeling sorry for that and offering a coupon as compensation" doesn't show that you care about what the customer has suffered.
- B. The manager and the employee may offer an apology with a coupon as compensation. 1 point; the offering of an apology could make the customer feel appreciated. The offering of a coupon provides the customer with a basic financial compensation.
- C. The manager and the employee may offer an apology and a cup of free hot chocolate as compensation. 2 points; the offering of an apology would make the customer feel appreciated. The offering of a cup of free hot chocolate provides the customer with a financial compensation.
- D. The manager may offer an apology and a cup of free hot chocolate as compensation. Also, he may provide ice therapy for the little girl. 3 points; such service recovery would warm the customer's heart. Besides, the cost of the service recovery may be lower than that of choice E.
- E. As the manager did, drive the customer and her daughter to the hospital for care and then provide free hot chocolate at a mild temperature and see that the car seat is cleaned for the customer. 4 points; this would be the best choice because such a service recovery would touch and warm the customer's heart, and probably lead to a prolonged customer loyalty and an overall positive feedback.

### **Editorial Commentary**

In the story, the customer complained to the employee about her daughter being scalded by the hot chocolate. Several studies have indicated that successfully restoring customer confidence, satisfaction, re-patronage intentions, and loyalty, is dependent on the customers' perception of whether or not their complaint is being handled fairly. The literature in social psychology and organizational behavior suggests that three types of perceived justice influence customers' perceptions of

complaint handling, i.e., procedural justice, interactional justice, and distributive justice.

Let us examine and review the three kinds of perceived justice felt by the customer during the employee's, or the manager's, complaint handling process.

Procedural justice refers to whether the procedures, policies, or rules used in handling a customer complaint are perceived as fair. For instance, how fast a complaint is resolved, or if both sides can recount their side of the story, matters. In this case, the procedural justice was achieved by the employee listening to the customer and then quickly offering a discount or a coupon as compensation. Perhaps, because of the employee's lack of empowerment or training, both interactional justice and distributive justice have not been perceived by the customer.

Interactional justice concerns the manner in which the service provider responds to the customer's grievance during the complaint resolution process. For example, responding relates to whether the customer is treated with politeness and respect. In the story, the customer did not really sense the interactional justice as the result of the reply from the employee. "It is inappropriate for such a little girl to open the hot chocolate in that way" provokes the customer rather than calming the situation. The employee's response implied that the customer was being blamed, even though the problem may have been that the lid was not properly put on the drink. Besides, this type of reply violates one of the guidelines for effective complaint resolution, i.e., do not argue with customers.

Outcome or distributive justice relates to how fairly customers are compensated for their complaints, i.e., the perceived fairness of the tangible outcome or redress. The level of refund or the exchange offered affects how the customer reacts. In this story, meeting the customer's perception of distributive justice by the offering of a discount or a coupon as compensation was questionable.

The customer's perception of interactional and distributive justice improved with the appearance of the manager. Stopping the argument with the customer, and taking the right service recovery action, made the customer perceive interactional justice. A series of subsequent actions by the manager, such as driving the customer and her daughter to the hospital, preparing a free cup of warm hot chocolate, and cleaning the car seat, indeed satisfied the customer's perception of distributive justice.

With the three kinds of perceived justice being satisfied, the customer left Burgers & Beverages with an appreciative mindset. It is reasonable to foresee that the customer would spread positive word-of-mouth communication and continue visiting that fast food restaurant. In conclusion, good service recovery enhances a customer's perception of perceived justice, which in turn leads to customer confidence, satisfaction, positive word-of-mouth feedback, and customer loyalty.