

# May I Help You?

✘ I would say my favorite job was back in 1968 when I worked for Macy's on 34<sup>th</sup> Street while going to college. I worked two nights a week and all day Saturday and netted about \$22. I loved the job. I took orders on the phone. I loved the different forms – the order forms, the return forms, the exchange forms. All this was done without a computer. Everything was hand written. I had a large loose-leaf book which contained all the items Macy's advertised in each of the area newspapers. When someone called, I looked for the ad and filled out the paperwork for the order.

The only thing I didn't like was when I had to assure every customer that their item would definitely be delivered for Christmas, without actually knowing it would be. Nowadays, retailers give you a tracking number so you'll know when to expect your item. I was very good at my job and would have stayed longer at Macy's if they didn't want me to join the union.

I write about this because I seldom get the kind of service I provided in 1968 from telephone salespeople I speak to nowadays.

First of all, more often than not, I'm initially prompted to decide whether I want to proceed in English. Hello? I'm in the United States of America. I'm not in Mexico, Guatemala, Panama, or Spain. When did this nonsense actually begin anyway? I wonder if I was in Guatemala, would I be asked if I wanted to proceed in English?

I don't recall the last time I actually got a human being on the phone without having to answer several questions and required to press 1 for yes and 2 for no far too many times before being transferred to a live person.

Before you get to a real person, though, you have to plug in certain information so the computer or whoever is listening confirms you are who you say you are. Then when the real person comes on the phone, more often than not you have to repeat all the information over again.

I have a dear friend who prefers doing business on the phone rather than on the internet because he believes he's helping someone keep their job. My friend's a good guy and what he's doing is commendable but sometimes, in my experience, I put the phone down after talking with someone and scratch my head and say, "did that person actually do what I asked?" I love making airline reservations on [alaskaair.com](http://alaskaair.com) or ordering something on [amazon.com](http://amazon.com) because it's quick and easy and extremely accurate and not subject to human error.

Here's a perfect example. We recently rented two vans from Enterprise Rent-a-Car. Our original reservation had us picking one van up on Thursday and the other on Friday. No problem. Our plans changed, and I called to change the reservation so that we'd pick up both vans on Friday. By the time I finally got off the phone with the customer rep, I had a sinking feeling and knew both the vans wouldn't be available on Friday. We decided to physically go back to the Enterprise location to confirm the reservation and, sure enough, I was right to have misgivings. Although the clerk didn't want to acknowledge that his co-worker had screwed up our reservation, it was clear from all the typing he was doing, the changes I requested were either never made or messed up completely. Having our Friday-to-Monday reservation in writing, we happily left.

Here's a recent telephone conversation with a clerk in a liquor store in Colorado:

Clerk: Yeah?

Me: Do you carry Lagavulin scotch?

Clerk: No.

Me: Thank you very much.

Clerk: Yeah.

Can you believe this? And I'm sure this guy is complaining that he only earns minimum wage. In my world, he wouldn't have a job.

Fortunately, I do speak with some wonderful salespeople and readily commend them when they do a great job. But, every once in a while, I get someone that is just rude, incompetent or just doesn't care. As far as I'm concerned, if you're going to do a job, no matter what the pay rate, you should do it properly. Otherwise, leave.

I don't get it, but if you do, God bless you.