

Through the “Looking” Glass

A CUSTOMER BECOMES AN EMPLOYEE
AND OFFERS HER PERSPECTIVE
ON CUSTOMER SERVICE AND PAYDAY LOANS

BY STEPHEN ALTOBELLI

Finding good people to hire is never easy ... especially in a business where they are constantly handling other people's money. At the core, one of the most important, fundamental questions that employers in the financial services industry ask is, “Can I trust this person?” Finding an accurate answer to that question can be difficult, no matter how thorough the background check.

Perhaps it should come as no surprise then that many companies hire customers to become employees: it just makes common sense. “Employee referrals tend to be good people who work out well,” explained Joe Coleman, President of Rite Check Check Cashing & Financial Services Center, Bronx, New York. “Employees know the company's culture, what's expected of new hires and, in general, the types of people we're looking for.”

For starters, the local branch manager or teller most likely knows the customer/potential employee on a first-name basis. In the normal course of doing business they have a deeper knowledge of the individual and his or her character than they would if a stranger applied for the position. For those companies offering payday advances, that familiarity with the customer is even more extensive. As Abby Hans, President of Checkexpress, Chicago, Illinois, explained, “The manager knows the individual's credit history, their reliability and, at least to some degree, their personal and financial situation. As such, they have a solid understanding of the individual they are hiring.”

A case in point is Joyce Decker, a sales associate at a Check Advance store in Peoria, Arizona. Joyce had been a long-standing customer of the store, using it on a periodic basis to take out payday loans when unexpected expenses occurred. Over time, she developed a rapport with Judi McMullen, the sales manager. On more than one occasion, Judi had told Joyce to let her know if she was ever looking to make a career change.

Then one day, Joyce, employed for more than 16 years in

the food preparation industry, found herself unexpectedly between jobs. She called Judi to find out if her offers had been in earnest. Judi's reply? “I'll call the district manager right now.” Three weeks later, after her background check had been completed, Joyce started working for Check Advance.

OFFERING A UNIQUE PERSPECTIVE

As a former customer, Joyce offers a unique perspective on customer service, payday loans, and the role her company plays in the lives of her customers. “First off, I like being on the other side of the counter. I have a true appreciation for the customer, what their needs are, and what they're going through,” she said. It is quite common for customers to



Judi McMullen, Sales Manager, and Joyce Decker, Sales Associate, of Check Advance, Peoria, AZ.

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become like friends. “They come in all the time, seeking advice, just to say ‘Hi,’ whether or not they need to transact any business.” And, as with many Financial Service Centers, customers develop a strong loyalty to a particular store. “We have one customer who travels 50 miles to use our store. He knows us, and we know him,” Joyce said.

Judi, who also serves as the collections agent, and Joyce provide impromptu financial counseling, urging customers to use the product wisely and pay off the loan as soon as possible. “I make the final decisions as to who we loan money to,” explained Judi, “And we work with those customers who are having difficulty with repayment to make sure they don’t get behind.”

And what about payday loans? “As a consumer, I liked them and used them as needed,” Joyce explained. “I didn’t have great credit, and banks don’t offer low-amount loans.” She used the

loans to pay doctor bills, car repairs, and other “unexpected things that require a couple of hundred bucks. If it’s done right, it [the fee] is not a big burden.”

And it would no doubt interest many to know that individuals of all income levels use the product. “It does not matter how much money you make. You can make \$10,000 a year; you can make \$90,000 a year; all those people come in here,” Joyce explained.

There also is the question of alternatives, or rather, the lack of them. “I occasionally needed \$200 – \$300, and banks wouldn’t give me a loan in that small an amount,” she said. Without micro-loans, people would be forced to ask friends or family. Neither option is appealing to many people.

“Everybody runs into financial jams from time to time, and these small loans are great for helping people get through the rough patches,” Joyce concluded. “I’m glad I can be here now to help them out.” ■

Stephen Altobelli is a Vice President with MWW Group, the public relations firm that represents FiSCA.

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