

How to create a scene in a shop ... essential advice for SA consumers

By Aki Kalliatakis



Making a scene in a public place like a shop rarely comes naturally. Most of us were brought up not to make a fuss and accept what we're told by those in authority.

Unfortunately, being meek and mild looks less and less like a viable option for customers who are aggrieved by shoddy products and services.

Sometimes you must have your say or explode.

You end up making a scene and may feel some initial satisfaction, but gradually the realisation dawns that you might have made a better job of it.

We're not schooled in confrontation. Some guidance is called for, especially over Christmas when some establishments may be more interested in driving up volumes than customer satisfaction levels.

Here are six tips that may help you make a scene in a more telling way:

1. Don't lose your temper and don't use bad language. Think through what you are about to say, then, in a polite and professional manner, make your case.
2. Check for identification on the shirt, jacket, etc. of the staff member you are addressing. Make a point of using the individual's name (Sometimes you may have to ask for it.) This conveys a sense of personal accountability.
3. Speak up with a firm voice, without shouting. You wish to attract attention. You do not wish to create a disturbance that may result in staff calling in security personnel. The idea is to speak in such a way that other customers realise a complaint is being made and the shop has fallen down in some way. The store may lose other customers as a result of the scene. This has to be a worry for staff members and gives them a reason to be accommodating.
4. Ask about customer service procedures. Ask if frontline staff give feedback to management on customer likes and dislikes. If the answer is 'Yes', tell the staff member exactly how you feel on the subject at hand and request that this feedback be passed on. This allows you to repeat your complaint while prolonging the interchange. The longer you speak the longer other customers have to realise service quality is suspect and the longer the staff will feel under pressure to provide a solution.
5. If no solution is forthcoming, ask for the business card of the person you're dealing with. If they have no card, ask for contact information and the name of someone in management. Ask if the complaint can be escalated. The higher up the organisation you can go, the more likely it is that you will get action.
6. If no satisfaction is forthcoming in the store, make a point of phoning in your complaint or send an email to the most senior person you can get access to.

Acceptance of poor service has got South Africans nowhere for decades. So, speak up while remaining calm, respectful and considered.

If you must make a scene make it a good one.

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