

The Misdirected Bus Passenger

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Carlos Rodriguez was on his way from Wayburn to Creighton to visit friends. Because of limited financial resources, Carlos decided to go by bus. Because of his Hispanic accent, when he asked for a ticket to his destination, Creighton, the ticket agent thought Carlos said Brighton, which was one of the destinations also served by the bus company. The ticket issued to Carlos identified Wayburn as the point of origin and Brighton as the destination. The bus that Carlos was told to take originated in Wayburn and completed its journey in Talbot, a 10-hour overnight trip. The Brighton stop was 30 minutes before the Talbot stop.

Since Carlos was not a regular traveler, he did not examine his ticket that closely; besides, he had never made this trip before. When the bus arrived in Brighton, a very small town, Carlos knew something was wrong, since he knew that Creighton was a very large metropolitan area. The fact that his friends were not at the bus station to greet him also raised concern.

Carlos asked another passenger if this was the Creighton stop. Carlos was informed that it was not. The bus driver told Carlos that it was probably best that he continue on to Talbot, where there would be a station agent on duty to provide assistance; no one was on duty at Brighton at this time.

When Carlos arrived at the Talbot station, he learned that a connecting bus was departing in 30 minutes to Creighton. This trip would take 6 hours to complete. With the assistance of the other passenger Carlos met on the bus, Carlos and the other passenger explained the situation to the ticket agent. The other passenger asked the ticket agent what the ticket price would have been had Carlos received a ticket to his correct destination via a direct route. The ticket agent said it would have cost \$20 more. Carlos did not have that much money on him, or did he have any credit cards. The other passenger offered to pay the \$20 for Carlos.

When this offer was made to the ticket agent, she said that would not be possible. The ticket agent told Carlos that he would have to pay the full \$60 fare from Talbot to Creighton. Carlos had already spent almost that much for his original ticket. Since the connecting bus was about to leave, the other passenger asked the ticket agent to ask the station manager whether the additional \$20 would be accepted, since Carlos had been misdirected. The station manager was not available, but after some insistence from Carlos and the other passenger, the ticket agent decided to call another ticket agent at home. The other ticket agent indicated that the full fare of \$60 had to be paid and that Carlos could take up the matter with the station manager at Wayburn, when he returned home.

The end result of this situation was that the connecting bus left without Carlos. The next bus to Creighton out of Talbot was not until around midnight, eighteen hours later than the bus that had just left. Carlos spent the day trying to connect with his friends in Creighton for them to arrange a prepaid ticket from Talbot to Creighton for him. At least he was successful at this task and arrived

in Creighton the next morning.

Because of the nature of the event involving Carlos, the other passenger filed a letter of complaint with the Head Office of the bus company. In the response letter, Head Office apologized for what happened and asked if the passenger had a contact address for Carlos, so that they could apologize to him directly, as well as make amends. The other passenger informed Head Office that no such information was available. The other passenger eventually learned that the ticket agent contacted at home was terminated by the bus company because of this incident.

Focus: Customer service; perishability of a service; fixed cost, variable cost, versus total cost; life-time value; customer relations management.

Questions

1. Explain the relevance to the case of each of the concepts identified in the Focus section above.
2. Who was to blame for Carlos being misdirected? Explain.
3. What was the cost to the bus company by allowing Carlos to board the connecting bus after paying the additional \$20? Explain.
4. Did the ticket agents at Talbot deal with the situation correctly? Explain.
5. How should the ticket agents at Talbot handled the situation? Explain.
6. How would you have handled the situation? Explain.
7. Did head office deal with the ticket agent who was terminated correctly? Do all ticket agents for the bus company (and station managers) need training in how to deal with situations like this? Explain.

For all questions, use the appropriate theories and concepts, when necessary. Do not just present case facts.