



Rush Hour at Macy's

By Sharif Berkeley

1. Imagine you're working at a cash register in a department store, with several people waiting on line with their purchases. Suddenly there's a malfunction with the register and it won't let any transactions go through. The people on line get restless and start to complain.

You break into a nervous sweat, then you try the transaction again. It still won't go through. Now the line is even longer than before and you still haven't finished with your first customer. You hear people say, "Come on already," and, "Damn, he's slow," but of course they don't understand that it's your first day at work and the faulty computer isn't making it any better.

Could you see this as your first day on the job? This is exactly how it went for me on my first day at Macy's.

I had wanted to work at Macy's for the longest time, and when I finally got hired I thought it was going to be a wonderful

experience. But if I knew that the first day was going to be that hectic, I would have paid more attention in the 15-hour training course.

2. **My Register Breaks at Rush Hour**

My employer had placed me in electronics at first because I'm an expert in that field, but there was so much confusion between the employees and the management that I had to be placed in housewares, in the Macy's Cellar.

That put a damper on my enthusiasm because I knew nothing about pots, pans, and all that house stuff. To top it off, I was stationed right next to the clearance sale area, where people were running around grabbing up things like they were possessed by

shopping demons. It was like being thrown into a lion's cage after being marinated in A.1. steak sauce.

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It was a little past 5 o'clock, and I was unfortunately caught up in the shopping rush hour. I thought that I had remembered all the instructions in the train-

ing course, but little did I know that when you get nervous you forget things.

My first customer approached. She had several items in her hands from the clearance area. She dropped her load and I began to scan her items. The first two items came up on the screen. I was halfway done. But the next three items had no price on them. I scanned the UPC symbols, and all three came up as one cent each. This couldn't be right; nothing in Macy's sells for one cent. I asked the other cashiers how much the items really were and they didn't know.

I looked back at my register to see that, by this time, two more people were waiting on line. I called my manager and he said

that the items were 97 cents each. When I came back there were five people waiting on my line. I thought that everything was all right because now I could move on to the next customer with no problem, but I thought too soon.

3. **Starting to Panic**

My first customer had given me a check and—just my luck—my check reader wasn't working. By this time the customers waiting on line were getting irritable and discussing my performance among themselves.

I started to panic. I knew that if the check reader wasn't working I had to enter the sets of numbers on the check manually, but I forgot how! I tried but I entered the numbers in the wrong sequence three times. I was sweating and I felt like the people waiting in line were grim reapers ready to kill me on the spot if I didn't hurry up.

Finally another cashier took pity on me and came over to assist me. The people had been standing in line so long that the manager decided to give them coffee mugs just to calm them down. The cashier standing beside me told them that it was my first day and that I was nervous.

To my amazement, the customers all had a change of face. A lot of them understood the position that I was in and some even said to my manager, "If it's his first day, someone should have been helping him out the whole time."

A few of them came up to me and told me not to feel bad because they could relate to how it felt being my first day. Then and there my wounds of disappointment were covered by a big band-aid of confidence. I didn't think that people still had that much compassion.

During the rest of the day I gradually got the hang of things, thanks to my coworkers, who are still there for me whenever I need help or a price check.

4. **Racking Up Sales**

That first day was one I would never forget: the feeling of all eyes on me, people cracking the whip telling me to hurry up, the beads of sweat on my forehead, and the nerve-wracking anxiety. It all made me wish that I had paid attention in the training session.

The nervousness I felt could be compared to being up on stage in front of a crowd for the first time. It's a situation that not many people can handle, but eventually you get used to it.

It's been a long while since my first day and now I've got the hang of everything and I go through customers like water. Not a day goes by without me having over \$1,000 in sales. Some of the same customers I saw on my first day come back to shop, say hi, and see that I've gotten better. I even have customers who like to come on my line because I treat them better than some of the other cashiers do.

5. **Don't Doubt Yourself**

The first day on any job can be hectic, whether it's dealing with customers or a job where your boss is constantly looking over your shoulder.

My advice is to be persistent and don't doubt yourself. Even though some people may look down on you because you're new, don't give them any excuse to believe what they think of you. Do your job to the best of your ability.

My job is very rewarding, although the first day was rough. But that's what it took to get better and faster at what I do, and with the help of my coworkers, friendly customers, and a fat check on Fridays, I guess it's all worthwhile.

Sharif was 15 when he wrote this story. He later graduated from high school, attended Lehman College, and worked in computer sales.