

The Lost Belonging

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Abstract

Reema and Sangeeta were close friends who have done their graduation from Christian College, Agra. Reema worked as Assistant Professor at FIT University, Mysore and Sangeeta was working as Associate Professor at Rio de Grande University, USA. Every year during her visit to Agra, plan was made for university visit, it somehow did not happened. This time on Sangeeta's visit, Reema and her husband Neraj went to Bera Moda store to meet Sangeeta who was waiting for them. They had a great reunion at the store. It was around 9 pm and the store employees have started wrapping the store. They also decided to exit at this time. To her surprise, guard gave her the wrong bag. He did not find her bag in the rack. This made her irritated; she approached the Sales Manager of the store. Sales Manager ruffled the guard, inquired about the belonging but could not find the bag. The Store Manager was called, as Sangeeta was adamant to meet the senior and not to leave the store without any complimentary item to reckon. The Store Manager asked about the invoice of the belonging in the bag, Sangeeta was not carrying any invoice at that time. The Store Manager kept on arguing that he cannot help her since she was not having the receipt of the belonging. The case will unfold the arguments between the store employees and Sangeeta viewpoints.

Keywords: Collateral Damage, Corporate Negligence, Ethical Dilemma, Ethics

1. Introduction

Reema and Sangeeta were closefriends; they have done their studies together till graduation in Agra University. Currently, Reema was working as Assistant Professor at FIT University Agra, a number one private university in India, as faculty of Management. Sangeeta worked as Associate Professor at Rio de Grande University, USA. She has done her Masters in Life Sciences from University of Whales and then pursued PhD from Ohio University. Sangeeta's parents lived in Agra whereas her two sisters and a brother were settled in USA. Sangeeta used to visit her parents after a year or two, this year in 2013 she came to Mysore on 15th May.

Sangeeta, while working at Rio de Grande University, was involved in bringing grants from federal government. Grants aided lots of candidate in pursuing various programs. As programs costs too much and grants were necessary to meet expenses. She had made her students to work on various projects and presentations. Grants made her respectful among all the students and faculty

members of Rio de Grande University. The laurels were important considering her to be only Indian member in the campus. Sangeeta being an Indian was proud of her achievements.

This time Reema had chalked out a program that she will take Sangeeta to her university. Every year during her visit to Agra, plan was made for university visit but it somehow did not happen. Reema had already taken permission from the Vice Chancellor of FIT University; he gave the date of 31stMay 2013. Reema told Sangeeta about this development. She was happy to hear this news as it would be an honor for her to visit the University of such Reputation. It will not only boost her academics profile but also help in building cross- cultural relation with the faculty in India. It can open gates for further passage of grants to Asian countries especially India.

2. The New Outlet and the Measures of Security Unfolds

It was humid and hot on 30th May; to escape it out

Sangeeta went to civil lines in Agra just to take stroll. She had to buy some odds and ends; she also took with her beautiful embroidered white shirt for getting a matching trouser, she had chosen it to wear on a visit at FIT University the next day.

She wanted to buy some accessories from civil lines. Sangeeta gave a call to Reema who promised to join for shopping. After some purchase at civil lines, Sangeeta advanced towards a newly opened BeraModa store, just for window-shopping and waited for Reema. It was a huge store; in fact it was only Bera Moda store to come up in civil lines last month.

Around 8:10 pm, Reema and her husband Neraj entered Bera Moda store to meet Sangeeta who was waiting for them. They had a great reunion at the store. It was around 9 pm and the store employees have started wrapping the store. They also decided to exit at this time.

When they were about to leave, Sangeeta asked guard at entrance about polythen bag which was in his custody. To her surprise, guard gave her the wrong bag. Sangeeta told him that the bag was embossed with 'Lamba and Lamba' label and was of bottle green color. He did not find the bag in the rack. This made her irritated; she approached the Sales Manager of the store. Sales Manager ruffled the guard, inquiring about the belonging but could not find the bag. Sangeeta told Sales Manager that she had asked the security guard about the token for keeping the bag and he had replied that store doesn't have policy of issuing token and he will take care of the bag.

Sangeeta became very furious and upset. She had a very beautiful embroidered shirt in that bag which she had bought from a boutique from USA. It was her favorite; she had planned to wear it while visiting FIT University. Sangeeta had great attachment with shirt, she want something as complimentary to her belonging as it was a sheer case of negligence by store. Reema and Neraj also questioned Sales Manager, and asked about its solution. The Sales Manager was not able to resolve the conflict, he made a call to the Store Manager. The Store Manager reached the store within fifteen minutes.

Sangeeta wanted to see the footage in the CCTV. Store Manager, Mr. Mukherjee accompanied her into a room which had TV set. They watched the footage but it became too time consuming, as it had to be watched for last two hours. The picture quality was not good and was lacking clarity. The Store Manager told Sangeeta to come next day. He gave his address; boast about the years of

his service, talked about his work ethics. Mr. Mukherjee promised her that he will come with some conclusion after going through the footage on the TV.

3. Collateral Damage to Be Argued as Part of Ethical Issue

Sangeeta, seriously wanted to collateral for lost bag. She had raised the point of collateral as she was in a dilemma that whether the Store Manager will recollect her the other day he was calling her for talks¹.

The arguments went on till 10pm; the time for the Store to be closed. The arguments created pressure and caused the Store Manager to become aggressive. He asked about the invoice of the belonging and told that he would give the amount immediately. Unfortunately the shirt was bought from USA two months ago from a boutique, and she was not carrying the invoice at that time. Store Manager kept on arguing that he cannot help her since she was not having the receipt of the belonging.

Reema and Neraj were using logic and convinced both parties to come to a solution rather than to be aggressive. Meantime a woman walked into store, it looked as if she had lost something. She inquired the security guard about a bag. Guard looked at the rack, got hold of two bags which lay that side of rack and showed to her. She had a sigh of relief when she looked at the bag, as one of the bags was of her.

Sangeeta was watching this and she enquired the lady as of what had gone wrong, the lady told her that she was shopping in the civil line and when she went back to her hotel she found that she had forgotten her bag. This lady was not carrying any token; she just came to the store as she recollected that she had visited it in the noon and got back her bag.

Sangeeta, Reema and Neraj came out of Bera Moda only to return the next evening. Sangeeta had written a complaint about the negligence and loss of her belonging in the store. She wanted that the Store Manager should give her in writing what had gone wrong. He was admitting negligence but do not want to give anything in writing as it would malign his reputation.

Reema and Neraj dropped Sangeeta at her home at 11PM. Sangeeta's elder brother, a legal consultant at USA, was in New Delhi for some personal work, she wanted to take some advice on this matter. She only had her aunt

who was waiting desperately for her arrival. She thanked them and asked them a favor to escort her the next day.

4. Putting the Onus on Outsource Security Agency by the Store

The next day Neraj arrived at Bera Moda store around 2.30 pm, though the Store Manager had called them at the 7pm, he had gone there just to enquire about the matter. He met Mr. Mukherjee, who told him that he has called Security in charge from the security agency CSI hired by the store. Neraj waited for an hour, while he was stepping out of the store, the Security In charge Mr.Yadav came in the store. The small wrinkle in this scene came when Store Manager told Neraj that now he should settle the matter with Mr. Yadav. Mr. Yadav discussed with Neraj the complaint of negligence of bag by the guard in Bera Moda store.

Store Manager after calling the meeting, shook off with his responsibilities, he was not interested to solve the issue nor was ready to address the customer. He was neglecting the issue as it would have brought bad image for brand store which was launched hardly month ago. They had easily and calculatedly transferred the case on Security Agency asking Security Guard responsible for the negligence.²

Mr. Yadav, Security in charge told Neraj that he will have to do proper reporting to his seniors and have to follow up enquiry, which will take time. He elaborated the fact that the Store Manager had put blame on security guard as he wanted the Store to be out of controversy.

Mr.Mukherjee, told Neraj that they did not want to put the Store or himself into any controversy. The CCTV footage which he had undergone showed security guard giving away bottle green polythene bag, embossed 'Lamba and Lamba,' to some other customer who had visited the store at 8.45 pm. Mr.Mukherjee wanted to get rid of the case making his exit. He wanted that Neraj should settle the case with security agency. The negligence he cleared does not come in preview of rules and regulations laid by Bera Moda Store.

The security guard pleaded Neraj that he will be penalized. He found himself as scapegoat in the entire sequence. There were no clear guidelines given to him about the safety of customer's belongings, no token to be given to customers³.It was his way of keeping items and

recollecting the visitor⁴. He was feeling low, and believed his salary will be deducted as punishment for the amount claimed by Sangeeta.

Neraj was taken aback by the way Store Manager; Mr. Mukherjee had put all the blame on security agency washing his hands out. He was talking differently the other day and now he has changed the facts and figures and also clarified that the guard was not on company payroll.

Neraj told Mr. Mukherjee that he does not have much time to follow up the matter, referring to the security agency. He put his point that misplacement of the bag was from store. The entire responsibility of negligence lied on the store and he will only deal with store authorities and no one else. He wanted that Store should pay as collateral, calculated amount of Rs.3000/-. He also made it clear to authorities that if they wanted to cheat they would have presented invoices of other items to claim that there were other belongings in the bag.

Mr.Mukherjee after small argument called Neraj at 7PM. Neraj told him that if he will not listen to their complaint and pay compensation, he will email the complaint to higher authorities at Bera Moda Store. The complaint will also point out absence of Mr. Mukherjee, Store Manager at the time incident took place.

The matter took towards heated debate. Neraj sincerely wanted to settle down with deal. He told the Store Manager that he will not discuss the issue with Security In charge and it will be only Mr. Mukherjee's prerogative to settle the issue. He simply wanted solution as soon as possible⁵.

5. Conclusions

Mr.Mukherjee came under pressure of written complaint to higher authorities as well as the fact of his absence when the incident happened. The issue also involved an NRI .He must have thought that case was strong to challenge and make him accountable.

At last, Mr.Mukherjee agreed to compensate Sangeeta. Though arguments and pressure was influencing his position but he still insisted the blame on security agency. Compensation was decided on the calculated amount agreed by Sangeeta and Store Manager.

Sangeeta took compensation from the Store Manager. Store Manager wanted written proof of acceptance of compensation by Sangeeta. The letter of acceptance written by Sangeeta is shown in Exhibit 1...

Dear Sir,

Myself Sangeeta Gulati, a customer at Bera Moda, Agra, on 30/5/2013 left a bag with guard at entrance of shop. On my exit, I asked guard about my bag, he could not return the bag and accepted mistake for oneself. The Store In charge in presence of Security In charge and Sales Manager compromised for the negligence. I have received compensation of Rs.3000/- against my lost bag.

I do promise if in near future my bag is found or returned by store, I will pay back Rs.3000/- to Store In charge.

Sincerely yours
Sangeeta Gulati

Agra
Dated: 31/5/2013.

At this point following questions were bothering Sangeeta:-

- Dilemma and course of action in Store.
- Stress and tension through which she had gone
- Accountability and negligence of the Store In charge

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