

August First Bakery & Café Pulls the Plug on Laptop and iPad Use

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Abstract

This critical incident describes Jodi Whalen and Phil Merrick's decision to go "screen free" by prohibiting use of laptops, iPads, and electronic reading devices at their restaurant, August First Bakery & Café. Whalen and Merrick made the decision to address the problem of Wi-Fi squatters, customers who spent hours at the café working on electronic devices while purchasing little food. Whalen and Merrick estimated that Wi-Fi squatters cost them \$15,000 annually in lost business. Customer response to the new policy was mixed. While some customers welcomed the ban, others said they would not return to August First Bakery & Café. The wisdom of the decision, the policy's impact on customer service at August First Bakery & Café, the "screen free" movement, and the issue of Wi-Fi squatters are central to the critical incident.

Learning Outcomes

In completing this assignment, students should be able to:

1. Identify the issue of Wi-Fi squatters;
2. Describe the "screen free" movement and evaluate the arguments for and against adopting a screen free policy;
3. Analyze the challenges small business owners face from multiple stakeholders; and
4. Evaluate how policy decisions (e.g. prohibiting laptops, iPads, and other electronic reading devices) impact customer service.

Application

This critical incident is designed for use in undergraduate Marketing, Management, Hospitality Management, or Introduction to Business courses.

Key Words

customer service, hospitality management, small business management

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