

The Call Center

I peeped over my cubicle “office”. I was hoping to see the girl who sits in the next cubicle and keeps our thoughts warm in these cold late night office hours.

Instead what I saw through the vast glass partition of our office building was a half cut moon floating in the sky. The moon looked like a nude model who instead of being tired or anything keeps a steady pace. Indeed moon was a nude model! Otherwise, poets and artists would die of starvation! The only difference is that moon does not ask for any money.

At that time I was standing half, now I stand fully and yawned like a lion. I was sleepy alright. But the night was still young and tender.

Long way to go fella!
I thought.

When I got this night shift job I was very happy. I can not remember all the reasons for my happiness now but most prominent was that I was ‘a night owl’ or so I thought. Ever since I started working here the owl inside me flew to catch a rat or something leaving me nights full of sleep.

My jobs require me to answer almost 200 phone calls every night and answer them politely(because everything is being recorded and I need this job badly) and if possible help the customer who is on the other side of the phone. But at these hours we basically deal with the most ‘interesting’ people of this country has to offer!

Allow me to explain the ‘interesting’ part a little bit.

If the employee who is picking up the phone is a female then she is in luck! All she will get are the offers of sex in the wildest ways possible and when she rejects(you cannot accept because that’s against the policy!) then the person calling will make sure that she understands that she is a lowlife prostitute and she needs to be screened for STDs or maybe AIDS. That’s almost all the scenarios(well 90.09% of it). A little boring yet reasonable!

And if you are male. Oh boy!!! The first response you will get is a tsunami of anger! This is because the other end was expecting a female voice! Then you will get different types of psychopaths, one that will skin you, one that will rape you to death, one that will cut your mom and feed you, one that will rape your girlfriend, one that will make sure you eat your own shit etc. They are never the same types. But if you are fortunate(!!!) enough to work here as a male then you will find a pattern don't worry! But all answers from our side are same always-

“We understand your frustration, sir. And we are really sorry for it.”

Sometimes we get lucky when the person calling is a female one. They are generally very nice. They will talk about their SIM card replacement, internet package, new offers etc. Some would sometime tell a word or two about their frustration about their husband's cheating or their family problems, but all in a sweet and melancholic manner. Like a late night bitter coffee with a lot of sugar.

The black phone on my table rattled. All of our phones are connected to a central system and the calls are distributed maintaining a queue. At first, these sounds would give me headaches. But humans can stretch themselves as rubber and I have stretched my headache until it tears apart.

My headset was on my ears.

“Hello Sir, Helium Telecom Customer Care, How can I help?”

We always call them ‘Sir’ first, if the other end turns out to be ‘not Sir’ only then we call them ‘Ma’am or Madam’. I asked my boss the reason for this and he told me, “Because we do not live on Amazon and it is the civilized way.”

Anyway, after three weeks in this job I stopped all kinds of wondering and after every thirty minutes or so I checked my wristwatch and dreamed about my beautiful soft bed.

“What Helium bullshit!”

Other end fired like a canon.

“I know it is ‘Tender Babes’ service and I need one tonight.”

The man continued at the same pace.

“No Sir, I think you dialed the wrong number.”

“Look I know for your services you guys need to be extra careful but look here I have the passcode for this month. I am your regular customer.”

Then he told me the code for this month. That reminded me one of the Kurt Cobain's songs. In that song, he sang about something ‘Moist’.

“No Sir, I am extremely sorry but this is not what you are looking for. Have a good night.”

Then I hung up.

Well, this was the 47th call of this night. And it had been two hours since I had had a good coffee.

The definition of a ‘good coffee’ is very different from all other senses. In these night hours, a ‘good coffee’ is a coffee that is too much bitter that your tooth would want to fall and at the same time with so much sugar that your tooth will actually fall in near future. These good coffees give us the kick to keep our night vigil.

I put my line in pause mode and stood up to have a coffee in the kitchen. I pour the coffee into my cup and went to the adjacent balcony of the kitchen to have a smoke.

After finishing my cigarette I returned to my cubicle and as soon as I resumed my line the phone beeped. I put on my headset.

“Hello Sir, Helium Telecom, How can I help?”

A very decent male voice talked from the other end.

“Hi, I need information about your roaming service.”

Ohhww...roaming!!!

I wondered. Roaming is one of that information which requires a lot of searching to get in. Because you know, not a lot of people ask for it. Only those who will lose millions of dollars if they have changed the number they sometimes ask for it.

“Of course Sir....”

This part was to buy some time to search in. I typed in the query section and when I was in the roaming folder I chimed back.

“And would you please tell me which country we are talking about here?”

Sometimes I really do not understand these common courtesies of our civilized world. Why asking a hundred kilo question when just three words can do the same job! No, you can not ask, “Where are you going?” to your honorable customers. Thatz bad business!

There was a moderate pause on the other side. These are those types of pauses you get when your girlfriend is not ready to get married and you just proposed her in public and now she can not say, “NO”. Thatz bad for love!

“Germany please.”
Otherside replied with the same pace of politeness.

“Just a moment Sir.”

“You know I got a full-time scholarship there....”
Apparently, he did not think giving me a moment was a good idea!

His voice was almost like a giggling child! With that type of happiness in your voice, you give the good news to your mother or someone like that but not to an operator in a call center. I was not ready for that and I did not know how to answer.

“...Well...I guess congratulations Sir...!!!”
I really hoped that was good enough!

Rule of thumb is “Do not talk unless you MUST!”. But what would you say to a happy man telling you something to get an appreciation!

“Thanks a lot, brother!”

Oww...owww fella hold it!!!

I thought

I do not want to have any blood or emotional attachment with you! That would be a drag in the end!

It always is!

“You know, I was at first thinking about getting a new number when I reach there!....”

That would have been a wise choice.
The voice inside me said.

“...but then....I thought then how the hell my friends and family will be able to reach me just at the moment I land there!...”
The chatterbox on the other side continued now happier but less polite and more friendly.

“....I really hate to leave them here but the offer is too big to miss!....I will really miss them!....”
At this point, he started something that sounded like sobbing!

I was really blown away by the flow of his emotion! I really did not have any idea what to do. And that's when I made the blunder of the century!

“Don't worry Sir! Your family must be very proud of you!”
I tried to tell these with a smiley voice.

“...(slightly sobbing and started talking with a sigh) Yeah...mama would for sure if she was alive...”

Ohh no!!! Long call alert!
I thought. I really should finish my job here. The call was getting long already. And security office(we call it “the sack center”) would surely take notice of this.

“..I am really sorry Sir!...”
I find no more word. We are not trained to handle these types of situations.

“....You know if my dad could only recognize me he would not let me go at all!!!
But that bloody Alzheimer!!!...”

I am floored! And my twisted mind wondered if his mom is dead and dad is smoking off his brain sitting in a grave not closed yet, then the only family left for him are his siblings! There must be a lot of them, roaming is very costly you know!

“...I am their only son you know....I can feel in my vein how happy they would be..”

Now with that, brothers and sisters are out of the window!

“I am sure Sir they would be....”

With that, I waited for sometimes and then go down to my actual business,

“Sir, as you were asking about roaming service....here we can offer some plans those will keep you close to your loved ones’ ”

“Thanks a lot for your kind help brother....I really appreciate it....”

“I have done nothing Sir...but that’s very kind of you...our plans....”

“You know every day in the middle of the night I feel that something very big is missing...after getting divorced last year I feel like I am done gambling with my life....I have lost all of them....In the middle of the night I sit by the phone and try to find a person to call....but no one is there!...and others do not pick up....”

He paused for a moment.

“....but today you did...”

Now his voice was bursting in tears.

“...you know you are the one in years...I just needed to talk...”

There was a long pause.

“....God bless you...and I am sorry I lied to you...otherwise I was afraid you would not talk...no one does....”

With those line hanging up in the air he hung up. Leaving me in sort of coma. I did not have any idea half an hour had passed. I could not think of anything.

I went to the next desk to talk with the girl whom I mentioned earlier. She was chatting with one of my colleagues.

“Can I leave early today. I know there still two hours left...but I really can not work now...My migraine got me really bad!...”

She looked just once and nodded “yes” then continued her conversation.

I left.

When I came outside I lit a cigarette and slowly started walking.

Not “home” of course!

I wish I knew my way *HOME*!