

# Drumsticks

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“We don’t sell drumsticks,” I say to the customer as I look at him in disbelief. Does he know where he is? This is a KFC after all, not a music store.

“Yes, you do sell drumsticks,” he replies to me with confidence. He wears an expensive business suit, top quality eyeglasses (which I could never afford), shiny black dress shoes, and carries a brief case, like in a James Bond movie, along with *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*. My store is located on Second Avenue and the corner of 43<sup>rd</sup> Street, which is close to the U.N. building and other international and national agencies and offices. Many of the customers who come here are like him. They look like they are well-educated and have a comfortable lifestyle (which I used to dream about and see on T.V. and in the movies before I came to the U.S.). But I’ve never had any customer who comes into the wrong store and asks twice for the same thing when the answer is “no.” While I think about this with a long face, he again requests, “May I have my drumsticks?”

I reply, “Sir, Sam Goody is around the corner at 42<sup>nd</sup> Street, between Second and Third Avenues.”

He says with a patient face and calm voice, “Please go and ask your manager.”

Oh! Now I have to go to the manager and he will not be happy about this. It is near closing time and the manager is very busy. He needs to take care of the whole day’s paperwork, make sure the cups and dishes are stacked up for the next morning’s opening, and make sure that the janitor has made the store sparkling clean after a messy day of business. He will be upset with me for not being able to take care of one customer. This is my fourth week on the job and nearly six weeks in this country. I am not ready to lose this kind of job— one where I do not need to speak English very much.

“Excuse me,” I say to the manager, “a customer wants drumstick and I even told him that we do not sell them, and to go to Sam Goody Store around the corner. He insists that I talk to you...”

Oh my God! His face is turning red before I even finish my explanation. What did I do wrong here?! Within four weeks at my job I learned very well: “the customer is always right” and “never say no to a customer.” I did not want to say “no” to this customer, but it is the customer who is in the wrong store. What else could I say besides “no.” Now my boss’s face is red. I know this look. He is angry. America seems very confusing to me. My manager commands to me in an angry voice, “go and take money from the customer.”

I reply as politely as I can, “but we do not have a drumstick price button on the cash register. How can I take money for drumsticks?”

The manager becomes angrier and gives me a disturbed look as if he is saying to me with his eyes, “I do not have time for this nonsense near closing time.” He quickly passes by me and walks towards my cash register while talking to the customer. I have to almost run to catch up to him because I am much shorter than he is. I want to know what is going on. The manager, by this time, has taken money from the customer and put it into my cash register. Without any explanation to me, he goes back and hands me a box to give to the customer. I take a chance and open the box to see what is inside. The moment that I open the box my manager bursts into an angry voice and says, “Why did you open the box? Give it to the customer.”

I reply in a calm and confident voice, “I opened this box to know what a drumstick is in a chicken store.”

Finally I see a little smile on the customer’s face appear as he tells my manager, “Take it easy, sir. She is going to learn.” As he grabs his drumstick box, he gives me a wink and says, “Welcome to America.” This time his facial expression is light-hearted like a well-suited comedian. Even though he smiled at me, I did not like this long drama. He could have explained to me when he told me the second time that a drumstick is a chicken leg. Why didn’t he? Why does he have to act funny? Not only act—even when Americans speak English, it does not sound normal. It is like listening to the high-pitched squeal of a cassette tape on fast forward. Then they blame us, like we have an accent. Why can’t Americans speak English like normal people?

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