

The Fine Print

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Publication Date: February 27, 2008

Originally Published in: *The North County News*
The Westchester Times Tribune



The customer service airline counter agent told me to read the fine print (and he was not talking about this column.)

The fine print (again, not this column) had nothing about the accountability, reliability, responsibility or the trust that a customer deserves when dealing with an airline – or any business for that matter. Shouldn't you get what you pay for?

For instance, when you make a reservation to go from Point A to Point B on a certain day and at a certain time (this sounds very "Seinfeld-ish") and when full payment is required in advance, shouldn't this service happen?

It is beyond frustrating to me, and inexcusable, when dealing with an agent of a business who is simply so disconnected from its customer that they just don't care.

We were supposed to leave from Westchester County Airport on Friday. When we arrived (2 hours early), we learned that the flight was going to be late so that we would miss our connection in Philadelphia. The agent gave us no reason and told us that he could rebook us for three days later as there was nothing else. Should we drive to Philly and try to meet the plane with only 4 hours to spare ... NO, we could not since Westchester airport recommends that we leave our cars at home and find alternate ways to get to the airport. Should we try to rent a car? The agent suggested a bus. Do we get reimbursed for the bus or at least a refund for this flight?

Fortunately, while I was standing at the counter, my husband was able to secure us seats on a private charter flight to Philly and we were able to make our connection. When we looked at the arrival board there, we learned that the Westchester flight had been cancelled altogether. What happened to all of those other people?

For the return trip back to NY, we were concerned about the impending snowstorm, so I called in advance to try to reschedule our flight to avoid a problem. After over 3 hours of frustration on the phone and speaking with 2 agents and a supervisor, I learned that the first agent cancelled my four tickets and only rebooked one of us on an earlier flight. [During this time, my husband who was listening to this craziness – and again to the rescue - booked us four seats on a different airline back to NY.] And amazingly at the end of my conversation, the supervisory agent who could not find me seats and would not give me a refund asked me ... if there is anything else she could help me with. Yes, I told her, give me your corporate address so I can sue you!

But I am still asking ... do we get a refund for this or at least some compensation?

As for the fine print (again, not this column), it may state that the airline is not responsible for certain delays or cancellations, but that is no excuse for poor customer service. Even if there truly is nothing that can be done about a situation, a simple apology, care, concern and sympathetic attitude would go a long way. An agent displaying an attitude of apathy and impatience just exacerbates the situation. Businesses should make customer service their number one priority – and that should be the fine print.