

When rules *must* be broken

 By [Aki Kalliatakis](#)

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Today's technology is amazing. We control a special rover on Mars remotely from our planet, and can fly to the other side of the earth, (Hawaii, if you are interested,) within 24 hours.

Devices capable of millions of calculations per second are strapped to our wrists, and 3D printing means that we can “print” various prototype models, food and even a whole house in a very brief time period. I’m looking forward to buying my first self-driving car just as I retire, and I can pop a whole packed meal into my microwave to eat two minutes from now. (Well, maybe not everything about the new world of technology is that amazing.)

But, with all our incredible advancements, there are still some businesses that seem to have been left in the Dark Ages.

For example, it seems impossible for me to get a replacement credit card in less than around eight to ten days. Where's the customer service in that? I was sitting at a coffee shop at the end of a meeting with a client, and as I handed over my card to the waitress, she said it had been declined. I knew it wasn't because there wasn't any cash, so I was a bit worried about fraud, but, now embarrassed, I took out some cash and paid with that. In my mind I just knew what my business companion must have been thinking.



Before the bank even had a chance to text me about this personal rejection, I called the number on the back of my card to find out if I should be in a desperate panic or just mildly stressed. A few minutes later the pleasant young man gave me a rather generic answer: “Mr. Kalliatakis, I’m afraid that your card has been blocked, and for your protection we will need to send you another one.”

I asked him to be more specific, but he muttered something incomprehensible, and then brightly reassured me that there would be no additional cost to me for a new card. I asked about the last few transactions, hoping that there wasn't any cash stolen, but nothing untoward seemed to have occurred. It was then that I realised two things: First, it wasn't my fault, and second, they had cocked up something – something that was awkward for them but which, come hell or high water, I'd never get to the bottom of. So now my card was cancelled and I'd have to wait for a new one.

I was, however, more relieved and grateful that it wasn't going to be a fight to prove theft from my account – until he said it would take five to seven working days to get this sorted. I couldn't believe it! How difficult can it really be, after all? How complicated is the process of issuing a duplicate credit card to a customer who, because of a mistake the bank had obviously made, now had to be inconvenienced? And, even more irritating, using words like “to safeguard your account,” and “for your protection” is clearly a way of deflecting the blame by confusing the customer.

Call me naïve, but I really think that there's a death of common sense here. I know that there need to be rules and processes to take care of issues like this, but a sense of urgency and the ability to bypass the bureaucracy seems called for here. Clearly, they didn't have my best interests at heart in this sorry saga.

Many people in my industry – consulting and training – travel a lot, and therefore there are an extravagant number of stories and case studies that are written about travelling - and flying in particular. Most of them are negative.

We don't talk about air travel to show off how glamorous our work is. (On the contrary, I have now come to the point after 30 years in the consulting business where I just dread the thought of flying.) But flying is just another category of transport: my car takes me to clients and events near where I live, and airplanes take me to clients and events that are further away or even on the other side of the world.

But when we write about our experiences of flying it is because airports and air travel are usually the stressful events - even when they go reasonably smoothly. In this astonishing world where engineers have created the miracle of jet travel, and clever programmers have prepared software that is the envy of many other industries, I have to conclude that airlines and airports are led and operated by staggeringly stupid people.

Even airlines which boast about great customer care have a knack of screwing things up for passengers. One of the most successful and reputable is based in the global travel hub in the U.A.E. In my view, I am a loyal customer, although from their perspective they probably see me as one of the “rats and mice.” Checking-in at Heathrow recently at the end of a tiring 10-day trip, my baggage was way under the 30 kilogram limit. But I really wanted to take my sons' bulky toys and wife's gifts in my carry-on luggage.

I'm a good customer, and really asked as nicely as I could for them to do me a favour by allowing me to take them on board with my briefcase. The answer was “No!” I turned on the charm and begged, explaining who I was and waving my loyalty card about. They were even more emphatic. The supervisor threw out the “Rules is rules” defence, and was indifferent – no, he was absurdly stubborn - to my needs, especially since I explained that my final destination was SA where we're infamous for stealing desirable stuff from passenger's suitcases. He folded his arms and gave me a glazed look.

Now, if this policy was applied consistently to all passengers, I wouldn't mind too much, but as soon as I got on the plane, I saw literally dozens of people with two, even three really large luggage bags - over and above shopping from the duty-free shops. The hypocrisy of it all made me miserable for the next sixteen hours, and added to the stress I already felt about my family's presents.

It confirmed that airlines and airports are run by really reckless policies and witless people. From three to six flights a year, they will be lucky to see me once more.

What rules and policies does your business enforce that create frustration for your customers?

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