

23 April 2008

Mr. Ronald L. Sargent
Chairman & CEO Staples.com
500 Staples Drive
Framingham, MA 01702

Re: Take a Seat and Sit on This - Herculean Customer Service in Danbury CT

Dear Mr. Sargent and Team Staples:

As I pen this thank you note, I am happily sitting on my new cushy, replacement Global Task Chair courtesy of many honorable customer service efforts on behalf of store personnel at your Staples Mill Plain Road, Danbury Connecticut location.

My ordeal started several years ago when I first started hunting for office chair replacements. My multimedia studio had several beautiful Herman Miller Aeron chairs that I spent dearly for but since a car accident and new found titanium-infused bones, the Aeron's rounded hard-plastic sculpting at the bottom of the sitting surface dug into my left femur bone such that I needed to find replacement chairs effective immediately.

Enter Staples and your line of Global Task chairs.

My initial customer-buying sales reasoning echoed , "Hey, the cushioning is right, the grey color pleasing, and the multi-directional levers to tilt in almost any manner were all very exciting options, but it was the lifetime warranty that sealed the deal."

My Staples Global Task chair enjoyed a pleasant average life in my studio - bouncing between video edit station, adjusting nicely for 88-weighted musical keyboard station, plus wheeling over to the office station.

A couple of puppy-dog bite marks and scratches here-and-there on the wheel base, and a plastic right arm rest requiring duck tape given some of the repeated desk bumps over the years, all said and done it was a good trusty chair.

But then one day the back broke - just snapped as I leaned back. Screws, or at least partial pieces along with wood shavings fell to the floor and I immediately knew another office chair adventure was in the cards.



Kasha Scott in Old Comfy Chair

None of the Staples store personnel were thrilled to see me when I came wheeling through the automatic glass sliding doors with my broken chair in the lead. An announcement from the customer service counter was made that could be heard throughout the store's PA, and soon a young gentleman approached offering to help. I showed him the guarantee and the Staples product bar codes under the sitting-part of the chair, and he asked for time to confer with store management.

When he returned, I was given two options - I could either get a store credit for the current retail value of the chair (\$125 versus the \$300-plus I initially paid), or I could leave the chair there and see if they could order the replacement parts.

Neither of us had been down this path before so I asked him what his preference would be, and he said, "Chuck, your warranty does state that we have first option to replace defective parts. The guy who services our furniture is gonna be in here tomorrow, so if it's all right with you, I'd prefer we see if we can get the replacement parts, and I'll give you a call once I hear back."

Fair enough. I left without my chair but felt great that a warranty / guarantee effort was set in motion. I wasn't sure going in if I would be tossed out because the manufacturer went out of business, lack of store receipt, etc., so just knowing that options were on deck was a breath of fresh air in our seemingly time crunched, often unresponsive, mega-store, impersonal, not-my-problem, hurried culture of ours but I digress.

Two days went by when a voicemail was left, "Mr. Scott, we spoke to the Global rep. Your new chair back is on order. We are also going to replace your tape-ducked arm rest as a professional courtesy. Parts should be in during the next couple of weeks, so I'll call you when it's ready."

Yippee! My old, trusty chair that had been with me during so many late night editing sessions and played the seat to many a musical performance would be returned, to be somewhat akin to the comfort of a favorite old shoe.

For several weeks I sat on a hard metal fold-up chair. Then after four weeks I decided to call to check on the status. My Staples customer service champion was not in, so I asked to leave a message for him, which they reluctantly took down. I could almost hear his inner voice say to me over the phone, "Dude - I'm busy. Why do I have to write down this message, and why can't you just call back tomorrow morning when he's in?"

The next day I was about to follow-up until I played back the morning voice mails, and there was one of panic from my Staples customer service hero. "Mr. Scott. Can you please call me at your earliest convenience. It's Important."

With that I thought, "Okay - here we go, they changed their mind and the parts were never ordered, not available, or management changed their mind about supporting the guarantee."

It turned out that parts arrived, but during the waiting process my chair was mistaken as junk and tossed out.

Then the drama started to play out. Apparently a frustrated management team mused, “How could we let this happen. Now we owe the guy a new chair. Somebody is gonna have to buy this guy a new chair, and it’s not me. I just hope he doesn’t want one of those \$600 leather chairs. How the heck ...”

When my hero replied and chimed in during management huddle, “... but he’s the customer. He had a guarantee. We promised.” Said hero was promptly told to leave work effective immediately hence the cell phone call I got from him as he was driving home per management request.

I asked if this was just bad timing and if better picked up another day or two once management cooled down. I asked if he would prefer I support his suggested next steps or if he’d prefer I deal with management directly, which is what happened next.

I was given the name and number for head manager. I called and got directed to his office when an assistant picked up, claimed the manager was busy, and asked if he could take a message.

At this point, I started to laugh at what kind of message to leave given all the twists and turns, so I started at the top, “This is Chuck Scott, and I’m the guy with the missing chair.”

“Oh, yea! We know who you are. How can I help you?”

I asked if my customer service hero’s job was in trouble and what could we reasonably work out given all that went on.

Suffice it to say, I drove up there that afternoon before the assistant manager’s shift ended and rolled away with a floor demo model that is very close in style to my original trusted old one.

Without naming names, Jonathan, Jim and Rob at Team Staples know who they are, and I just wanted to go on record of appreciation for all of your Danbury CT Staples customer service efforts.

Cordially,

Chuck Scott

PS - On the way out, I did purchase an extra padded memory foam cushion. Now, only if you sold designer foot-stoles to accompany said chairs!