

## *The Betty Letters*

*My Dear Grandchild,*

*I have discovered that certain employees of a supermarket chain in Hongkong are thieves. By calling these people thieves, I am using the term to mean that they are, feloniously, taking or removing other persons' personal property with the intent of permanently depriving the true owner of it. If these employees are not thieves, then, the management of the supermarket chain has indulged in what I would consider an undesirable labour policy in order to entice people to come to work, part-time, as cashiers by permitting these people a perquisite which, clearly, encourages them to obtain an advantage by deception from Octopus Holdings Ltd. But the supermarket, itself, is not the loser, at least not, directly, although it seems to me, that it must be one of the losers by permitting this larceny. The owners of this supermarket chain, ultimately, are being ripped off by this undesirable policy whether or not management realises it. This is that which I discovered: I sent my maid to buy some things, the other week, and, since she paid for the goods, using my Octopus Card, I had to see the receipt in order to make sure that I was only paying for my goods and not for goods which my maid wanted to buy for herself. However, on scanning the receipt, I noted that it had printed at the top, 'MoneyBack Member 010 ... 924.' The problem, here, is that I am not a member of the Octopus, MoneyBack Rewards programme, operated by Octopus Rewards Ltd! I asked my maid whether or not she is a member. When the answer came back that she did not even know about Octopus Rewards Ltd, I telephoned the store from where my maid had obtained my goods and talked to a man who said that he was the Manager. He said that Ms Chan Kwan Chun, the cashier who checked out my maid, was a part-time staff member and that it was she who is identified as MoneyBack Member 010 ... 924. So, the amount of money that I paid for my goods is resulting in Ms Chan Kwan Chun, receiving reward points from Octopus Rewards Ltd, reward points to which she is not entitled. These reward points may be redeemed for goods from certain supermarkets or other Octopus partners, you understand. If Ms Chan Kwan Chun can obtain an advantage for which she is not entitled due to my purchase of goods from this supermarket, then, it stands to reason that she has the ability to obtain similar advantages for which she is not entitled from other unwary shoppers who, also, are not members of the programme, sponsored by Octopus Rewards Ltd. I questioned my maid about this matter in full and discovered that, prior to her paying for the goods, using my Octopus Card, Ms Chan Kwan Chun asked Mary, my maid, whether or not she was a MoneyBack Member. On learning that Mary was not a member, she swiped her card on a little machine, the card, having been secreted in a pocket of her uniform. Because Mary had heard a beeping noise, prior to Ms Chan Kwan Chun, starting to charge her for the goods that she had selected, she looked at the receipt, carefully, as she left the store, just in case she had been overcharged, inadvertently. Upon scanning the receipt, she saw a 'MoneyBack Member' number. She rushed back into the store and asked the cashier about this MoneyBack Member number. The cashier, Ms Chan Kwan Chun, said that it was the number of her cash register: 'That's all!' My maid asked the same question, again. She received a slightly different answer, this time around: 'It's my staff member number.' Lo and Behold! Ms Chan Kwan Chun had obtained the credit for my purchases by way of Octopus rewards, calculated at 0.50 percent of every dollar spent.*

*I know, you think that this is just small beer, but work it out for yourself: 300 points multiplied by 100*

customers is 30,000 points. This number of points has a value of about \$HK15,000 in redeemable goods. For this cashier, it can mean a great deal, supplementing her income, materially. However, no matter what it means, the Bottom Line, as far as I am concerned, is that Ms Chan Kwan Chun is indulging in a dishonest act, whether or not the management of the supermarket is encouraging the act. The Manager of the supermarket store, a Mr Nip, appeared to be unaware of the actions of Ms Chan Kwan Chun, saying that he would look into the matter and, if it is the case that Ms Chan Kwan Chun has been obtaining Octopus MoneyBack points to which she is not entitled, then, he will give her a verbal warning. However, if the matter is considered serious, then, he may have to let her go. 'She is only a part-time staff member, you know,' Mr Nip explained. Mr Nip's answer to my questions appears to suggest that the actions of Ms Chan Kwan Chun are not, openly, encouraged although, obviously, they are being tolerated and, possibly, it is considered the price that the supermarket has to pay in order to obtain part-time staff.

I am not satisfied with Mr Nip's answers because if it can happen at one of the stores where I shop, it can happen at others, too. If this situation is rampant – and it could well be so – then, it must be tantamount to obtaining an advantage by deception, with or without management's tacit approval. To take the matter a little further, if Ms Chan Kwan Chun can obtain an advantage from me, one for which she is, definitely, not entitled, then, what could prevent her from perpetrating other acts, causing her to obtain advantages from other shoppers? And if this part-time employee can get away with this wrongful act, how many other staff members of the supermarket and other Octopus Partner shops are engaged in this, or similar, types of schemes? As for the response from Mr Nip, I think that that was very bad ... unless he knew that such things are happening at his, or other, stores. If an employee of a bank were found to be cheating, no matter how small was the offence, the police would be called in, immediately. Mr Nip, however, is of the opinion that the case that I brought to his attention was a very small matter, one that, obviously, did not deserve much attention. This makes me think that the acts of Ms Chan Kwan Chun are well known and, clearly, considered acceptable to management of this store.

And so I ask you, My Dear Grandchild: Is the type of behaviour, in which Ms Chan Kwan Chun is presently indulging, the type that we want to encourage our children to perpetrate? I suggest that it is wrong and, in essence, dishonest if not criminal in nature. I talked to a member of The Independent Commission Against Corruption about my concerns and was told that this matter had nothing to do with this independent branch of the Government of Hongkong and, as such, The Independent Commission Against Corruption is not interested in it. There is no requirement at law that I have to report this matter, of course, because it may not be an illegal act even though that which Ms Chan Kwan Chun is committing has all of the earmarks of a chargeable offence under the laws of Hongkong. If she is not guilty of any wrongful act, one has to wonder: Is somebody, turning a blind eye in the direction of this obvious, white-collar crime and, by so doing, constructively converting an illegal act into one that is acceptable and legal by virtue of the fact that it is encouraged, openly, or ignored, openly? It is said that the law is not concerned about trifles – *de minimis non curat lex* – but I wonder whether or not this is a trifling matter. Think about it, will you?

Talk to you, next week.

Chief Lady

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