Hello, welcome and...goodbye?

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Prince Frederick, MD - You no doubt have seen on social media the outrage over a faithful employee at Walmart being terminated after years of service. Locals may have been surprised to learn that just about every community that has a Walmart has an employee in this very pickle. Yes, Walmart is eliminating the “greeter” position. Well, actually, they are rebranding and reinventing the post in such a way as to make it more of a challenge.

If you think you’re upset about this, how do think I feel? Well, maybe you don’t care, but my long-range goal was to become a full-time Walmart greeter. It was to be my employment swan song. I have been practicing “Welcome to Walmart” almost every chance I get. I figured it would be the perfect job in my golden years. Those guys were my heroes. I mean, how can a Walmart greeter have a bad day at work? I’d be all smiles and happy, too, if all I had to do was show for work, welcome customers—and then get paid for it.

In a missive sent to customers, the media and employees, or as they call them, “associates,” Walmart CEO Greg Foran explained that retail has become a very competitive business. The bottom line is forcing the company’s brass to make this decision. Said Foran, “we changed the position of people greeter to customer host, a role that requires a different skill set, such as handling customer refunds, scanning receipts, and checking shopping carts.”

While some people may demonize the retailer’s management for making this call, you really can’t do that, not if you look at the entire picture. Walmart has been exemplary in its impact on its many business communities. Sure, quite a few defunct variety stores’ owners and employees will claim that when Walmart showed up in their community it prompted their demise. But how did it prompt this? They did it with jobs that paid better, prices that were lower, merchandise that was a notch superior and a wider variety. I’m fairly certain that no other retailer has hired individuals to simply greet customers coming and going. If you think about it, that’s a lot of elderly and physically challenged individuals who were provided employment over several decades. However, by eliminating a position its competitors never had, Walmart is feeling the wrath of some of its customers.

In his missive, Foran states, “for associates with disabilities impacted by the changes to the Greeter position, we have extended the current 60-day transition period while we explore the circumstances and potential accommodations that will make sense for each person. Let me be clear: If any associate in this unique situation wants to continue working at Walmart, we should make every effort to make that happen. Since we announced this change, we have already made offers to many greeters, including those with physical disabilities. We expect this will continue to be the case for many more across the country over the coming weeks. I’m proud that we have a long-standing history of being an employer of choice for people with disabilities. We are proud to be recognized with a 100 percent score by the Disability Equality Index, marking three years in a row for this distinction, which recognizes the initiatives and programs we have in this space to serve both our customers and our associates.”

In a perfect world every retail store employee ought to be a “greeter.” However, with all the heavy lifting, the pitfalls that come with people using a variety of means to pay for merchandise, hard-to-please shoppers—not to mention the miscreants who are stealing stuff—we must understand that, just like any other job, some workdays for store employees are better than others.

Thankfully, the greeters are not being replaced by machines that say “welcome to Walmart/bienvenidos a Walmart.” However, the person providing that human touch will be a bit busier, the smile perhaps a little forced at times. If it’s good for business, competition, employment and keeps the prices falling we should smile back and welcome the change.

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