



Is It Worth It?

Some people return them. Others leave them in vacant parking lots or on curbs in close proximity. Seth Sanders, a clerk at Safeway in Washington mentioned, “It is kind of a test of character. It is our job to pick up after people, but if it is the smallest thing you can do to help out, I feel like it is not a lot to help out a little bit” (Hauser, 2021). What am I referring to you might ask? The answer is shopping carts.

We have all experienced a strenuous trip to the grocery store that included meandering through aisles and waiting at long checkout lines. These trips always come to the same conclusion after unloading purchased groceries into our vehicles. That conclusion involves an inward question of, “Will I make the extra effort to return my shopping cart to a stall or simply leave it close by my car out of convenience?” It has been an interesting topic to research, as the “Shopping Cart Theory” is now popular on Reddit and other social media platforms, as well as studied by students at the Lausanne Collegiate School in Tennessee. In a nutshell, this theory states that the decision to return a cart is the ultimate test of moral character (2021). I’m not quite sure that deciding to return a shopping cart to its rightful place is an indication of high character, but it is a decision that can affect people in a positive way. If everyone returned their shopping cart correctly, those employees who work at the store wouldn’t have to gather up the carts across the parking lot. Instead, it would save them time and free them up to focus on other necessary tasks.

In any role, especially a leadership role in healthcare, each decision to act or not to act impacts others. It could be easier to take a shortcut, and the decision might even make sense at the time, but how does it affect the job of a teammate down the line or the experience of a patient? Taking the extra time out of a busy day to answer questions about a procedure, offer assistance to a colleague, ask someone how they are feeling, or wish a patient a happy birthday, are small things that can make a big difference.

Where are your shopping carts, and who is responsible for them? How do you help others understand and maintain your processes? For your specific role, it is important to identify what additional steps can be taken to improve the patient experience and the operations of your department. Just like returning a shopping cart, I believe these types of actions are worth the extra effort.

-Josh

Hauser, C. (2021, June 10) *Everyone Has a Theory About Shopping Carts*. The New York Times.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/08/style/shopping-cart-parking-lot.html>