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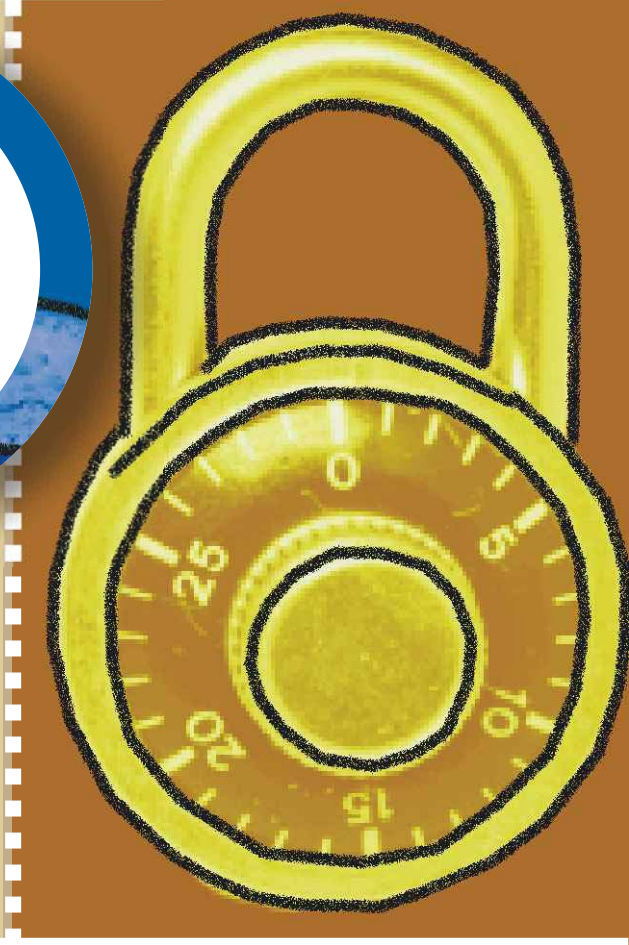
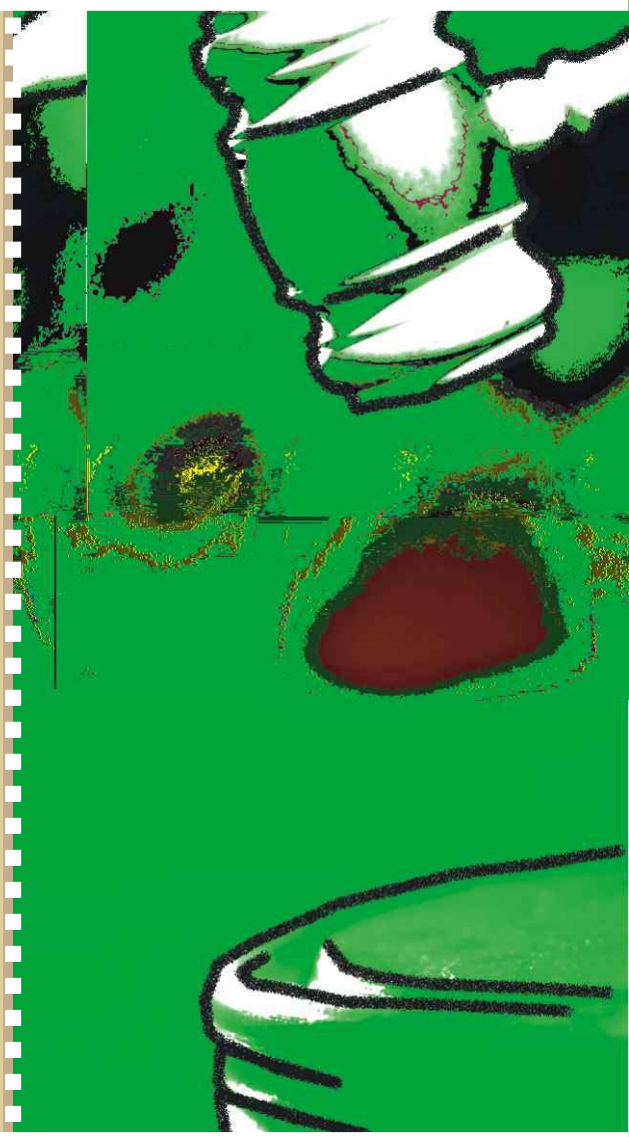


SHOPlifting



BOOK SIXTEEN

SHOPLIFTING

CONTENTS

1. Outcomes
2. Introduction
3. What is Shoplifting?
4. Ways in which the Shoplifter Operates
5. Ways in which the Shoplifter Conceals Goods
6. Prevention of Shoplifting
7. At the Counter
8. Dealing with Shoplifters
9. Actions Performed by Customers that do not Constitute Shoplifting
10. People Regarded by Law as incapable to shoplift
11. Assessment

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BOOK SIXTEEN

Outcomes

1

This booklet will provide you, the owner of a store, with a basic background to shoplifting which will show you how to apply some basic principles stated herein. After studying this booklet you will be able to:

- ✓ Know what shoplifting entails and what forms of shoplifting to guard yourself against.
- ✓ Recognize a shoplifter in your store
- ✓ Prevent shoplifters from removing goods from your store
- ✓ Deal with shoplifters when they are apprehended
- ✓ Know which persons are not capable, by law, to commit the crime of shoplifting

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2

Introduction

Shoplifting can be described as a form of theft. Stealing goods from a store is illegal and criminal and punishable by law.

To understand what shoplifting entails we should first look at the definition of theft. Theft is described as the malicious and intentional taking of property that belongs to another person.

In this definition there are four important aspects:

- The thief must act maliciously, in other words he must do something that he knows is illegal and punishable by law
- The thief must act intentionally, in other words he must act in such a way that it is clear he wants to steal goods
- Stealing implies taking something from another person for the purpose of making it your own property.
- The property must belong to another person or be in the possession of another person.

For example, if someone takes Bongani's bike for the purpose of making it his own to use for travelling to work, then that person has stolen the bike from Bongani.

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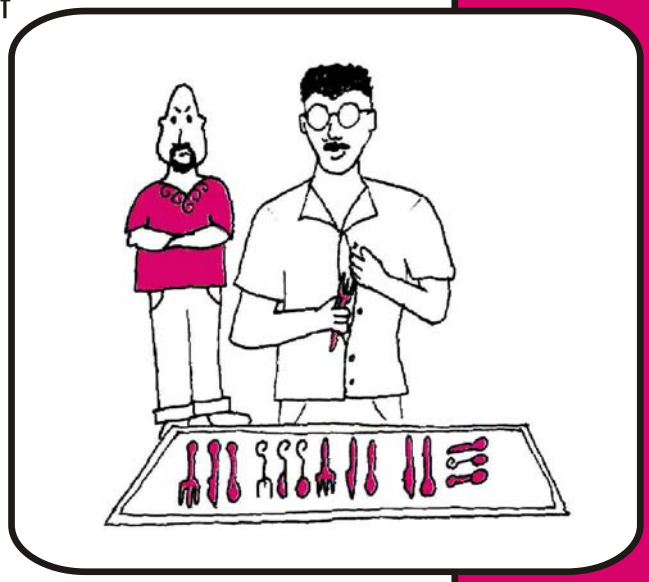
What is Shoplifting ?

3

Shoplifting is an act whereby a person takes goods from a store without paying for it. Remember that if a person forgets to pay at the counter, it does not constitute shoplifting. This can happen to anyone.

It is accepted that a person is shoplifting goods once he had passed the counter in a store without paying. However, it is not always necessary to do this before it can be regarded as shoplifting. Let us say that Mr. Scoundrel walks into Bongani's store and goes to the shelves where cutlery is on display. He then hides some forks under his jacket. Bongani sees him hiding the forks and then apprehends him. It is clear that Mr. Scoundrel is trying to hide the forks in an attempt not to pay for it. He is thus guilty of shoplifting, even if he has not passed the counter.



The reason for the above-mentioned example is that the storeowner cannot always check on his customers. If he sees someone who tries to steal his goods, he may regard himself

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lucky that he is able to prevent the person from stealing his goods. In other words, the South African courts accept that a person is guilty of shoplifting when it can be shown that:

- A person has taken goods that are under the control of the shopkeeper, usually by hiding it from the shopkeeper's sight.

- A person has taken control of the goods himself by hiding the goods so that only he knows where they are.

You should keep in mind that when a shopkeeper has more than adequate safety measures against shoplifting, for instance where he uses surveillance cameras through which he can monitor all the movements of customers, he will keep control of his goods until the customer has passed the counter without paying. Only when the customer has passed the counter in this example will it constitute shoplifting.

What is Shoplifting ?

... Continued

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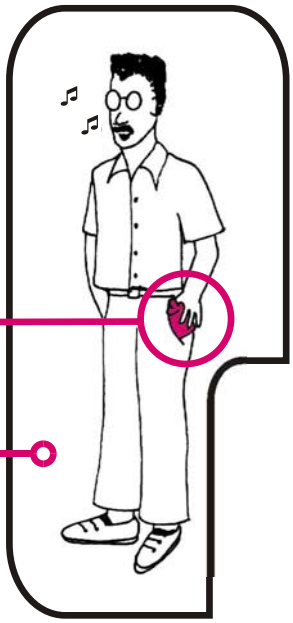
Ways in Which the Shoplifter Operates

4

By keeping the following scenarios in mind, it will help you to prevent customers from shoplifting goods from your store.

Scenario 1

Mr. Scoundrel walks towards the goods on display. When he thinks nobody is watching he quickly hides the goods on his person. He then strolls idly through the shop, pretending to look at other goods, and leaves the store without paying.



Scenario 2

Mr. Scoundrel and his brother enter the store together. His brother waits at the door while Mr. Scoundrel shops. Mr. Scoundrel walks past the counter to show his brother some goods he wants to buy and asks his brother's opinion whether he should buy them. When nobody is watching, his brother hides some of the goods on his person while Mr. Scoundrel returns the rest of the goods to the shelves.
They both then leave the store.

Scenario 3

Mr. Scoundrel takes some goods and puts them in the basket while hiding some other goods on his person. He pays for the goods in the basket at the counter and leaves the store.

Scenario 4

Mr. Scoundrel looks at some watches in the store. He puts one on his wrist without any attempt to conceal it and then leaves the store.

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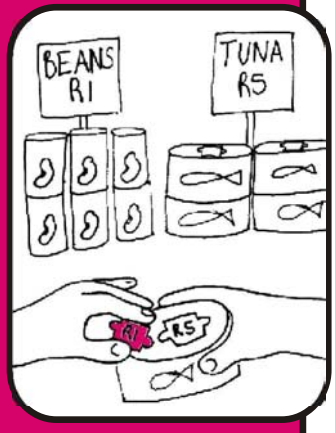
5 Ways in Which the Shoplifter Conceals Goods

An important element of shoplifting is the way goods are removed from the store without the shopkeeper knowing it. Bongani can help you recognize the various forms of concealment because many customers have tried to steal things from his store in the past. Shoplifters are very inventive and their ideas sometimes baffle him. Every time he thinks that there is no other hiding place, they figure out a new one. A few examples he came across are:

- Concealment of goods under clothing. This may be under the thief's jacket or in a pocket or even inside his socks when he pretends to bend down to fasten his shoelaces.
- Concealment of goods in handbags and briefcases when nobody is watching.
- Concealment of goods in bags or cartons from purchases made at other stores. They pretend that the goods in these bags have been bought at other shops.
- Concealment of more expensive goods in the wrappings of less expensive goods, for instance hiding a watch in a box of corn flakes. This type of concealment is called false wrapping.

Bongani also names ways of shoplifting without actually concealing the goods. This may seem strange but it is described as the most effective way to shoplift goods from stores.



- Wearing the goods in plain sight, for example where Mr. Scoundrel puts on the watch and pretends that it is his own.
- The concealment of the goods' actual price by putting false price tags on them. The labels may be fakes, or labels of less expensive goods may be placed on more expensive goods.

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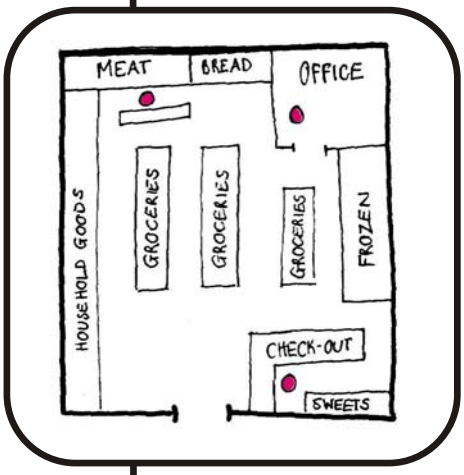
Prevention of Shoplifting

Bongani likes to show off his goods to his customers and would never want to lock them up where nobody can see them. However, he is worried about the items that are missing when he takes stock. Can it be his personnel? Sometimes yes, it could be, but mostly it is clients who do not pay for goods. How can he sell goods without displaying them to his customers? The only way to prevent shoplifting without damaging one's business is by taking preventative steps to keep shoplifting to a minimum.



Guards walking behind customers to make sure that they do not shoplift may be effective, but it will irritate the customers.

Bongani takes us to his office and shows us a chart of the layout of his store. On this chart he shows us how to make one's store safe against shoplifting. He explains the measures taken as follows:

- Each part of his store is divided into smaller departments. The biggest one is the grocery department. Each department has its own counter from which the cashier is able to view all the customers in that department. It is important that the shelves are placed in such a way that no part of that department is hidden from sight. You can also place your counter at the door and put information desks or checkpoints in each department.
- All the smaller items like sweets or cigarettes, or unwrapped edible goods like ham, are placed behind the counter and will be provided to customers when they ask for them. These are the items that are usually shoplifted.

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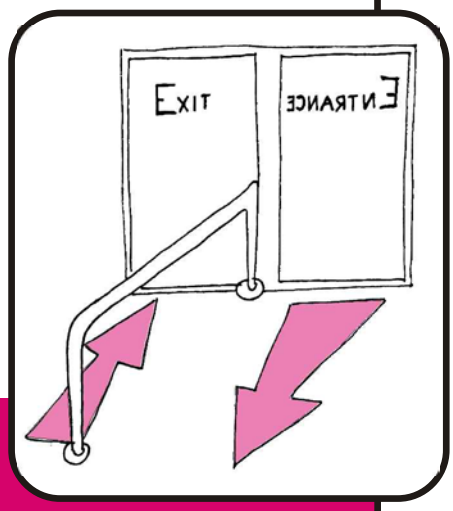

- A checkout counter may be placed at the door to check the purchased goods against the cash slip that the cashier gives to the client. Make sure that customers leave the shop through only one entrance for they love to sneak out the back door. An effective way of control is to use one entrance for customers to enter the shop and another entrance for leaving the shop.
- Do not place the restrooms in the sales area. It is a convenient place for customers to hide goods at their leisure. Rather place them behind the counter area.
- When clothes are taken to the fitting room, count the items customers want to try on. A big card with the number of items is usually given to the client on entering the fitting rooms and is checked against the number of items when the customer leaves.
- Real expensive goods like radios and cameras should be placed in display cabinets or fastened to the display unit itself by using iron restraints or chains.
- Surveillance cameras are the best way to prevent shoplifting but are very expensive. Placing mirrors at strategic points in the shop is also effective for it will help to monitor places hidden from the cashier.
- The display shelves can also be lowered in height because no shoplifter will dare to steal something in plain sight of other customers.
- A parcel counter will prevent customers from concealing goods in bags or briefcases.
- Make sure that there is always staff nearby that can look out for would-be shoplifters. Make sure the work schedule does not leave any opportunities for would-be thieves.
- Place your office in such a way that the whole store is in full view. Positioning your office higher than the shelves is a sure way of putting off would-be shoplifters.

Prevention of Shoplifting

... continued

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At the Counter

7

Bongani acknowledges that a lot of shoplifting is caused by the negligence of staff members. Effective control over goods passing the counter is very important.

Make sure that no item's wrapping is damaged as another item may be hidden inside. Exchange it for one with an undamaged wrapping. The client will also appreciate it.

Look closely at the price tags to make sure that it is the right price tag for the specific item. Printing the price tag or gluing the price tag on the wrapping prevents the swapping of price tags. Make the price tags unique so that it would be difficult to imitate or to switch them from one item to the other.

Using a price book to check on the price of an item when you are not sure about the actual price of goods is a safe way of eliminating pricing problems. Double-checking of prices may take long, but it is a safe method. Always rely on the principle of rather being safe than sorry.

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8

Dealing with Shoplifters

Although it is hard to control one's temper when apprehending a shoplifter, it is very important to always be discreet and polite. A rowdy scene may scare other customers away.

Approach the suspect and ask him politely if you may help him. Through his reaction you would be able to establish if he has been planning to steal something

Ask him to follow you to the office and contact the police immediately. Do not confront the shoplifter in front of other customers. If he wants to know why he should follow you to the office, tell him discreetly that you want to ask him some questions.

Openly confronting or accusing a shoplifter is never a good idea, even in the office. He may get violent, he may run away or if you have made a mistake he may sue you in court on grounds of defamation.

Make sure the goods the shoplifter has tried to steal, stay in the possession of the shoplifter and do not get displaced or are disposed of before the police arrive. The shoplifter will not be charged without the goods in his possession being evidence of the attempted shoplifting.

Inform the shoplifter of his crime, how he has concealed the goods and how you have caught him. Do not try to remove the stolen items from their concealed place.

Wait for the police to arrive and they will handle it from there.

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9 Actions that do not Constitute Shoplifting

Some actions performed by customers may never constitute shoplifting such as:

- Picking up property of customers that they have discarded
- When customers simply forget to pay
- When your goods have been priced incorrectly
- Intentional damage to goods and arson may be criminal affences but they do not constitute shoplifting.

10 People Regarded by Law as Unable to Shoplift

These people are not capable of committing any crime, for example small children or mentally handicapped people. Find out who the legal guardian of such a person is and explain the situation to the guardian. Remember to keep the person who has been caught shoplifting in your office until the guardian arrives. Confiscate the goods from the person with the help of the guardian and then leave the matter there. The guardian will handle the situation from this point onward. If you are not sure about the culprit's age or mental status, call the police and they will handle it from there. If you call the police, remember not to confiscate the goods from the culprit until the police have arrived.

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11

Assessment

1. What constitutes theft? Give your own example, explaining the elements of theft.

2. 'A person can only be apprehended for shoplifting when he has passed the counter'. Is this statement correct in all circumstances? Give a reason for your answer.

3. Mr. Scoundrel puts on a hat that is for sale, without concealing it on his person, and walks out of the store without paying. Has he committed the crime of shoplifting? In your answer, name a few ways in which shoplifters conceal goods on their person.

4. You open a new store in your neighbourhood, but you are concerned about shoplifting. Draw a map of your store and explain how you would safeguard your shop against would-be criminals.

5. How would you make sure that a customer does not shoplift when he wants to pay for some goods at the counter?

6. You apprehend a female customer who you know has concealed goods in her bag. She immediately begins to swear at you. How would you handle this shoplifter without scaring other customers away, until the police arrive?

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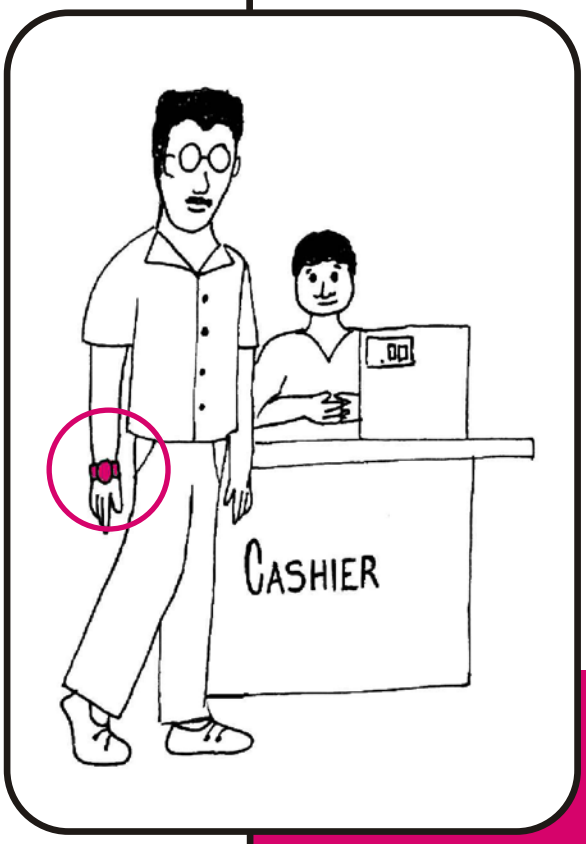
7. Describe what you would do if you catch a small child eating sweats he has picked up in your shop at the sweets counter without paying for it first.

8. Mrs. Khumalo walks out of the shop without paying for a comb that she has taken from the shop. She is really embarrassed and tells you she has forgotten to pay. You know she is a good customer and hasn't stolen anything from you before. Does her forgetting to pay constitute shoplifting?

9. Name a few actions that do not constitute shoplifting.



Assessment ... Continued

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