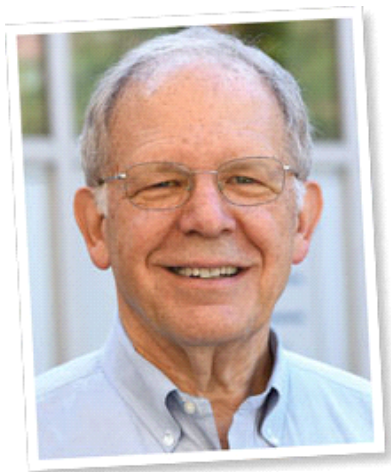


12/1/2020

Garden Center or Package Locker?

Bill McCurry



Bill McCurry

Dear Bill: My employees have their Amazon packages shipped here. Employees may want their boxes the instant the truck arrives, which disrupts operations. One employee's purchase was damaged. They thought we should reimburse them. Must employers operate a package receiving-and-storage business? Am I a hypocrite saying "shop local" when Amazon brings dozens of boxes into my store daily?

This month, I've invited past Young Retailer Winners and Finalists to respond to this timely question.

Debbie Foisy (2014—Deb's Greenhouse, Monrinvile, Alberta, Canada):

The issue is the team is using company time and space for exclusively personal things. We don't have a porch pirate problem here. My team doesn't get packages delivered here.

We do allow greenhouse space for our team to plant their own containers. I made it clear from the beginning there's no charge for the staff holding area. They plant on their own time, after shifts, days off, etc. It hasn't been an issue. They love popping in on their day off to plant their personal stuff.

I would discourage staff from getting packages delivered to the store. There needs to be clarification on what is company time and what is personal time. Employee personal items of any type should stay off-site. Shipping and receiving should be out of your customers' view no matter the source.

It could appear hypocritical to have Amazon boxes in your store. If your sign reads "Support local business," the people reading it are already supporting you. The sign should say, "Thank you for supporting local business."

Valerie Nalls (2015—Nalls Produce, Alexandria, Virginia):

Wow, great question! Having personal packages shipped to the workplace is more common as package theft rises. The employee's problem becomes a new problem for management.

No, I don't think it's necessary to operate a package storing-and-receiving business. I wouldn't entertain the idea of a fee for package handling. In a firm, but respectful, way, announce that shipping personal packages to the shop can

no longer occur. It has posed storage and liability issues while complicating receiving.

You expect a strong 2021. You need to streamline your processes while responding to the challenging 2020 and preparing for next year. You're the manager and it's absolutely in-bounds for you to do this.

Will you feel a little uncomfortable? Possibly. But you know it's the right move for your business or you wouldn't have identified the problem. To soften the blow, possibly consider hosting an Amazon locker yourself. It might become a great traffic driver for you.

Will Heeman (2016—Heeman's, London, Ontario, Canada):

We normally have between 50 to 140 amazing staff members. The team is what Heeman's is all about. If package delivery is important to our employees, then it's important to us. It's an employee perk.

We want to be supportive and if a Daymaker (what we call our staff members) can't receive a package because they're busy working, we want to make their life easier by accepting it for them. This is part of our larger receiving operation, so everyone knows what's expected.

We have a dedicated receiving person who has a process. When an employee package arrives, they're notified to retrieve it after their shift. No one abandons their shift to pick up a package. Sure, it's a small cost to the company, but we're happy to absorb it, especially for the convenience and peace of mind it gives our team members.

We do all we can to support our team. They support Heeman's. During the pandemic, our Google and Facebook reviews rose from 4.7 average to 4.8. Why wouldn't you do all you can to support a team like that?

Tanner Jones (2019—Colonial Gardens, Blue Springs, Missouri):

This hasn't been a problem yet. The question is when, not if. In the few instances this has happened, the employee politely retrieved their package from the receiving coordinator to ensure it was theirs and not for the company, then promptly took it to their vehicle and returned to work.

Set up a policy where employees can only come get packages on their break or shift's end. The receiving coordinator can handle up to a certain amount per employee per business day, and beyond that, each package will incur a certain amount in handling costs that we deduct from their paycheck. Better yet, spin it around and create a benefit for your employees. Set up a space for them to hold packages safely. Amazon isn't going away anytime soon; neither is porch piracy. With some balance, employees can feel valued knowing they can safely get their packages while management isn't seeing dollar signs flying off the dock in lost productivity.

Yes, it would look hypocritical to customers that you aren't shopping local when Amazon arrives. Many small businesses do sell through Amazon, but your customers will only see you support Amazon, not a small business. All deliveries and storage should be out of sight of customers.

Kim Gliha Mullen (2020—The Garden Barn Nursery & Landscape, Vernon, Connecticut):

This isn't an issue yet. If it was, I'd do my best to limit personal packages. I don't think it's fair for employees to ask for routine personal packages to be shipped to our store. Businesses shouldn't be expected to be a receiving operation for their employees.

If a company wants to offer this "perk," consider creating a policy that your employees understand. Include what's

allowed to be shipped to the business, times they can retrieve the packages, and if loss occurs, it's not the employer's liability. You have no idea what's in those boxes.

I never considered what customers may think about Amazon deliveries. Despite the ease of online shopping, seeing frequent Amazon vans unloading doesn't send a positive message to your patrons who are still shopping local. I wouldn't allow employees to ship packages to our store. **GP**

Bill would love to hear from you with questions, comments or ideas for future columns. Please contact him at wmccurry@mccurryassoc.com or (609) 688-1169.