The Accidental Bank Robbery

Topic: Commercial Bank Management Branch Management)

Characters: Chris, Management Trainee at Commerce Trust Bank
Carole Baker, Teller at Commerce Trust

Chris wasn't really pleased with his current assignment as a relief branch manager at Commerce Trust Bank, but it was a means to an end. Employed by the bank for almost two years as a branch management trainee, Chris desperately wanted to escape the training program and begin a career as branch manager. He had earned strong praise from his superiors throughout the training program, and Chris hoped this last phase of training would pass quickly and uneventfully.

As a relief manager, Chris took over all management functions in various Commerce Trust retail branches whenever the regular office managers were called out of town for more than one day. The relief manager's position was particularly challenging, because Chris was called upon regularly to make quick decisions regarding check cashing, small loan approval, and employee supervision when he knew few of the regular branch customers and little about the daily office routines. For assistance, Chris often relied on the judgment and experience of the senior tellers and customer service representatives within each office he managed.

One recent assignment was particularly difficult because Chris was called to work in a small suburban office staffed by relatively inexperienced branch employees. At the end of his first full day in the office, Chris was not surprised when one of the branch's young tellers, Carole Baker, reported to him that her drive-in teller window was $900 short. While Chris was accustomed to out-of-balance teller windows, Carole was not. She had just completed teller school the week before Chris's arrival at the branch, and as a probationary employee, she knew that an unresolved $900 shortage would lead to the termination of her employment with the bank. When Carole approached Chris for help, she was in a state of panic

Given his experience in retail banking, Chris reassured Carole that he would locate the $900 shortage from the transactions ledger maintained by Carole's computerized teller terminal. Sure enough, after reviewing Carole's ledger entries for only a few minutes, Chris spotted the error. Carole had received a check for $100 from one of the bank's regular depositors, incorrectly entered it into the computer for $1,000, and paid out $900 more in cash than the amount shown on the check.

Both Carole and Chris were relieved to locate the error, and even more relieved that one of the branch's best deposit customers was the unexpected beneficiary of Carole's error. Surely the customer pulled away from the drive-in window without realizing the mistake. When Chris phoned the customer to explain the bank's error, however, he was shocked when the customer reported receiving only $100 from Carole's window. Even when Chris mentioned that Carole would lose her job if the error could not be resolved, the customer steadfastly maintained that Carole had only paid $100 in exchange for the $100 check.

Hanging up the phone, Chris turned toward Carole, who was now in tears. In order to reconcile her window, Chris would have to report the $900 error on Carole's shortage report. While the source of the mistake was clear to everyone at the branch, the loss appeared unrecoverable. When Chris reported the shortage to the bank's personnel department, as he was required to do by the bank's branch operations policy, Carole would be fired. Wasn't there something he could do, Carole sobbed, to balance her window without reporting the $900 loss? What should Chris do now?

It occurred to him that since the customer who took the money maintained some accounts with the bank, he could debit one of the customer's accounts for the $900. Alternatively, he could place the $900 loss in a temporary suspense account to balance Carole's window and resolve the issue at a later date. Chris was unsure whether to take one of these options or perhaps do something else.

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