

## STEALING HAS NEVER BEEN EASIER

by David Knuckles

---

In March 2020, there was a nationwide concern for one thing and one thing only – *plastic bags*. Sure, protecting the Earth should be of the highest priority, but now, there is a giant loophole in the system. Way too much trust has been bestowed on the American people; in particular, the New York citizen, who is looking for any and every way to cut corners. Because, as Fran Lebowitz said of living in this city, “*No one can afford to live in New York. Yet, eight million people do. How do we do this? We don't know.*”

You know how we do it? We cut corners.

You used to be eyeballed if you brought your own bag into a particular store. Even told to leave it up front if it was a backpack or larger and you were of a certain suspicion. However, due to the ban of plastic bags, it's encouraged. While someone who is leaving their apartment specifically for groceries may stuff a reusable bag into their back pocket, it is unlikely New Yorkers would have an extra bag specifically for food when stopping by a grocery store amidst their day of running several errands. If not, customers are asked to either carry everything home with them or purchase a bag the store already has for them. And though a paper bag may only cost you five cents and a reusable around twenty-five, we are a people of principle, and why the hell would I pay for a bag at a grocery store?

The best way to beat the system is by bringing your own bag. One that is not a twenty-five cent grocery bag. One that allows you to shove a stalk of corn next to your crisp copy of Patti Smith's *Just Kids*, or throw some wet spinach on top of the newest edition of *The New Yorker*. Plenty of things that, as long they aren't sticking out, are none of anyone's business. Along with customers carrying around their own multi-purpose bags, they are expected to use shopping carts or baskets. But of course, that may not be necessary if it's only a few items. It in fact has been seen as acceptable to use the twenty-five cent shopping bag instead of the shopping basket to carry your items. *That being said*, it wouldn't be frowned upon if you used you're own multi-purpose bag to carry your items while you shop. And there we have our loophole. If anyone sees you do this, there's no hesitation; as long as you do it smoothly, knowing you are in the right – no one bats an eye. As long as your witness does not end up checking you out at the end of course, it draws ninety-five percent less suspicion than slipping something into your pockets. It's your bag, why wouldn't you use it to help carry items. That's your safety net. The beauty comes when no one see you. Then when you check out, you will have them outside your own bag (in hand or in basket). You will then purchase these items and put them into your multi-purpose bag, joining the secret items that sit there awaiting the others. For now, as long as they aren't sticking out, are nobody's business.

Buying something usually eliminates you as a suspect, while not doing so may do the contrary. But not if you're careful. You try and act as natural as possible for twenty feet. *But what is acting natural?* Whistling to yourself? In New York, natural is unnatural. Act anxious, talk to yourself. One thing that works is to look within yourself to try and figure something out. Look a bit puzzled, as if you're struggling to remember the shopping list you didn't write down. Or make a beeline out of the store as if they didn't have the exact ingredient you were looking for – that may be a good time to mumble to yourself, maybe squint as you're thinking of what other store might carry the item.

You will only be suspected of something if you have your hands in your pocket or you make eye contact. Or of course, someone saw you contemplating an item for too long, or god forbid witnessed the transfer. If you don't do those things, you won't even remind anyone of the idea of theft in the first place. You're a human exiting through an exit.

Also – self check out? Forget about it. No one is policing this device. And even if they were – *what happened?* — I was temporarily in charge and I don't work here, that's what happened. *How am I suppose to know what to do, how to run your machine?*

“Place the item in the bag.” You know how you beat the system – place the *items* in the bag. Don't overthink this one, no one knows what you just rang up.

There use to be a united way to shop. A cart, a basket – paper or plastic? But instead, while there may be suggestions, it's essentially up to you on how you want to spend your time in a particular store. Not only has the line between right and wrong blurred, but even more so, the correct way to go about right/wrong. There is no longer consistency, everyone's a little confused, a little wary about where to go next. There was a sign – *sure, well I didn't see it.* And that's okay, now you know. Act a little confused, laugh at yourself – blame it on your morning thus far. Verge on tears like an old lady if you think it fits you. The patron, store manager, cashier, and onlookers can all agree on the fact that stealing is technically *not correct*, but everything else is completely up for debate. Remember, while it's frowned up to steal, it's illegal to get caught.

And before I forget – department stores with a different checkout on each floor? Paying may as well be optional.