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## The stress of shopping in the bullseye universe

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RALEIGH - Holiday shopping can really wear you down. After gathering wish lists from both of my children (okay, I admit I helped the 14-month old with a few age appropriate choices), I combed through sale flyers and searched online for the best deals. Some retailers were even kind enough to send coupons meant to lure me to their store instead of the competition. So, lists in one hand and coupons in the other, I headed out early to avoid the hassle of shopping on the day after Thanksgiving. I'd done my research, I knew what I needed to buy and where to buy it, I had a full tank of gas and I was ready to roll!

I won't mention which mega chain I chose, but let's just say that they hit the bullseye with the items I needed. The Magnetix iCoaster, for example, is apparently what every little boy ages 6 and up wants this year because it was a real pain to track down. After several stops, I somehow found the last one on the shelf in North Raleigh and was tickled pink. I headed to the checkout with my trusty coupon in-hand and patiently waited my turn in line. I was excited to have the coupon because it gave me \$10 off a relatively high-priced toy. "Expires Nov. 21" is how the coupon read; I double-checked the date. It was November 21, the day before Thanksgiving, so I was golden. Or so I thought.

The cashier handed the coupon back to me and sneered, "You can't use this. This coupon is expired."

I checked the date again. "Today is the 21<sup>st</sup>, isn't it?" I flinched, believing for a second that I had lost an entire day somewhere.

"Yes, but this expires November 21<sup>st</sup>."

"Right," I answered, "so that means I can't use it tomorrow, because that will be the 22<sup>nd</sup>, and *then* a coupon dated the 21<sup>st</sup> will no longer be valid."

"We're not open tomorrow, ma'm. It's Thanksgiving."

"I realize that," I smiled, "but my point is that this coupon is still valid *today*, and I would like to use it *before* it expires."

"No, see you would have had to have used it by *yesterday*, because that was the day before the 21<sup>st</sup>, and the 21<sup>st</sup> is when the coupon expired."

My head began to hurt as I looked around in disbelief. I waited for someone to come running out and tell me I was being Punk'd, and then I asked to see a manager.

The manager scrutinized the coupon with a big frown on her face. "Yes, see this coupon is expired, but we'll go ahead and give it to her – as long as it's only one."

"One what?" I questioned.

"One coupon. You can't use the whole sheet. It's a glitch in the computer system. It's fine."

I was with her up through that point. Then she had to say it.

"It's expired. But it's fine."

"The coupon clearly says it expires November 21<sup>st</sup>. That's today. The coupon is still good through today. I used another at one of your other locations just this morning," I argued.

"And they took it?" the manager asked.

"Yes, they took it! They read the coupon, checked the date and had no problem."

The cashier and manager both seemed unconvinced.

"Okay, let me give you another example. If you go to Kroger to buy a food item *today* and present them with a coupon that says it expires *today*, they will honor that coupon all day long until they close and it is no longer November 21<sup>st</sup>."

Lost on the entire analogy, the cashier then looked at me with a completely straight face and replied, "I wouldn't know, ma'm. I don't shop at Kroger."

Sighing, I stood quietly and waited for the cashier to scan my coupon and total my purchases.

"Would you like the rest of the sheet back?" he obligatorily asked.

"No, thank you," I relented. "They've expired anyway."