

Cashflow

Tuesday, July 11, 2006

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CHRIS WINS WAR ON £4,000 OVERDRAFT CHARGES

AN angry dad who threatened to send in the bailiffs to shame a High Street bank over an unpaid debt has finally won his battle.

Abbey have coughed up £4,000 to Chris Leves after backing down over charges he brands illegal.

Chris, whose battle was exclusively revealed by Cashflow, said: "This is a victory for the man in the street against banks that overcharge



customers." Self-employed internet salesman Chris fought for six months to convince the bank their charges – such as £40 for going a few pounds overdrawn – were extortionate.

But the bank stood by their charges – until he went to court.

After a six-month fight, in which Abbey persisted in claiming the charges were legitimate, the bank finally backed down and repaid £4,000 they had taken from his account.

Bailiffs

At one stage Abbey failed to file a defence to the county court action and Chris won his case

automatically, giving him the right to notify bailiffs. But Abbey then insisted on a new court date.

Chris, 44, who has three children and lives with his partner Claire in Aldershot, Hants, wanted to force the bank to reveal in court exactly what it costs them when customers break the rules.

However, the bank settled before the case went that far. The decision

now opens the floodgates for a rash of claims from disgruntled customers who believe they are being ripped off.

Chris added: "Abbey was too scared to go to court in case they had to tell customers exactly how many millions of pounds they are skimming from customers' accounts."

Abbey refused to comment on their charges to customers.



By **CHARLES RAE**
Consumer Editor

MEET Bob the Bank Buster – the UK's newest consumer champion.

Bob Egerton is on a one-man crusade against greedy High Street giants and has recouped thousands for customers wrongly charged on their accounts.

He has had 100 per cent success in getting the banks to pay back the money since he began his FREE service 18 months ago.

Banking robber barons are quaking in their boots as Bob makes them repay money they have "stolen" from customers. He has won a total of £10,000 from banks, all of it going back to the cheated customers.

The 58-year-old says banks make millions from charging customers for making mistakes in their accounts but are "spineless" when threatened with legal action.

Bob has taken on the banks over charges made when people go overdrawn and cheques bounce. So far he has won repayments for customers of institutions including Abbey, Alliance and Leicester, Capital One, Nationwide and Yorkshire Bank.

Conspiracy

Bob, a former teacher who lives near Truro, Cornwall, got a law diploma at Plymouth University in 1996.

He said: "There is a conspiracy between the banks. They know they can make billions of pounds but won't step inside a courtroom because they know they will lose.

"Eighteen months ago I came across a young lady who was being charged by her bank and I said I was absolutely sure we could get the money back.

"Banks will publicly state charges are lawful. They say customers have agreed to the charges and that nothing can be done about it.

"But the moment the claim gets into court the banks have a very different attitude. They are not prepared to stand up in a public forum and present their case. They always settle

before it goes to court." Since he began his free service for debtors in need, Bob has taken on seven cases and received a payout in each one.

He said the Consumer Contracts Regulations of 1999 and common law do not allow one party in a contract to

penalise the other just to make money. He added: "It's something that has to continue to be addressed. The fact I have taken on banks seven times and won every time brings it to a point where you have to say the banks know the charges are unfair.

"The Office of Fair Trading has been trying to look at the problem but it is clearly under political pressure because the Government is scared of the banks.

"They need the business because of their political agenda. It's an absolute scandal."

Bob, an organiser for the Lib Dems, can be contacted at the website bankchargeshell.co.uk.

He said: "I do it completely as a hobby. I did think about doing it on a no-win, no-fee basis but when people win the cases they tend to need all the money they get back.

"There is a grave injustice being done. I want to play my part in rectifying the situation for the least well-off members of society to ensure they are not ripped off.

"It is very satisfying to win as justice has been done. People feel delighted to have won but equally they are disappointed it is left to individuals like me on a voluntary basis to rectify the injustice. Sometimes people could be just a few pence over their limit, which can snowball to hundreds of pounds of charges when they can't meet the minimum payment."

Contest

A spokesman for Alliance and Leicester said the company does not contest the cases because it would cost them more money than settling.

He said: "Basically the situation is that we can't get involved in defending these cases because it is not worth our while doing it. It's not in any way because the charges are unlawful."

One of Bob's cases involved Laura Saunders, of Penzance, Cornwall, who lost her job in January, 2004. Yorkshire Bank told her they were going to reduce her £500 overdraft by £50 a month until it reached zero.

Over the next ten months Laura desperately tried to repay the money but could not do it fast enough.

Each month the overdraft was reduced and she was left with a debit balance just over the limit. The bank charged her £8 a day each day she was over the limit plus £20 each month it happened.

Every time that Laura wrote a cheque or had a direct debit that put her past her new overdraft limit, the bank refused to honour the payment and charged her £33. In ten months Laura had run up charges that totalled £806

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