

Serve up some sales

Five ways to give your customers the service they deserve, by Dennis Reid

With the Christmas period just around the corner many of you may be waiting with baited breath for the shoppers to start converging upon your stores – and for good reason. This is the time when shoppers are in a buying mode. It's also the time when, in all the hustle and bustle of the season, salespeople sometimes forget or overlook some very basic customer service points, points that can not only increase your sales today, but throughout the rest of the year as well.

1. Satisfy every single customer

Can you honestly say that when there have been customers waiting that you have gone for the sale or gone the extra mile with every single customer? Each shopper that comes into your store represents an opportunity to expand the store's customer base. Take advantage of the increase in store traffic and give each customer your very best service.

2. Keep personal problems off the floor

This is a time of year when tensions and tempers can easily flare. It's not always easy to adjust your mood, especially if you had a flat tyre on the way to work and spent 20 minutes looking for a parking spot. The fact that your customer may have just gone through the same experience is all the more reason you must not let your personal problems affect you on the floor. The ability to perform well, regardless of problems, has always been a benchmark of the professional.

3. Don't congregate on the selling floor

There will be times, though hopefully few and far between, when you'll get a break from the constant flow of traffic and congregate with your co-workers on the floor.

We all know it's easy to get involved in a conversation with other salespeople. But that's not what you're there to do. When customers need help, they feel uncomfortable about interrupting salespeople who are obviously engaged in conversation. A group of salespeople standing around can intimidate many shoppers. A customer who is uncomfortable about interrupting your conversation may wind up feeling angry at being ignored and go elsewhere. You never want customers to feel that your conversations with fellow staff are more important than they are. In theory and in practice, the customer always comes first.

4. Acknowledge every customer

This is even more important when the store is busy. Every customer who walks through your door needs to be greeted in some way; at the very least a simple "Hello". Doing this conveys a friendly feeling to your customers and lets them know that you are aware that they are waiting. Even if you're occupied with something else, give your customers quick recognition while they wait for your full attention.

Noticing customers also has a beneficial side effect: it is the number one deterrent to theft in retail stores. When you make it clear that you have observed the presence of people who have come into your store, thieves will be inclined to go to find a store where they won't be noticed.

5. Never qualify customers

Did you ever judge a customer upon entering your store as someone who probably wouldn't buy, most likely couldn't afford to buy, or wasn't the 'type' to buy in your store? Have you ever dropped customers, only to have another salesperson sell them something? Sometimes it's difficult to look at customers without prejudging them.

However, your opinions must not affect the way you treat customers. While this is a year round problem, Christmas season amplifies it.

Although it may be easy to sometimes forget these points when you're busy, the true sales professional finds a way to satisfy every customer. Make the most of this selling season – may it be happy and prosperous!



■ Dennis Reid is a former international sportsman and Olympic coach and his philosophy about life is simple – play to win. He is the Chairman of Retail Performance Specialists, leading experts on improving retail sales and service performance. RPS runs regular Business Building Programmes for the photo retail industry – the next one starts on 23 and 24 November. Tel 0870 428 3200 for more information.

Top 10 prejudices by which you should never judge your customers:

1. Quality of clothing
2. Age
3. Gender
4. Foreign accent or language
5. Local accent
6. Race or religion
7. Mannerisms
8. Facial features
9. Weight
10. Hair style

You may be surprised at how many of those customers you thought could never afford even the least expensive camera in your store end up buying the most expensive!



Left: Christmas may be panto season but if customers came in dressed like this would you serve them or shout 'It's behind you' and ignore them? Be honest...