

Clothes May Make the Man, But Clothes Do Not Make a Customer!

By Anne M. Obarski

Clothes May Make the Man, But Clothes Do Not Make a Customer!

Anne M. Obarski
anne@merchandiseconcepts.com

Merchandise Concepts <http://www.merchandiseconcepts.com>

I've lived long enough to be "dressed up" and "dressed down", to remember bell-bottoms (the first time!) and disco tops and personally I can be seen in Ralph Lauren or in a sweatshirt from my kids school. I am a typical customer! I can carry my money and credit cards in a Fendi handbag or a fanny pack, and guess what, it all spends the same way. This reminds me of the memorable scene in the movie "Pretty Woman" when Julia Roberts was shopping on Rodeo Drive in shorts and a tee shirt and no one would help her. After a transformation with the help of Richard Gere, she walks back into the same store with tons of packages and mentions that the previous day they wouldn't even wait on her, and she leaves the store saying, "BIG MISTAKE, BIIIIIG MISTAKE!" I loved that scene because unfortunately, it is so true of how some companies treat their customers.

Our society is becoming more casual in the way they shop. Time is of the essence. Dressing up to go shopping is a thing of the past. As a matter of fact, I can be found shopping on the Internet or on one of the television shopping channels late at night in my pajamas! So why do sales associates continue to make assumptions about the customers buying potential based on their attire?

I'd like to share three recent shopping experiences. The first one happened to a secret shopper of mine. She had always done business with retail store that carried a line of women's suits and was thrilled when I asked her to "secret shop" this store. She said that she had purchased every time she was in the store and probably owned ten suits from this store. What fun! The difference in the next shopping trip was that she was not coming from work but from home and had decided to go very casual since she had just broken her foot and needed to wear casual pants to leave room for her cast. She was delighted upon entering the store to see her favorite associate who had always been so helpful. As she approached her, the associate looked the other way and never even acknowledged she was in the store. For that matter, none of the other associates offered their services. This "customer" was livid. She was ready to spend money but not where their opinion of her ability to purchase was based on her dress.

The second shopping experience I'd like to share is similar but happened to a neighbor of mine. Jack was in the market for buying a new car. Now this type of "shopping" for me is similar to having a root canal done. Jack had left work in casual dress and decided to stop in a local luxury car dealership. As soon as he walked in, the associate looked over and said, "Is there anything you WANT?" Want? As Jack proceeded to look around the showroom, the associate stood up and came over to Jack and stated, "You know, we don't have anything in this showroom for under \$30,000?" Jack calmly looked at the associate and said, "I'm glad that you told me that, I think I'll just keep my Mercedes!" Did this associate just lose a potential customer? You bet! And it just so happens I was looking for a new car at the same time! What were the chances I would stop in to

that dealership? You guessed it, NOT!

The last experience was one that I had in a local golf shop. It was my birthday and I was looking to replace my fairway woods. I have been playing for 17 years but I still feel intimidated when I go into a golf shop. I am never sure what to ask for and if someone will make assumptions about me as a "lady golfer". This time was different. A very lovely female senior associate was working that day and made me feel so at home. She asked what I was looking for and made many suggestions and had me "test drive" all of the clubs I asked about. She put duck tape over 10 clubs and gave me two huge buckets of golf balls to practice with to help me make my decision. She came out to watch, made just a few comments and was always there to answer questions. After an hour and a half, I purchased new clubs and new shoes all for the amount I was going to spend on one brand name club. After the sale was complete, she told me that she played competitively and she thought everything I bought would really help my game and she was looking forward to seeing me play on their team in the next couple of years. I left with the biggest smile on my face! I couldn't get out of the parking lot before calling my husband to relay the story of excellent customer service. Oh, and by the way, did I mention I belong to a ladies golf league in which I relayed this story when they saw how well I was doing with my new clubs? Repeat and referral business is the name of this game.

Statistics show that three out of four customers leave a store because of inattentive, impolite sales associates. What's worse is that unhappy customers can tell between 10 and 20 other people about their bad experience. And if that's not bad enough, 95% of unhappy customers won't even tell you what made them unhappy! Can you afford even one unhappy customer?

It could be a big mistake. BIG MISTAKE!!

Anne M. Obarski is the "Eye on Retail Performance". She is an author, professional speaker, retail consultant and Executive Director of Merchandise Concepts. Anne works with companies who are performance, profit and people focused and helps leaders see their businesses through their customers' eyes. Anne's mystery shoppers have secretly "snooped" over 2000 stores searching for excellence in customer service. Reach Anne at www.merchandiseconcepts.com or <mailto:anne@merchandiseconcepts.com>

Get-Articles.com : 1000's of reprintable business and internet marketing-related articles.

[Submit your article for reprint.](#)