

Smile, It's a Customer!

By Anne M. Obarski

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When I start to work with a new client who wishes to start a secret shopper program, I always ask some simple questions. The first question is "Why do you feel you'd like to have your store shopped?" Next, "What information would you like to gain from this shop?" Lastly, "Can you tell me what non-negotiable retail selling techniques are your associates required to do?"

That last question is usually the one that throws them. Usually, companies choose to do a secret shop because they want an unbiased opinion of their customer service. Second, they usually want to pin-point specific, "problems" that they already assume are happening. But when I ask about the "laws" that the company has in regards to providing stellar service to the customer, they stop dead in their tracks.

Many simple techniques have always been assumed and never taught. You would think that a simple greeting would be easy to "test", yet most managers have never taken the time to "spell out" exactly what is an excellent way to greet the customer and which is an unacceptable style of greeting. Your customer has 7 seconds to make 11 decisions about the sales associate that greets them. What would they say about your associates? Why not role play with your associates and see how easy it can be!

A greeting must be "simply" genuine. Recently I read an article in a local newspaper paper about a nationwide chain coming into my area. The article said that the company had interviewed 1700 people for 200 openings. Happy people who smiled a lot did best. Isn't that interesting? They didn't say the people who did best were those who could sell ice to an Eskimo or those who dressed in designer clothes but people who genuinely looked happy. The article went on to say that employees should say "hello" to anyone who walks by. "If they get that furrowed brow look on their head, we ask if they need help." They went further to say that the employees are supposed to take customers to the items they want, instead of just pointing out the correct aisle. To me that is genuine customer service.

Tami, a "Retail Snoop" from Cincinnati, Ohio says, " I prefer being greeted when I enter a store. It shows that employees are interested in selling something to me. When no one says "Hello" to me or even asks if they can help me with something, I won't buy from that store. "Retail Snoop" Laura, from Wausau, WI, however, says, " I would like to be acknowledged when I walk in a store and said "Hello" to. What turns me off is a fake "Hello", as if they are doing you a favor by saying it.

My findings frequently show that about 95% of customers still are not greeted upon entering a store. What is worse is that the customer may never be acknowledged the entire time they are in the store. How sad. A simple smile, with direct eye contact is what most customers are interested in. Mike, Retail Snoop, from San Antonio comments, "Just having a good and generally happy attitude can influence me and the amount, if at all, I purchase."

A simple genuine greeting is not hard to do but it needs to become a non-negotiable. And if

smiling is a problem, inform employees that they can find teeth whitening kits in most grocery stores!

Anne M. Obarski is the "Eye on Retail Performance". She is an author, professional speaker, retail consultant, and Executive Director of Merchandise Concepts. Anne presents keynotes, seminars and workshops nationwide. She 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 <http://www.merchandiseconcepts.com> or <mailto:anne@merchandiseconcepts.com>

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