



Clerks, Jerks, and Retail Pros

By Doug Fleener

One night as I was flipping channels, which is pretty much how I watch television, I stopped for a minute to watch Jeff Foxworthy do his trademark "You know you're a redneck" bit. Even though we don't have a lot of rednecks here in the northeast I still find him pretty funny.

Not that I equate salespeople with rednecks (except for back when I used to open outlet stores two hours from any city that served real Chinese food) but it did get me thinking about where retailers and rednecks intersect. So with apologies to Jeff Foxworthy, I present:

You know you're a Clerk, Jerk, or Retail Pro when. . . .

You know you're a *clerk* when you say, "How may I help you?" to practically every customer who walks in the door.

You know you're a *jerk* when you don't bother to listen to the answer.

You know you're a *retail pro* when you naturally engage the customer in a friendly non-threatening manner without using overdone clichés.

You know you're a *clerk* when you say, "Will that be all?" after you've already started ringing a customer's sale.

You know you're a *jerk* when you ignore the customer when ringing a sale. You firmly believe that telling co-workers about your big night or what you're going to have for lunch is more important than some poor slob giving you their hard earned money.

You know you're a *retail pro* when you only starting ringing up a customer after the sales process is complete. That is, of course, unless the sale started at the counter.

You know you're a *clerk* when you are unable to answer a customer's question about a product.

You know you're a *jerk* when you make up answers to questions. One word for retail people like that. . . karma.

You know you're a *retail pro* when you either know the answer or do your best to find it.

You know you're a *clerk* when you don't think to eat a mint after eating spicy food or smoking a cigarette.

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You know you're a *jerk* when you smoke on the sidewalk your customer walks by to enter the store. Hello??? Just because you're not in front of the store doesn't mean they can't tell by your uniform where you work!

You know you're a retail pro when you say something to the clerk or jerk.

You know you're a *clerk* when you fail to contribute ideas about how the store can improve.

You know you're a *jerk* when you say that contributing to the success of the store isn't your job. And then you wonder why you never get promoted.

You know you're a *retail pro* when you contribute ideas whether you've been asked or not.

You know you're a *clerk* when you don't care for your job but have no plans to leave.

You know you're a *jerk* when you tell everyone you don't like your job but never leave. Do your co-workers - not to mention your customers - a favor. . .leave!

You know you're a *retail pro* when you like your job. If you ever find yourself in a job you don't enjoy you find another good company to work for.

You know you're a *clerk* when you hate to sell.

You know you're a *jerk* when you tell people you're a salesperson but all you do is clerk a sale. Jumping in front of your co-workers to ring a sale is not selling.

You know you're a *retail pro* when you're proud to sell because what you do has a positive impact on customer's lives.

You know you're a *clerk* when you're annoyed your boss told you to read this.

You know you're a *jerk* when you think I'm a jerk. Actually sometimes I am a jerk so I'll rephrase this. You know you're a jerk when you think I'm a jerk because you've just realized that maybe you've been more of a jerk* lately than you realized.

** In truth I doubt you're really a jerk. But it rhymes with clerk and I was hoping to get people's attention. Then again, there are jerks who work retail. Think about it.*

You know you're a *retail pro* when you can read a article like this and see what you do well as well as areas you could still improve.

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About the author: Doug Fleener is a veteran retailer with over 25 years of hands-on retail experience with world-class retailers including Bose Corporation and The Sharper Image. He has also owned and operated his own specialty stores. In his ten years at Bose, Doug grew the Retail Direct Group from four to 100 stores and was instrumental in developing Bose's unique and engaging retail methods.

Doug is now president and managing partner of Dynamic Experiences Group LLC, a Lexington, MA based retail and customer experience consulting firm dedicated to helping retailers improve their customer experiences that results in higher sales and profits.

Fleener is the author of the book *The Profitable Retailer: 56 surprisingly simple and effective lessons to boost your sales and profits*. He is a frequent speaker around the world on retail issues and his insights has been covered in leading business media including *The New York Times*, *Entrepreneur*, and *Shopping Centers Today*. Along with partner Matt Norcia they write the popular retail blog *Retail Contrarian*.

Doug lives in Lexington, Massachusetts with his wife and two daughters, where in his free time he barbecues while listening to Jimmy Buffet music.

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