

Engaging Lines

The other day I was talking with a participant in one of my seminars about teaching employees how to engage customers when they first came into the store. She didn't think her employees wouldn't be willing to do it, but that they didn't know how. It was an interesting conversation and afterwards I realized that it's frequently easier to tell people what not to say than what to say. Every customer who comes into your store should be welcomed. The best way to welcome a customer is very simple: say "Welcome." What comes after that depends a little more on who the customer is, how many of them are together, and other variables like are carrying bags, their ages, etc. With that being said, here's my best shot at what you may and should not say.

Here are some lines you can use on the customer after you welcome them:

"Is this your first time in the store?"

I like to know this information because my response is based on the answer. If they say "no" then I give them the 10 or 15-second speech on what makes this store different. If they say "yes," then I welcome them back and tell them I appreciate their return visit. I might also ask them if they have purchased from us and if so, what they bought.

"Looks like you're enjoying your day. Finding any great sales?"

This, or a version of it, works when someone is carrying a large number of shopping bags. We love customers carrying shopping bags.

"How's the weather outside?"

This question works well for stores in enclosed malls. You look pretty stupid asking that question if you can look out the window and see for yourself. In those cases a general comment on the weather works well.

"You kids enjoying yourself?"

Obviously, you don't use this on two adults walking in the store unless you're really, really old. It is a good line for children. Don't be offended, though, when the response is either "no" or no answer at all. You can then offer them something to do to get them excited about being in the store as well as freeing up the parent(s) to shop. You do have something for kids to do in the store, don't you?

Here are some things you should not say when a customer enters the store:

"Can I help you?"

I always want to reply, "Well, the prison psychiatrist didn't have any luck but let's give it a try." Everyone says this, so why should someone in your store add his voice to the chorus? I would almost consider it grounds for dismissal.

"How's it going?"

Whenever I'm asked this by a retail employee I want to say, "Fine. Just like it was when 43 other retail associates asked me the same question today." This line is so unoriginal and overused it should be outlawed.

"Can I answer any questions?"

"Sure." I respond. "Why is there Braille on a drive-up ATM machine?" This one is probably more overused than "How's it going?" Kill it!

"What's up, guys?"

I never forget the time that I saw a Bose store employee say that to a couple, neither of whom could have been under 85 years old. I found it offensive. Maybe it's a generational thing, but unless you're addressing two or more men (and they're considerably younger than 85) I don't think "guys" is the right word. And if we're going to wait on them, why do we need to know what is up anyway?

"Do you really think a 55 year-old woman should be wearing that outfit?"

Only say this if you want to draw unemployment for a while or go out of business.

If you have any more favorites of what to say or not say, send them my way. Have a great day!

About the author: Doug Fleener is founder of the Dynamic Experiences Group. He is a veteran retailer with more than 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. His new book, *The Profitable Retailer: 56 surprisingly simple and effective lessons to boost your sales and profits* published by Acanthus Publishing is available at www.theprofitableretailer.com or at Amazon.

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Fleener also shares his knowledge of experience based retailing in a series of custom key notes and workshops designed for stores, businesses, corporations, non-profits, and trade associations of all sizes. His casual style and quick wit make him not just a crowd pleaser but also an incredible motivator, encouraging people to take action and deliver extraordinary experiences to customers and employees alike. Learn more at www.dougfleener.com.