

For The Assistant Manager

All of us who have risen through the retail ranks have been in your position. I always say that the assistant manager's position is by far one of the most difficult in retail. You don't have as much say in policies as you'd like, you're expected to maintain standards, and you have some management duties but a lot of what you do is the same as the rest of staff. You're a tweener, stuck in no-person's land between staff and management. You often feel underappreciated for what you do, no matter how hard you work. I know, because I've been there.

What I've learned through the years is that the stronger the assistant manager is, the better the store. Here is what I've seen winning assistant managers do that improves the overall store performance as well as prepares them to be successful store managers.

1. The standards of the store never change, whether the store manager is on duty or not. When I worked for The Sharper Image the company dictated what music could and could not play in the store. I discovered once that my assistant manager bent that rule when she was manager on duty. While it looked like a small thing, and the employees liked listening to their own music, the assistant actually was losing her credibility with the staff. They learned from her that when she was on duty, the rules didn't apply. Over a period of time the customer feedback and mystery shops were lower when she was manager on duty than when she wasn't. After I coached her about why it was important for her to maintain standards to maintain her position, the store improved and the staff had more respect for her. After the grumbling of having to go back to the standard music, of course.

2. Winning assistant managers never have "off the record" conversations with the staff. As an assistant manager you represent the company in every conversation with employees and customers alike. I'm sorry to admit that I didn't always follow this when I was an assistant manager. Often I wanted to show the employee how much I was "in the know" and that yes, I was a mover and shaker. Actually I wasn't a mover and shaker, I was a gossip. Even worse, I was a gossip in a position of power. Successful assistant managers know that what's talked about behind closed doors, stays behind closed door and all conversations are on the record.

3. Last but not least, the best assistant managers know that being a leader isn't about a title; it's about leading by example. It's about going first. It's about having the drive and passion to be the best at engaging the customer, the best at making sales, and the best at delighting the customer. It's about being the best so others can learn from you, not about pride and ego. It's about asking others to role play with you and you play the associate or rep first and the associate plays the customer. It's about being as good as student as you are a teacher. It's about being a winning assistant manager and knowing your time will come.

It's not surprising that I have found that the best store managers were terrific assistant managers. They learned to master the "tweener" position, they learned to lead, and most of all, they learned to learn. So let me ask, what have you learned today, what have you taught today, and most of all, what have you done to lead by example?

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.

Doug is now president and managing partner of Dynamic Experiences Group LLC, a Lexington based retail consulting firm dedicated to helping retailers create unique customer experiences that results in higher sales and profits. Learn more at www.dynamicexperiencesgroup.com or call Doug at 866-535-6331.

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.