



The 3 P's of the Engagement

By Doug Fleener

One of the differences between average and GREAT specialty retail associates is the ability to comfortably and effectively engage the customer.

No, I'm not talking about the person who walks up and asks how they can help someone. I'm talking about the associate who can create an immediate and effective relationship with a customer.

These are the three P's of Customer Engagement that GREAT associates execute so well:

1. They are Personable - They're comfortable approaching and addressing customers. It doesn't matter if the associate's personal style is energetic or laid back; **they're friendly, outgoing, and good conversationalists.** I've never forgotten the time I realized I'd made a mistake in hiring someone. When, after this woman been with us for about two months, I pulled her aside to discuss her performance she told me that she hated talking to people. When I asked her why she worked in retail she said that even though she hated it, it paid well. Needless to say, she did not remain our employ very long after this conversation. **GREAT associates like talking with people.**

One thing I hear from time to time is that associates don't believe they can "be themselves" when asked to work within a structured approach to engaging the customer. I don't agree. **I see a structured approach as critical to a specialty retailer's success.** To me, such an approach is a roadmap. It guides the associate through the expected customer experience but he/she is still at the wheel.

Structure should have no bearing on how personable someone is with a customer.

2. They make it Personal - Unlike associates who approach all customers the same way, **GREAT associates relate individually to each customer.** They are truly interested in the person they are engaging. **They know that the more personal the experience, the more productive their time spent with the customer will be.** Even that is not quite enough, though. GREAT associates seem to enjoy that personal connection as much as the customer does. **They create a relationship.** It's no wonder that these are the same employees customers come back and ask for time and time again.

3. They engage with Purpose - **Every conversation with a customer should be undertaken with purpose and a desired result in mind.** Consider the initial small talk when a customer first enters the store. That initial non-sales related conversation helps breaks down barriers that naturally exist between customers and retail associates. It's almost like a verbal decompression that needs to happen before the customer and associate relationship to form. Many retail associates skip this small but important step and as a result they struggle to initially engage the customer.

GREAT associates use the initial small talk to begin learning about the customer. They can discover if it is the first time the person has been in the store, what they might already own, the occasion that brings them out shopping, their

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name, and on and on. **If a sale takes one hundred steps, they're ten steps closer after that initial conversation.** (By the way, that's a metaphor and not an endorsement for 100 steps to a sale.)

Every question is asked for a reason. Every answer from the customer is used to determine either another question or a comment. It's also used to determine which product or products to show the customer. **It's almost like a chess game - except both the customer and the employee are on the same team.**

As you work with customers this weekend ask yourself if you are nailing the three Ps - being Personable, Personal, and Purposeful. If you are, you're sure to add another two Ps - Productive and Profitable!

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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