

The 4 Habits of Highly Effective Retail Associates

By Doug Fleener

1. They assume each customer is in the store to buy something.

Probably one of the biggest mistakes retail employees make is assuming that a customer who walks into the store will *not* buy something. Obviously, not every customer who walks into your store will buy something. If that were the case then either you're not generating enough traffic or you are one of the most incredible salespeople on the planet. If you have products and/or service that enhance people's lives, and the people who come into your store can use your products and/or service, then why would you not assume they are going to buy something? Doesn't your customer deserve it? Assume they'll buy and you'll see an immediate increase in your sales. Just don't ever say what a retail employee actually said to me the other day, "Can I answer questions or are you just looking?" You'll be happy to know I resisted the temptation to use my smart aleck answer to the "can I answer any questions" approach.



2. They create relationships with every customer.

When I was a manager at The Sharper Image I had an incredible salesman named Jeff. Jeff's big claim to fame was that he could sell extended warranties on ties. Ties! He could be the most annoying man. Some customers couldn't stand him but most of the time customers did like and trust him. Once they bought from Jeff they would always ask for him when they returned to the store. He wasn't a particularly warm person. He was actually somewhat pushy. But he was awesome at developing a relationship with every single customer he worked with. He wasn't shy about asking the customer his name and then using it. He would ask questions and then tell the shopper what to buy. Jeff could tell you more about his customers than you ever wanted to know. I think the customers could do the same about Jeff. The man saw every person who walked in the door as an opportunity to build a relationship and sell a product.

3. They are comfortable asking the customer questions.

When working with retailers we find that most retail associates are good at welcoming the customer and then making some type of small talk to begin to build the relationship. It's the next step, that transition to asking customer qualifying questions, that so many associates struggle with. They're fearful of seeming pushy or overly sales like. Watch some top producing associates and you'll find that they make the transition effortlessly. The trick is to ask some questions during the small talk that helps you learn something about the customer. Ask questions that are natural to ask someone who has obviously made the effort to come into your store. "Is this your first visit?" "What do you own?" "What do you enjoy?" The questions are always about the customer. People love to talk about themselves. Sure, there are people who want to be left alone but if questions are asked warmly and with a genuine interest then most people will answer. Transition questions enable the top producer to determine what next steps to take. Based on the customer's answers and body language they may continue to ask questions, or they might stop asking questions and invite the customer to look around the store.

If they continue to ask questions, they're questions that help the employee to determine the right product or service that meets the customer's needs or wants. Top producers know that if they don't ask good qualifying questions, all they are doing is showing products.

4. They help the customer make the purchase. They know that their role is to not only help match the customer with the right product but to help the customer complete the purchase. Sometimes they need reinforcement that the product they are about to purchase really does meet their needs. They might need to be reassured that if it doesn't, they can return it. Sometimes they just need to be reminded that they deserve it. Regardless of how it's done, the top performing associate knows that her job isn't done until the sale is completed.

So let me ask, what sort of retail associate are you? What sort of retail associates are the people who work for you?

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.com.

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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.