



Speaking the Language of Sales

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What you say and how you say it has a direct correlation with whether the customer buys, what they spend and whether they choose to come back again.

RETAILERS IN EVERY INDUSTRY need to understand the positive correlation between increased services and increased sales. Transferring the enthusiasm of the product into the mind and heart of the consumer while providing top-notch customer service will, in turn, increase profits.

How do you do it? The first 10 seconds of the initial acknowledgement between sales professional and the consumer — what you say, your expression, your body language — is vital. Believe it or not, within that short time period, the consumer's opinion of the sales professional and the shop is established.

Making the Approach

As soon as the door opens, make eye contact with the customer. Unless you're helping another customer, get out from behind the sales counter or furniture — extend yourself both physically and emotionally. Keep in mind, however, that everyone has his or her own parameters for "personal space." Take a tiny step forward and, if the customer backs up, stay where you are. Let them choose the distance.

Body language says so much more than most people realize — in fact, 7 percent of communication is verbal; 38 is determined by the pitch and tone of your voice. A whopping 55 percent is actual body language. Some things to remember:

- Do not hold your arms across your chest; instead, relax

— and (at the risk of sounding like your mother) stand up straight!

- Maintain eye contact.
- Give consumers your full, undivided attention — and don't fidget.
- Listen and laugh when appropriate.
- Show enthusiasm.

The Opener: Tell, Don't Ask

As the consumer observes you, you need to observe them, categorize them and develop your opening statement.

Customers like sales professionals who are warm and friendly, cordial, laugh easily, make them feel good about themselves and project a positive attitude. Treat consumers with dignity and respect, look and act sincere and, most of all, pay attention to their needs.

Adopt a friendly greeting policy that requires sales professionals to greet consumers quickly. Stop being too busy to serve them. You are never too busy. Treat customers as if they were guests in your own home. Imagine you are creating life-long friends and want to elevate their confidence level in you. Here's specifically what that greeting should look and sound like:

Start with a slow, gradual smile, and deliver a warm greeting ("Good morning," "Good afternoon," etc.).

Don't ask a question, such as "May I help you?" Instead, make a comment, such as, "It's nice to see you in our shop." (If you know their name, then, of course, use it.)

Try some icebreakers, if you don't know the customer: Talk about the weather ("Can you believe this heat/cold/



rain/snow?”), pay them a compliment (“That’s a beautiful shade of green you’re wearing,” “What a great-looking bag,”) or make a comment on a product they show interest in (“We fell in love with that when we saw it in New York,” “That’s one of my favorites,” “We just got those in from a fabulous rose grower in California,” etc.). But don’t fake familiarity — consumers are cynical about motives.

Once you have greeted the customer, be prepared to address questions or concerns. A few tips to remember:

Don’t evade questions. Be honest and direct. Don’t exaggerate. Consumers are educated and immune to “the first,” “the best” or “the biggest.” They demand knowledgeable information and expect to have all their questions answered.

Focus the sales message on the need, present the benefit and uniqueness of your products and business and provide the evidence to back up your statements. Create the desire and focus on the emotions of the reason for the sale.

When Customers Get Impatient

You should have enough staff — and the proper systems in place — to be able to serve customers; however, even in the best shops, customers sometimes have to wait. There’s a way to handle those situations without frustrating the customer.

If you are assisting a customer and another customer appears impatient, acknowledge the impatient customer with a friendly greeting, like, “Please feel free to step into the cooler for a

Say the Right Thing

Follow these tips to ensure your shop’s service-friendly philosophy is reflected not only in you and your staff’s overall demeanor, but also in what they say. In addition to the age old (and ever-important) customer service axioms, such as “the customer is always right,” there are many subtle techniques for phrasing things that go a long way toward satisfying and impressing customers.

Never say to your customer...

Always say...

“I don’t know.”

“I’ll find out.”

“What’s your budget?”

“Is there a budget I should be aware of?”

“Is \$40 okay?”

“We have three lovely options, beginning at 40.”

“We can’t deliver this today.”

“We will have this delivered as early as tomorrow.”

“I can’t”

Lead off with good news. When telling bad news, literally lower your voice.

“But...”

“Of course we can get it there tomorrow morning. Our service fee is \$XX.”

That will be “150 dollars.”

“That will be 150.”

“We’re not open yet.”

“Come on in!”

“I’m too busy right now.”

“I will call you back within the hour.”

“Why did you do that?”

“I’m sorry. I’m not sure I understand. Can you please explain the situation again?”

“It’s not my fault.”

“I apologize. How can I fix this?”

“I’m not allowed to do that” and “It’s not my job.”

“I want to make this situation right. It may take some research. May I get back to you?”

“Hold on” (phone sales)

“May I put you on hold for about 20 seconds?”

“I’ll have to speak to the manager about that.”

“I can help you with that request.”

“I can’t promise you anything.”

“If white gerberas aren’t available, may I substitute xxx?”



closer look, and I will be with you shortly,” or, “Help yourself to some refreshments while I finish up, and I will be with you momentarily.” Of course, the best course of action is always having another sales professional available to assist waiting customer. As a last resort, ask your current customer if you may assist the other customer as he or she looks around and then take care of the impatient customer.

If you are assisting a customer and the phone rings, your number one concern is the customer you are assisting. If you are comfortable, ask the customer if you may take the call; ask the caller if you may return the call shortly. Finish assisting the customer and immediately return the phone call.

The alternative is to let the call go to voicemail — something small shops should have in place for those rare occasions when you’re not able to stop what you’re doing to answer the

phone. Don’t ever let the phone ring and ring endlessly — this is annoying to customers in the shop and aggravating to the customer on the phone. Your business hours voicemail might say, “I’m sorry, we’re assisting a customer and we’re unable to get to the phone in time — please leave your phone number and we’ll call you back within 10 minutes.” Then, keep your promise and return the call promptly.

Phone Sales

In many shops, phone sales are the lifeblood. Make it easy for consumers to call your shop. List your shop phone number everywhere. Make sure your number is easy to remember. When talking to consumers on the phone, use these tips to improve your sales technique:

Quick face-check. Place a mirror by the phone, so you can make sure you have a pleasant expression — it

Joyce Mason-Monheim, AIFD, PFCI, and Professional Floral Communicators International (PFCI) will present “Speaking the Language of Sales and Service,” at the 2007 AIFD National Symposium in Palm Desert. For more information, visit www.safnow.org.

will be reflected in your voice. Don’t ever transfer your bad day onto the caller. Before you answer, take a deep breath and release it.



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Smile while you speak. Slowly, but enthusiastically, say your shop name and identify yourself. Focus: talk only to the caller. Don't offer one-word, "yes" and "no" answers — answer in a friendly manner, in complete sentences.

Ask before holding. If you have to put them on hold, ask permission first, and don't keep them on hold for more than about 20 seconds. If it needs to be longer, let the consumer know you will call them back and when — and be sure to do it promptly (within the hour), or have someone else do it. If you leave a message, state your number at the beginning and end of the call. And be sure to thank them in the end.

If you have an automated phone sales system, make it easy to reach a real person. Plan your recorded hold message, and keep it updated. If you don't offer a 24-hour answering service, then after-hours messages should provide information such as your Web site address, store hours and an emergency contact number.

Your Attitude

Remember: The more shopper-employee contact, the greater the average sale. Show customers and employees that you enjoy what you do. Mimic the consumer's pace and listen for needs and objections. Please customers. Don't let personal problems seep through a positive attitude.

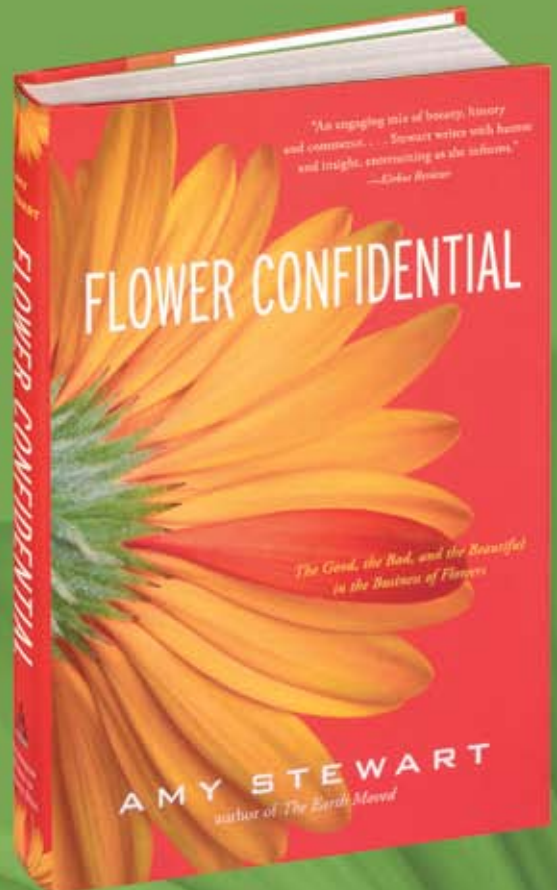
Hire nice, friendly personnel with personalities that are trainable, friendly, perky, excited and passionate. Observe your best employees and examine their traits. Even with no openings, watch for these people and take their application. Set a model behavior pattern yourself. Customer service is everybody's job, so talk every day about the importance of your customers to your staff. 🌸

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