

READY, SET, TYPE

I have staff members who don't or won't use my POS system and take their orders on paper, and it drives me crazy. Help! PHYLLIS REGA | PHYL'S FLOWERS | STRATFORD, CONNECTICUT

Technology is a great thing — when you use it. I can't begin to count how many staff I have met over the years who for one reason or another don't use the store's technology or use it passively, taking the order on paper and then entering it after the sale is complete. Both of those situations drive me crazy, and I'm sure they drive you crazy, too. But why does this happen?

Because you, owners and managers, let it happen! Yes, you have staff of a certain age who claim they're too old to use technology. My 72-year-old mother would disagree, in an email! And please don't buy into that hokum of "I'm a creative person, I can't be bothered to learn that stuff." Even prima donnas can learn to type!

So how do you get them typing without drama? Here's my three-step plan for welcoming your tech-phobic staff into the 21st century!

Have the Talk

Pull your keyboard-fearing staff aside and have a very practical conversation with them about the situation. Explain that you are paying a monthly fee for the entire store to use the technology, and if they are not using the software, you're not getting your money's worth. Here are a few points to make before your staff member starts rattling off his or her excuses for grabbing a pen instead of a mouse:

1. Writing instead of typing actually take twice as long, pulling down your collective productivity.
2. Scribbling credit card numbers on paper is *extremely* dangerous (and possibly illegal in some areas). Explain how the POS system safely encrypts the credit card, protecting the customer and the store.
3. That piece of paper cannot tell what the customer's average sale is or show their previous shopping history. So taking an order on paper is a conscious decision to lower the service level for your customers.

4. Writing an order instead of typing it dramatically increases the likelihood of mistakes. (I have yet to meet a piece of paper that will alert me to a misspelling or add extra charges for a timed delivery.)
5. When you take payment on paper, you cannot process it until after you've hung up. If the card is declined, you have to call the customer back — a complete waste of time (and so easily avoidable... by using the POS system).

SET THE GOAL

Once you have substantiated just how bad order-taking on paper is for customers and the store, you must explain that change is needed. Tell your keyboard-fearing team that they will be taking orders on the POS system *and* you are going to give them the easy tools, support and a realistic timeline (six weeks is doable) for reaching that goal.

Give Them the Tools

Google "Mavis Beacon Teaches Typing," a great, inexpensive program designed to teach adults basic keyboarding skills. Install it on your PC and instruct staff that you will give them 15 minutes a day to go through the exercises. If their hang-up is not the keyboard but instead keeping up with customers, empower them with language by reminding them that it's perfectly fine to tell a customer, "Bear with me, I'm new

on the computer, so I appreciate your patience." Then do some role-playing — you be the customer and call in with an order. And remember to celebrate their progress from paper to keystrokes!

Final bit of tough love: Could your staff member start working at Target or Walgreens and say, "Sorry, I don't use the computer!" Heck no! But why do they get away with it at your shop? 🐼



Tim Huckabee is founder and president of FloralStrategies. Since 1997, Tim and his team have provided sales and customer service

training at the best flower shops around the world, empowering management and staff to engage customers in exciting new ways. tim@floralstrategies.com

Got a sales or service challenge? Tell Tim about it, and he'll tackle it in an upcoming column. Email tim@floralstrategies.com, or call him, (800) 983-6184.

Cheat Sheet

Don't Say:

You can just take your orders on paper.

Do Say:

We all have to take orders on the system. Let me help to make you comfortable with the process.

LISTEN IN as Huckabee makes Mother's Day calls to unsuspecting florists, May 1 at 1 p.m. EST. Not available? Sign up anyway: You can access the webinar and train your staff all month long! www.safnow.org/webinars-education.



The Call

SCENARIO: Underwhelmed customer
SHOP: Flower shop in Hartford, Conn.

EMPLOYEE: Good morning. Flower Shop.
TIM: Hi. I'm sorry, I didn't catch your name.
EMPLOYEE: It's Kathy. How can I help you?
TIM: Hi, Kathy. I want to send birthday flowers to my daughter.
EMPLOYEE: Sure. What were you thinking about?
TIM: I'm not really sure. She's an artist, so I definitely want something unusual. Can you do that?
EMPLOYEE: No problem. I'm just going to type that on the order.
EMPLOYEE: Do you have a budget in mind?
TIM: Not really, I just want something nice. What do you recommend?
EMPLOYEE: We can definitely do something unusual, starting at about \$60, \$70...

I went for the \$70 option. Kathy continued to take the order and got all the pertinent information from me, including my email address.

👉 Kathy was friendly and captured my email address, so I got a confirmation from the shop, describing the item as "an unusual birthday arrangement for an artist."

👉 Kathy did not give me even a hint of what the arrangement might look like. Kathy undersold me, underserved me and "underheard" me!

Although this scenario sounds very familiar (be honest, would you or someone at your shop have handled it much differently?), this is actually a horrible travesty of customer service. Kathy didn't take an order, she actually pulled the pin on a customer service grenade — and a big, messy explosion (i.e., a disappointed customer) is inevitable!

The Fix

Customer service grenade? Yes, Kathy laid the foundation for a potentially explosive situation because she used what I call a soft adjective instead of a hard one on the order.

Avoid Soft Adjectives

Words such as unusual, dramatic and special are the trouble-makers. They're what I call soft adjectives (along with a few others: different, funky, dramatic, whimsical, elegant, glamorous, casual and traditional). If you've ever been on the receiving end of the following phrase, the soft adjective is the culprit: "I told her I wanted it to be unusual — and I could have bought this at a grocery store!" and the ever-favorite, "If someone just told me that I needed to spend more to really get what I want, I would have!" Soft adjectives can be interpreted by in many different ways — inevitably, not in the way the customer expected. When the designer goes to fill my daughter's order for something "unusual," she'll have to take a wild guess. Chances are she will miss the target, leaving me underwhelmed or disappointed.

Embrace Hard Adjectives

These words are your buddies: Tall and linear, fragrant, low and compact, with or without branches, bright and vivid, soft pastels. They don't lock you into a particular product, but they leave no room for interpretation between what the customer is expecting and what the designer creates. Using words such as these ensures complete satisfaction and reinforces your position as the true floral expert.

Conversion from Soft to Hard

When a customer asks for something unusual or different or funky, you need to convert that soft adjective to a hard one by digging a bit deeper to find out what they envision:

- "Let's talk more about what you mean by *unusual*."
- "When you say *something different*, do you mean color scheme, design style or both?"
- "I want to make sure we're sending exactly what you expect. Let's define *funky* together, so I can communicate that to the designer!"

Bottom line

At your next store meeting, make a list of hard and soft adjectives. Discuss what they are and how to deal with them professionally!

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Register for the very first FloralStrategies design webinar with Jackie Lacey, AIFD/AIFSE, on May 15 at www.fsw1404.eventbrite.com

I DO!

How can we turn more consultations into paid weddings?

SAL GRECO | OWNER | WALLINGFORD FLOWER SHOPPE | WALLINGFORD, CONNECTICUT

Ah yes, the runaway bride. Many florists lament the time and energy spent sitting with brides, only to never hear back from them. Frustrating? Yes. Fixable? Definitely! The first step is to eat some humble pie and get over the idea that your designs, ideas and prices dazzle every bride. It just doesn't work that way. But you do have more control over the conversion process than you realize.

Follow Up (Duh)

At an SAF conference a few years ago, a florist in my workshop said she was only converting 50 percent of her bridal appointments. I asked what I thought was the obvious question: "How and when do you follow up with them?" She looked at me doe-eyed and shrugged, explaining that she never followed up. I bit my lip and explained that she was letting business slip through her fingers. Brides often meet with more than one florist and are planning many other aspects of their big day. In other words, they're busy.

It's your job to follow up and ask for the business. Whether you communicate through email, by phone or both, you must reach out and be prepared to answer questions, discuss prices or amend the proposal.

Make sure you lay down a strong foundation for your follow up by closing your appointment on a confident note: "Kate, we're so excited about the idea of creating your unicorn-themed wedding, your guests will be talking about the flowers for years to come! I'll follow up next week after I send the proposal to see if you have any questions or additions and we'll go from there."

One week later, make that call. Don't be sheepish; be professional and direct, "Hello Kate, this is Tim calling from Tim's Flowers. It was a pleasure meeting with you last week. I'm following up to answer any questions and continue our conversation about your big day on September 8!" Then let the conversation run its course. If she does not want

to book with you, don't be afraid to ask why, so you can learn what to change in future consultations. I like the direct approach: "What could we have done differently to have you choose us as your florist?" Let her talk, and just listen and take notes, so you and your team can do better moving forward.

Don't Give It Away

I'm astonished to see florists give detailed proposals listing the names of flowers and stem counts for the entire wedding and then wonder why the brides aren't booking. When you give away the details, you make it too easy for the bride to take your paperwork down the street to another shop or studio only to have them beat your price and steal your business.

What's the alternative? Colonel Sanders talks about his secret 11 herbs and spices without divulging them. Follow his lead. Talk about color schemes and palettes but not specific flowers. Discuss shapes and styles without naming containers or sharing dimensions. Less is more, really. Simply explain to your brides that you will "make her unicorn/vineyard/backyard chic wedding a reality" and will furnish her with a more detailed document, outlining the

specifics of the designs, once she has signed a contract.

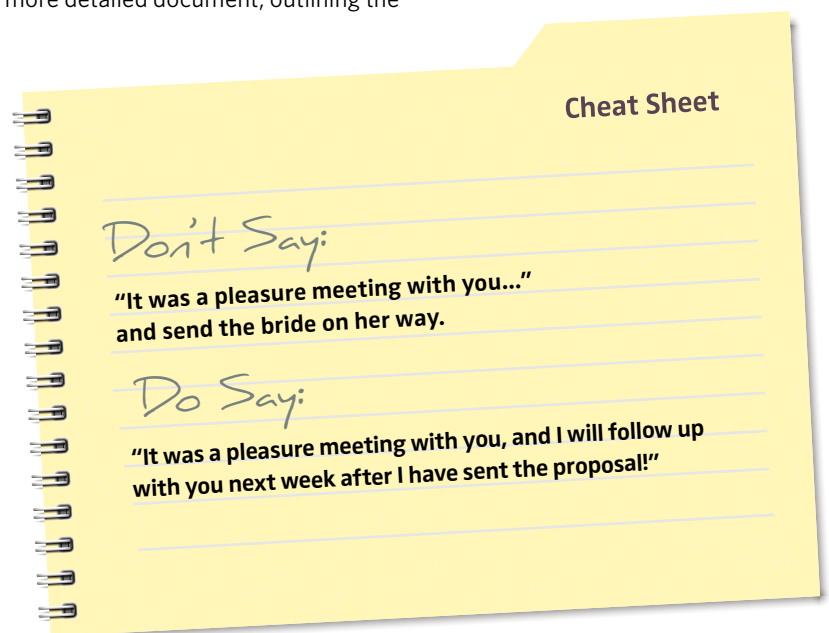
Work smarter and you will turn more proposals into signed contracts! 🌿



Tim Huckabee is the president of FloralStrategies, which provides sales, service and POS system training. Tim has spent the last 17

years traveling the globe and educating florists of all sizes to engage customers in bold new ways while learning how these successful shops operate on all levels. tim@floralstrategies.com

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The Call

SHOP: A florist in Little Rock, Ark.
SCENARIO: A customer needs birthday flowers

EMPLOYEE: Good Morning, XYZ Flower Shop, Dorothy speaking.
TIM: Good morning Dorothy. Can you help me with some birthday flowers for my wife?
EMPLOYEE: Yes sir. Is this your first time shopping with us?
TIM: It is. We just moved to Arkansas.
EMPLOYEE: Well that's exciting! Welcome to our state, you're going to love it here. So, let's talk about your wife's flowers.
After taking delivery information and card message, Dorothy continued.
EMPLOYEE: Were you thinking roses or a nice spring mix?
TIM: Gosh, I'm not sure. What do you recommend?
EMPLOYEE: We can do something real nice for her with assorted flowers starting at \$54.99.
TIM: Is that enough? I want to do something nice for her birthday and then something special for our anniversary next month.
EMPLOYEE: Well then, let's take it up a notch to \$74.99. How does that sound?

I took Dorothy's lead and "splurged" on \$74.99. Dorothy did not ask about the anniversary order, so I ended up placing only one order instead of two.

The Analysis

- 👉 Dorothy was immediately personable, the epitome of southern charm ("Welcome . . ." and "lets talk about your wife's flowers.").
- 👉 Dorothy presumed it was a low-budget order even though I said nothing to imply I was hung up on price. And she missed the cue to go for the anniversary order at the same time. And, she used the "n" word ("nice").

The Fix

Don't let friendliness trump giving exceptional, memorable service. Customers look at us as the experts, and they're ready to listen to us in terms of products, prices and more. Don't be afraid to go high on prices, when appropriate, and fish for extra orders every day.

Channel a barrista I constantly remind the teams I train at flower shops that the same people who call or visit your store wait in line at Starbucks to pay \$5-plus for, in my terms, "a cup of hot, dirty water", and they plop down \$300 to \$400 or more for a smartphone. So, why wouldn't they spend \$100 or more on flowers that will make them look like a hero? They will once you let them, trust me. Dorothy didn't let me spend high, so I didn't (as I sat in my car sipping my grande-expensiveccino).

Romance the customer Professional salespeople use professional language. A "nice mix" is what I buy in a bag at the grocery store when I'm picking up my salad for dinner. A "beautiful arrangement of spring flowers in pink and cream" would have made me feel infinitely more excited about (and confident in) my choice to call Dorothy's shop for flowers.

Get the worms ready I literally handed Dorothy an extra order on a silver platter when I mentioned my upcoming anniversary, yet she missed her chance. Why? Because we're not tuned in to selling beyond the scope of what's right in front of us, let alone what's *not* mentioned.

When a customer alludes to an event on the horizon, reel it in! "*I'd be happy to take that order for you right now, to save you the time and effort of calling back.*" Whenever a customer places a non-holiday order near a holiday, get out your (fishing) line: "*We're going to take great care of this birthday order for your Mom. And with Mother's Day only a few weeks away, you can save time by placing your order for her now. If you have a minute, I'll tell you about our featured arrangement this year...*" Finally, on a daily basis, cast a line for extra business. After every non-funeral order, say, "*I can also help you with any upcoming birthday or anniversary orders.*"

Bottom line: Customers are ready to spend more every day and order in advance, so let them! 🎣

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LISTEN IN as Huckabee makes Valentine's Day calls on unsuspecting florists, Jan. 14, 1 pm EST. Not available? Sign up anyway: You can access the webinar and train your staff all month long! www.safnow.org/webinars.



The Call

- SHOP:** A florist in Seattle
- SCENARIO:** A customer wants to order an arrangement found on Pinterest
-
- EMPLOYEE:** ABC Flower Shop, Hailey speaking, how can I help you?
- TIM:** Hi Hailey. I would like to order some flowers I found online for my wife.
- EMPLOYEE:** Of course. What's the name of design you like?
- TIM:** I'm not really sure since my wife saw it on Pinterest. I just figured you could copy it.
- EMPLOYEE:** Well I can certainly try. Where did you find it? (Tim directs her to the page.)
- TIM:** So how much will that cost?
- EMPLOYEE:** Ummm. That arrangement is all peonies and we usually don't have them now. I could call and check but you're probably looking at \$200 or more. They're kinda expensive.
- TIM:** That's crazy! No way! I don't understand why they'd be so much and why you don't have those!
- EMPLOYEE:** Peonies are typically a spring flower and, even then, they're about \$8 a stem at our shop. Was there any other design you found that you liked?
- TIM:** No, I'm just going to have to find another florist to do it for me. Thanks.
- EMPLOYEE:** Sorry about that!

The Analysis

- 👍 Hailey made a point to find the design online rather than relying on my description (since customers know so very little about flowers).
- 👎 Hailey shot me down from the start by telling me that my first choice flower, my wife's favorite, would be hard to source.
- 👎 She made matters worse by categorizing peonies as "kinda expensive." (Let the customer be the judge of that!)
- 👎 Paralyzed by my out-of-season choice of luxury-priced flowers, Hailey failed to offer me an alternative.

The Fix

More and more customers pre-shop online and then call your store (typically with unrealistic expectations). Rather than dreading the call (or, worse yet, sabotaging it), view it as an opportunity to educate customers. The next time you get a call from someone who wants the huge vase of purple callas that he found online for \$39.99 and delivered by a Unicorn, take a deep breath and follow this plan.

Confirm the Image Get in front of a computer to access the exact image that your customer is referencing. Don't rely on his or her description or your own hunch; deal with the facts.

Confirm What You Have (Not What You Don't) Don't just blurt out that the flower or plant is out of season. Doing so may make the customer feel dumb for not knowing that information. Instead, offer alternatives that you know are available. Hailey could have said, "Those peonies are gorgeous, and we usually start to see them in the late spring. Today I have these flowers in the same rich, red color or those flowers which also have a wonderful fragrance."

Confirm Price; Don't Presume Price Sensitivity Customers have no idea of what flowers cost until we educate them. Hailey should have said, "Peonies are a premium flower, typically \$8 a stem. In order to recreate the arrangement in the photo, I recommend spending between \$200 and \$250." Remember, it's going on the customer's credit card, not yours.

Bottom line: The Internet is here to stay, so learn to work with it as part of your sales process. 🌱

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The Call

SHOP: A florist in Seattle
SCENARIO: A customer wants to remain anonymous on his Valentine's Day order

EMPLOYEE: Thanks for calling 123Flowers. My name is Maribel, how can I help you?

TIM: Hi Maribel. I would like to send roses to a special lady.

EMPLOYEE: OK. Do you want red, pink, yellow or white? And are you interested in one dozen or two?

TIM: I want to make a splash so let's go for two dozen red.

After taking the recipient information and delivery date:

EMPLOYEE: And what would you like to say to Stephanie on the card message?

TIM: Just sign it, "Your Secret Admirer."

EMPLOYEE: No name?

TIM: Nope. I don't want her to know it's from me, yet.

EMPLOYEE: Our company policy is that we either need to have a name on the card message; if not, we do reveal the sender's name if the recipient calls and asks.

TIM: No, that doesn't work for me. I'm paying good money for these roses, so please just fill out the card as I asked and make sure no one reveals my name.

EMPLOYEE: Sir, as I just explained, I can't do that, it's against our store policy.

TIM: Fine. Then I will find a florist who understands that the customer is always right! Thank you for your time.

The Analysis

👍 Maribel maintained a professional demeanor even as she explained and reinforced company policy to a disgruntled customer. Bonus points for offering the two-dozen roses option.

👎 Maribel lost the sale *and* ticked me off in the process. Maybe she could have saved either the sale or, if not that, the prospect of getting future (non-anonymous) business from me had she handled the situation with a bit more finesse.

The Fix

I have seen many different ways of handling an anonymous order, ranging from no policy at all to strict enforcement of one (like at Maribel's store), to not releasing sender information until the police call the store. Which is best? That depends on what you think is best for your store, staff and community.

Adopt a Policy — and Diplomacy

Don't require staff to make a judgment call on the character of the customer — innocent and playful, or spooky and stalker-ish? — every time this situation arises. Have a policy, and make sure it is simple, clear, concise and easily understood by staff and customers alike.

While I give Maribel kudos for following the rules, she could have handled the situation better to possibly save the sale, or at least keep the customer for future business. A few tips:

- **Play up what you *can* do, not what you *can't*.** If a customer requests anonymity, try: "Of course, we can leave your name off the card. But our policy is to divulge the sender's name if the recipient calls to ask."
- **Reinforce your interest in their business.** If he's not amenable to your policy, you'll have to diplomatically refuse the sale. Try, "Your business is important to us, Mr. Huckabee. Our policy is designed to protect customers, as I'm sure you can understand. Alternatively, I can have the flowers ready for you to pick up and/or you can have them delivered through another service."

Bottom line

Operate like a big business – have rules and stick to them! Whether your policy is to allow anonymous orders with no restrictions or to divulge the sender's name if requested by the recipient, review the policy with your staff before Valentine's Day. 🌸

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The Call

SHOP: Angry recipient
SCENARIO: Flower shop in Portland, Ore.

EMPLOYEE: ABC Flowers, this is Erica. How can I help you?
TIM: Hi Erica. I need to talk to someone about flowers that were just delivered to my daughter.
EMPLOYEE: Sure. I can help you. What's her name, or yours?
TIM: The last name is Tobin — her name is Janet.
EMPLOYEE: OK, I see the order here. It was the XYZ123 from (WireService).
TIM: Well, it looked nothing like the photo I saw online. It was skimpy and small and I paid over \$100!
EMPLOYEE: Um. Give me a minute.
After placing Tim on hold for a minute...
EMPLOYEE: Thanks for holding. I just talked to the designer and that order was filled to the value we got.
TIM: I don't know what "filled to value means," but I am smart enough to understand that I did not get \$100 worth of flowers. I could have gone to the grocery store and bought this for half that price!
EMPLOYEE: I'm really sorry but we only had \$75 to fill that order and we had to take delivery out of it, too.
TIM: If that's it, then lesson learned and I'll do something else next time. Thank you.

👍 I can only give Erica a thumbs up on the fact that, prior to saying, "Um. Give me a minute." she was polite. And she did apologize — but not soon enough.

👎 Erica made nearly every mistake in the book: She did not immediately acknowledge my disappointment. She did not investigate my order and deal with the facts. She used insider language ("filled to value"), and she did not offer a resolution.

The Fix

Customer complaints are a natural offshoot of today's Internet age. Customers forget that we're dealing with a perishable, handcrafted item and that, as a result, the picture is rarely, if ever, identical to the finished product. Here's how I deal with those complaints.

Apologize

You'll win over a customer immediately — and set the tone for the rest of the call — by showing some empathy and taking ownership of the situation. My favorite lines include, "I'm so sorry to hear that you're upset, but I promise I'll do my best to get this cleared up!" and, "I'm so sorry that you're not happy with our flowers. Let me work with you to get this fixed right away!"

Gently Educate

Listen to customers' concerns or complaints, and then educate them. For example, "We used peach roses instead of yellow ones because the yellow roses did not arrive in perfect condition." Or: "We created that arrangement according to the design you chose, but sometimes the flowers are not as full or large as those you see online."

Verify Origin

If the customer did not place an order directly with your store, they paid extra money in fees. Customers don't realize this and make a snap judgment, as I did, based on the total charged to their credit card and the perceived value of the design. A simple approach is invite customers to deal with your shop directly, "The next time you want to send flowers to your sister, please call us directly on our toll-free line, so we can give you better service and much better value. You'll be very happy, I promise!"

Offer Resolution

If you filled the order to value, you did your job — but you still have an unhappy and confused customer. You may not agree with this approach, but I always look at the bigger picture and strive to win back the customer — for today's and all future business: "So sorry that you're not pleased. We want you to be happy, so let me send a replacement (with more flowers) or offer you a store credit for \$XX to spend with us on your next direct order."

Bottom line

You will have unsatisfied customers, just make sure to handle them the smart way! 🙌

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Register for the next FloralStrategies webinar, *Handle Complaints Better*, on Tue, Apr 22 at www.fsw1403.eventbrite.com

HURRY UP AND SLOW DOWN!

The members of my staff seem to get so easily flustered (and make more mistakes) when they feel that customers are in a hurry. Help!

DEB MCKINSTRY | MAIDA'S FLORAL SHOP | OSWEGO, NEW YORK

A: It's all in their heads. I have watched hundreds of orders being taken and listened to scores of recorded sales calls but have yet to encounter a customer tapping her finger on the counter and yelling, "Hurry up!" Generally speaking, customers will give us the time to complete their order and give them good service. Yet what Deb has noticed at her shop is nothing unique — I hear this complaint from staff every week in flower shops, who say they feel rushed by the customer. The irony, as Deb stated, is that when we try to speed through an order in the name of "helping" a customer, we often end up missing key points and/or making mistakes.

So what's the problem? It's not about the customer, it's about the employee's perception (or misperception) of the customer. We fear customers and are afraid to take control of a phone or walk-in sale. Not just in the big-city shops, where you might presume there's more hustle and bustle; this happens everywhere and with every type of employee: newbies and veterans, young and old.

Is there a way to fix it? Of course! By simply changing your thinking and perspective you won't be crippled by the misconception that every customer is going to hang up or walk out unless you rush through their order. Here are the most common "hurry up" situations I see and how you can handle them better:

You Can't Find the Customer in the System

Take a deep breath and try again. It's critical that you locate the customer so you don't create a duplicate account or accidentally use someone else's information. Say, "Bear with me while I find you in our system — I will give you your customer ID so we'll be able to find you quicker the next time you call."

When you do find the account make sure that you have complete information (including the email address: "which email address should I use to send delivery con-

firmation?") and confirm that it is up to date, "Are you still at 944 Laurel Avenue?" Also, be sure to alert your manager or the office when you find duplicate accounts!

The Customer Blurts Out the Order Before You Can Speak

"This is Mrs. Super Important, and I need to have pink tulips delivered to Laura Baldwin at General Hospital in room 701 by noon today, can you do that?" Think calming thoughts and just follow the pattern that I have been preaching in my columns for years: "Of course I can help you! First, have you sent flowers with us before?" Go on to find her in the system (see above) and then just follow the screen by taking delivery information, card message, etc. If you start jumping around the screen trying to keep up with her, instead of following the professional pattern, *you will make mistakes.*

The Customer Makes You Feel Pressed for Time

Acknowledge the customer, but don't get intimidated! "Bear with me please, I want to make sure we have this exactly right, so I'm just double-checking your order," or "We're nearly done, I appreciate your patience."

You can even joke about the software, "I'm not the quickest typist but I want to make sure I cover all the details. Thanks for your patience!"

The Bottom Line: No customer has ever said, "You're taking too long, just cancel the order!" 🌸



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Cheat Sheet

Don't Say (or Think):

I'm sorry, I'm going as fast as I can!

Do Say:

"I appreciate your patience, I want to make sure your order is 100 percent accurate!"

IT'S SHOWTIME!

My staff hides behind the counter, and when they do interact with customers on the floor, it's typically with a feeble, "How can I help you?" I know we can do better. Help! FRANK EGAN, ENCHANTED FLOWER BOUTIQUE, NEW ROCHELLE, NEW YORK

Why aren't we excitedly greeting customers who have come to give us their money? Have you walked into Walgreens lately? If you have, then you've noticed that the person behind the counter practically accosts you with a hearty, "Welcome to WALGREENS!!!" Why don't we see this more in the floral industry? I have my own theory: Our fear of engagement is a nasty manifestation of undervaluing what we do (apologizing for the prices we charge is another one).

We need to be at least half as engaging with customers as the clerks at Walgreens!

Go Full Frontal

Get out from behind that darned counter, let customers see all of you and work the floor! There is always something to be done in the shop, from watering and dead-heading plants to dusting and restocking, so stay on the floor and you'll be more readily accessible to customers as they enter.

When a customer walks into a business and sees the staff just lingering behind the counter, chatting, it sends the message, "Yeah, we're busy talking about what we're gonna order for lunch. Give a shout if you need any help." I remember visiting a doughnut shop where the manager (!) stood finishing a discussion about plans for the weekend with a staff member while I was going through caffeine withdrawal. I lost it and blurted out, "Sounds like fun, but I need a medium latte, stat!"

Just as bad: employees who are hypnotized by their cell phones instead of making eye contact with an incoming customer.

Doesn't matter if these conversations and texts are work-related — you need to be totally available to incoming traffic. Easy enough, right?

Be a Host With the Most

Your team may ask, "But what do we SAY?" Here are some of the lines I use to greet customers (feel free to massage these and make them your own).

What can I help you to celebrate today? Yes, to those of you whose vase is always half empty: occasionally customers will tell me that they need to order funeral flowers upon hearing this question, but I have never have had anyone appear offended or walk out of the store.

Are you looking for birthday or anniversary flowers? I typically use that line on men. It's a great ice-breaker and leads to discovering if it's a milestone event — the perfect opportunity to offer a larger design/higher price point.

Are you shopping for yourself or looking for a gift? Usually reserved for women, this is a quick way to learn if your customer needs loose flowers, maybe for her own container, or an arranged design to take with her.

And remember: It's not just what you say, but also how you deliver the message; your tone and level of enthusiasm is critical. Make sure that you are conveying interest and professional confidence with your voice.

Once you have connected with the customer and have a grasp of what's brought her in today, you must direct her to the best item for their needs. Don't take the lazy way out and just point to

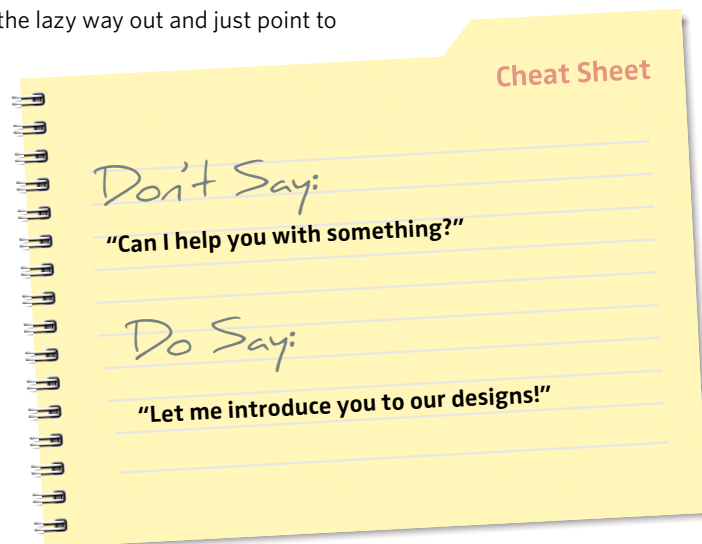
the cooler. Take control instead: "Let's look in the cooler so I can introduce you to a few designs that I think would be perfect for you!"


The bottom line: You can set the tone and pace for the entire sale based upon how quickly, eagerly and enthusiastically you greet shoppers. 🌿



Tim Huckabee is founder and president of FloralStrategies. Since 1997, Tim and his team have provided sales and customer service training at the best flower shops around the world, empowering management and staff to engage customers in exciting new ways. tim@floralstrategies.com

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LISTEN IN as Huckabee makes sympathy calls to unsuspecting florists, **Wed., July 16 at 1 p.m. EST. Not available?** Sign up anyway: You can access the webinar and train your staff all month long! safnow.org/webinars-education

The Call

SHOP: Florist in Indianapolis

SCENARIO: Customer ordering anniversary flowers

EMPLOYEE: Good morning, Flower Shop, this is Tiffany.

TIM: Hey Tiffany. I would like to order some flowers for my wife.

EMPLOYEE: Great, I can help you with that. Have you sent flowers with us before?
Tiffany found me in the system, confirmed all my information and took delivery information.

EMPLOYEE: What would you like to tell your wife on the card message?

TIM: Well, I thought about getting mushy, but let's just leave it at "Happy 25th Anniversary, darling. All my love, Robert."

EMPLOYEE: Congratulations! That's really impressive!

TIM: Well thank you. Yeah, I guess it is.

EMPLOYEE: Of course you have to celebrate a milestone anniversary like that with something special. Do you have a gift in mind for your wife, or would you like a suggestion?

TIM: I really had not thought that far yet. What do you recommend?

EMPLOYEE: I can create a gorgeous vase arrangement of 25 long-stem roses in her favorite color. I can add beautiful accent flowers and special foliage, too. That would be priced at \$150, and she'll love it, I promise!
TIM: That sounds perfect.

EMPLOYEE: Great. As a finishing touch I can also include a box of our locally made gourmet chocolates for just \$20.
Tiffany finished the sale and took my billing information. She confirmed that she had an updated phone and email address on file, ran my credit card, and then closed with...

EMPLOYEE: Finally, your total is \$189.46. We'll bring that wonderful anniversary gift to your wife at work next Tuesday before lunch. Thanks so much for calling!

The Analysis

- 👉 This call was a breath of fresh air because Tiffany took the time to listen and connect with her customer. She wasn't afraid to offer a higher priced design, and she did a thorough job by offering an extra item.
- 👉 Tiffany did not miss a point. She acted the way every independent, professional florist can — and should.

Learn From It

This month's call sounds different from previous months because it was made to a shop where the owner has invested in staff education to build sales and improve service (full disclosure: my TotalTraining program). Let's revisit some of the standout things Tiffany did so you can use the same techniques with your customers.

Qualify Customers Ask if the customer has shopped at your store before and then find him in the system, paying close attention to the average sale and shopping history. Look for any missing information and make sure the account is up to date, by asking: "Is this still the best daytime contact number for you?" "Which email address should I use to send delivery confirmation?"

React to the Card Message It's too easy to lose sight of the fact that we are dealing in emotions: Someone in the caller's life just got married (or divorced), died, won the spelling bee, had union surgery or, in my case, is celebrating a big anniversary. Always have some sort of comment ready, so the customer knows you're paying attention: "Congratulations, you must be so excited!" or "I'm so sorry to hear that news."

Sell Big It's 2014 and your customers, no matter where your shop is located, pay lots of money to fill their cars with gas, buy a new cell phone, shop for clothes or eat out. So, why is our industry still using 1984 prices? ("Our arrangements start at \$39.99." Really?) When the card message merits it, go up and over \$100. What's the worst thing a customer can say? "No thanks." But they won't hang up; they'll just ask for a less expensive option.

Personalize the Sale Offering add-ons (finishing touches, in Tim-speak) is not being pushy. And never assume that a customer will ask for them if they want them. It's your job to offer these extra items, using the same, elegant approach as Tiffany (above).

Bottom Line An educated staff earns more money for your store every day! 🌸

Tim Huckabee, an international flower shop sales and customer service trainer, is founder and president of Floral Strategies LLC and the American Institute of Floral Sales Experts (AIFSE), a retail floral sales certification program. If you would like Tim to test-call your shop for this column, contact him at (800) 983-6184 or tim@floralstrategies.com

Have a customer service conundrum? All SAF members are entitled to a free 15-minute sales or service chat with Tim Huckabee, (800) 983-6184, and special rates on his TotalTraining program (totaltraining.eventbrite.com).

CAN I PULL A CYRANO DE BERGERAC ON STAFF?

Occasionally I hear my employees really botching a call and am torn on how to handle it. Help! JULIE PRITCHARD | OWNER | THE FLORAL FIXX | WINNIPEG, MANITOBA

Oh, the pain and agony of witnessing a clerk fumble through a call. If you have ever attended one of my “CSI: Flower Shop” live test call workshops at a Society of American Florists event, you’ve experienced this (if not in your own shop). The temptation is to grab the phone and finish the transaction the “correct way.” But is that the best approach?

Owners and managers regularly ask my opinion on how to handle this sticky situation. There is no definitive “right way,” since there are so many variables: the gravity of the error, the personality of the salesperson, and the rapport established between customer and staff member. Here are two very different approaches I use with great success.

Put Out The Fire!

Sometimes your survival instinct kicks in when you hear such an egregious mistake being made that you know it will lead to the loss of a sale, a disappointed customer or both! Here are some classic examples:

“No, we don’t carry those flowers”—without the offer of an alternative blossom or the option to have them special-ordered.

“We don’t deliver there”—without placing the customer on hold to see if an exception could be made or offering to coordinate the delivery through another shop.

“I’m not sure”—followed by silence instead of an offer to check on availability.

Make the universal “time out” sign to your staff member indicating the need to STOP TALKING. Coach him or her to say, “May I place you on a quick hold while I check?” and then in a calm, relaxed tone empower your employee to take control of the situation, feeding him or her the proper response: “We are out of peonies, but we do have beautiful garden roses with a similar look and feel” or “While that town is out of our delivery area, I can easily get beautiful flowers sent tomorrow through our affiliated shop closer to your mom” or “Thanks for holding; I just checked and indeed we can do ...”

Make sure to review with that employee what you said and why, so he or she is then empowered to give the correct answer on his or her own next time.

Fireside Chat

Sometimes you hear about a “bad call” after the fact or you’re left dealing with the fallout from a botched call in the form of a customer complaint. Even if you were standing right there, you know your employee well enough to understand that on-the-spot coaching would have flustered or confused her. There is still opportunity to educate your employee so that mistake is not repeated. I find the “fireside chat” method works best in these situations. To start, gather all the facts (print a copy of the order, talk to anyone else involved in the order, such as the designer or delivery person, for example) and then approach the staff member: “I’d like to talk to you about this order. Here’s what happened; this is what the customer said (and/or mention what you heard walking by). Would you explain how you handled this call...?” Hear her out, correct the misinformation and explain that you need that situation handled very differently next time.

Whichever approach you chose, treat that interaction as a learning experience for you, that staff member and the rest of your team. If he or she could not handle the call the way you wanted, then maybe

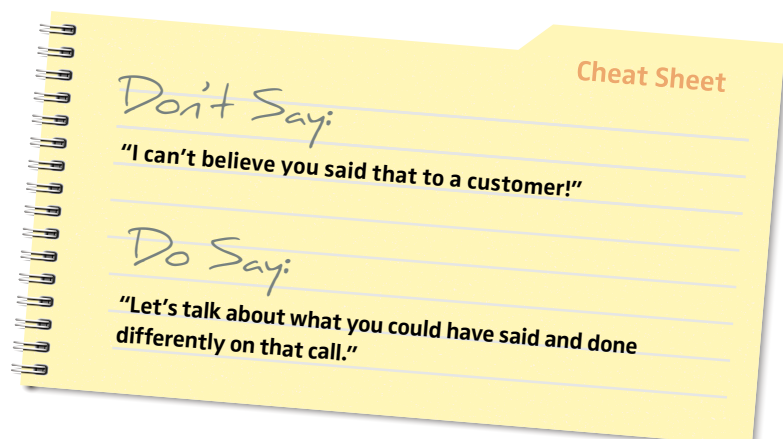
you need to beef up your training materials and procedures. You might even consider doing some role-playing for dealing with the “out of the ordinary” requests—arming your employees with the best possible answers to please the customer, save the sale and make the shop look good! 🌿



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years traveling the globe and educating florists of all sizes to engage customers in bold new ways while learning how these successful shops operate on all levels. Visit floralstrategies.com/2016-series for Floral Strategies’ 2016 webinar topics and dates. tim@floralstrategies.com

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PICTURE THIS!

Customers increasingly ask us to send a picture before delivering their flowers. What's the best way to handle this request?

WAYNE POLLACK | OWNER | PEOPLES FLOWERS | ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO

Consumers are spoiled by technology.

When shopping online for nearly everything from a pizza to a briefcase, they see a picture of their purchase (or an idealized version of their purchase). When they order flowers, expect to have a similar visual experience and don't hesitate to ask for a shot of their gift to be taken at some point between design and delivery. Simple enough, they think. Yet we know it's not quite so simple. That "quick shot on your phone of what I am sending my daughter" can quickly turn into a nightmare if not handled correctly.

Look At The 'Bigger Picture'

Only you can decide whether your shop is equipped to send photos of designs going out for local delivery — and how, exactly, to make it happen. Here are a few things that may weigh into your decision:

Staff security When staff use their personal cell phones to communicate with customers, I've seen it lead to (best case) staff being contacted by customers at all hours of the day and evening to ask about delivery or complain about an arrangement, and (worst case) stalking issues. A dedicated phone (or high quality digital camera — see "photo quality" below) for photos is something to consider.

Timing When the photo is texted before the design leaves the shop, it opens up the possibility that customers may call and request a change to the order — a different color, or perhaps a different flower.

Photo quality Some of the requests for a different color or a larger design happen because phone camera lenses do not always do the flowers (or their colors) justice, not to mention that the customer is viewing (and scrutinizing) the image on a tiny screen.

Labor Even with the proper setup (a good camera, lighting, backdrop, etc.), taking professional-quality shots of each arrangement before delivery and texting it to customers requires some labor.

What To Say

Regardless of whether you offer the photo service, there's a professional and customer-friendly way to handle the request.

If you don't offer the photo service, that's fine — exude confidence in the product you're selling. If you step in with a professional demeanor, positive attitude and confident response, customers quickly forget their desire to see the flowers and rely on your word. Simply reply: *"We're not set up to do that yet. However, the flowers will look just as I described (or you saw online). You'll probably receive a photo texted from your delighted daughter."* Yup, your word as the professional is worth a thousand pictures.

If you do offer the photo service, explain to customers that you will *send an image once the flowers are heading out on delivery.* This language subtly communicates that you're not sending a photograph and then holding up the entire delivery process waiting for a customer's "thumbs up." Instead, the image will be sent as a visual confirmation of the discussion you just had. 🌸



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"Sorry, we don't do that."

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