

## OBLIVIOUS TO EMPATHY?

> How well do your employees really listen to customers? That's a question I often ask owners. Employees take calls all day that deal with heightened human emotions, but too often they respond like robots (and provide lackluster service in the process).

For this month's column, I called a store in the Midwest and posed as a customer in need of sympathy flowers. As you will hear when you play the recording for your team, the sales clerk tried earnestly to help me and give good service, but she undersold and underserved because she simply did not listen.

### The Opportunity: An Important Funeral

I told the employee I needed flowers for the funeral of a cousin who died in a car crash. I said, "We were raised like brothers." I said I had no idea what to send and had not been on the shop's website. In the conversation and via my card message, I communicated that this was a major loss, impacting many people. (I even asked for a ribbon that read, "Beloved Cousin" and said the flowers were coming from "All your family on the East Coast.")

### Thumbs Up: Quick, Efficient Service

The call lasted less than five minutes. That's not a bad thing! You can be sympathetic, engaging AND efficient; those qualities are not mutually exclusive. The salesperson also offered her opinion — a valuable service for customers who want advice on color, size and style. She also did a good job describing an easel spray to me, a self-styled amateur at ordering flowers.

### Thumbs Down: No Condolences, Underselling

To start, the employee did not express any sort of sympathy, even when I stated how close I was to the deceased. That is a MAJOR problem. If we want to keep customers away from the order-gatherers and direct shippers, we must step up our game to be more personable and attentive. I asked for pricing on an easel spray, and with hesitation she shared, "Something nice starts at about \$150." (I did not ask for their starting price, but that's where she priced my special design.) When I gave her the chance to offer me a higher budget — "Do you think that's a good budget based on your experience?" — she missed an opportunity for a higher sale and a more satisfied customer. Adding insult to injury, I had to take control and ask about a scripted ribbon; she did not offer me that option.



### The Takeaway: Don't Just Hear. Listen.

Have you trained your staff to understand that sympathy orders need particular care? At this store, the salesperson handled the call as if I wanted to send "thank you" flowers to a friend. I mentioned it last month and I will repeat here (and throughout 2019): We need to LISTEN to our customers, not just hear them. Arguably, I, as a grieving cousin, was going to spend hundreds on a flight to get to the funeral of a very close family member. If the salesperson had really listened to me, she would have expressed some empathy and also started me well above \$300. I would have happily ordered the higher priced design.

The truth is that listening takes no longer than hearing, but listening involves connecting with the customer, truly understanding their needs and offering a floral design and price best suited to their needs. The most successful flower shops regularly train their staff to listen to and engage customers. Ironically, you don't need to focus on the difficult task of upselling if you simply listen to the opportunities that customers present every day and respond appropriately. 🌸



### The Recording

You're only half-done learning from this column. The next step: Read this column with your staff and then play the audio recording, available at [safnow.org/timscalling](http://safnow.org/timscalling). Start a group discussion: Ask your team for feedback on what they heard and have them talk about how they can make better sympathy sales moving forward.

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### VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

How does your staff REALLY treat customers? Email [tim@floralstrategies.com](mailto:tim@floralstrategies.com) to volunteer your shop for a free Tim's Calling undercover shopping call, anonymity guaranteed. (Retail value: \$50.)