

“To open a shop is easy, to keep it open an art.”

-Chinese Proverb

Retail is hard enough, yet we often do things either unknowingly or unwittingly that make it harder than it has to be. In the eBook you'll learn **ten easily-correctible mistakes** most retailers make.

#1 CAN I HELP YOU?

We all know this phrase is bad, but do you realize how bad it really is? The response to this question is so common it has become a knee-jerk reaction as much as saying “Fine” when someone asks how you are.



“Can I help you?”

“No thanks, I’m just looking.”

The customer has now said to the whole world—and especially to herself—that she is **not here to buy anything today.**

This phrase actually suppresses sales. The better approach is to use this simple scripted sentence ...

“Hi [insert name]! Thanks for coming in. Take a look around and I’ll be back in a moment to see if you have any questions.”

This approach shows the customer you are happy to see her, grateful she chose you, and are willing to give her some space to shop at her own pace and style.

(For more on how to properly meet and greet customers, download the Free eBook **“THE MEET AND GREET”** at www.PhilsForum.com)

#2 NO WE DON'T, NO WE CAN'T



A customer walks in your door and asks the most critical question. **“Do you have this product?”**

If all your salesperson says is No, the customer walks out unhappy. The transaction is over before it even started. The better response would be to say something like ...

- **“Let me show you what we do have.”**
- **“Can I show you an alternative?”**
- **“We don’t sell that product because ... Let me show you something better.”**

Another thing you should do is keep track of all the products or services customers ask for. If the customer enters your store asking for something it is because she believes you would carry it. If several customers ask for the same thing, you should consider either carrying that item or finding an acceptable alternative.



The same is true for Services. If a customer asks if you can do something, the best response is to say Yes and then figure out how to do it.

#3 YOU JUST MISSED THE (SALE/EVENT)

I was in a record store to buy an album for a new band I had discovered (*yeah, that dates me a little*). The clerk said, **“Oh man, you should have been here a couple hours ago. The band was here signing autographs.”**

Ten Mistakes That Sideline the Sale

While that didn't stop me from my purchase, it did leave a sour taste in my mouth. I left feeling more unhappy about what I missed than happy about what I purchased. By the way, that happened thirty years ago and I still remember it like yesterday.

It is common for your staff to say things like, "*You should have been here yesterday when this was on sale.*" All that statement does is kill the mood and the feeling. Some customers will put the item back under the belief there will be another sale in the near future.



When a sale or event is over, it is over. You need to live in the present where the customer standing in front of you is ready to buy today. If she didn't want it today, she would have ordered it online and be home waiting by her mailbox for it to come.

#4 CALLING HER MA'AM

The terms ma'am and sir are considered honorary terms, terms of respect. In the military you learn quickly to use these terms for your superior officers or pay the consequence.



Out in the real world, however, the word "ma'am" can have a different effect.

Some women see it as a sign that the sales clerk thinks she is old. That word grates on her ears and causes her to build up a wall of defense.

Note: this is a regional thing, too. In the south Ma'am is still seen as a sign of respect, but in the Northeast you use it at your own risk.

While we're at it, stop using other demeaning words for your female customers. She is not Chick, Baby, or Honey. She is not Sweetie. Use

those words and you are certain to get a bad Yelp review in the near future. Maybe the only term of endearment still acceptable is "Dear".

If you don't know a customer's name (*which you should be trying to learn with every customer who walks through your door*), the only still universally acceptable term is "*Miss*" because it implies young and vibrant, something every woman believes about herself.



#5 NOT TALKING TO THE ALPHA

When two or more customers walk in together, one of them is in charge of the shopping experience. Your job is to figure out who and make sure you greet that person appropriately.

Have you ever walked into a car dealership with your spouse only to have the salesperson only talk to the male about the minivan mom wants to buy? Then you know how this mistake can kill a sale.

How do you identify the Alpha? Start with the firsts ...

- First through the door
- First to make eye contact
- First to make conversation
- First to start shopping



If you cannot figure it out immediately, be sure to talk to all members of the shopping party as equals until it becomes apparent who is the decision-maker.

Ten Mistakes That Sideline the Sale

Men and women shop differently. When you can identify the Alpha, you can tailor your message more directly to the right person in the style he or she prefers to shop.

#6 TALK TOO MUCH

“People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.”

-Theodore Roosevelt

We all hate “fast-talking salesmen” so don’t be one. When you blather on and on, the customer gets turned off and off. You are better served learning to become a listener.

Of the four communication skills—Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing, we do more Listening than the others combined, yet we spend little to no training learning how to be a better listener.



One way you can be a better listener while also showing your customer you care is to practice repeating back what the customer said to you.

She will recognize that you are listening, and it will also give her the chance to clarify anything you might have misunderstood. Those two attributes raise the bar of caring to the point that she will want you to share what you know.

#7, #8, #9 CASHIER MISTAKES

There are three common cashier mistakes that annoy your customer. They may not sideline the current sale, but they certainly leave a bad last impression that could hurt future sales.

ARE YOU READY TO CHECKOUT?

When your customer is standing at the cash register with a bunch of items and her wallet is open, don’t ask, “Are you ready to check out?” It shows you are ignorant, poorly trained, and not very observant.



DID YOU FIND EVERYTHING?

Another phrase to avoid is, “Did you find everything?” While this seems like a helpful phrase, it really is dangerous because it turns your customer into an instant liar.

When you ask this of someone waiting to checkout, more often than not she will answer Yes even if she didn’t find everything.



Why? Because at the checkout the customer is in a different mindset than she was while shopping. Shopping is leisurely and without constraints. Checkout is hurried and impatient.

- She won’t say No for fear that you will stop what you are doing to try to find the item she couldn’t find.
- She won’t say No because she already learned you don’t have the item from another clerk and doesn’t want to go through the hassle of explaining it all again.
- She won’t say No because she doesn’t want to be reminded that she has to go somewhere else to get what she wanted.
- She won’t say No because she doesn’t want to hold up the line forming behind her.
- She won’t say No for fear you won’t do anything at all—the worst response she could imagine.

Ten Mistakes That Sideline the Sale

According to Professor John Gattorna, 68% of customers leave a business because of Perceived Indifference., which leads us to the last cashier no-no.

HERE YOU GO

This is most often said when handing someone their change, receipt, and shopping bag. "Here you go," is really saying "I don't care," in a strong way.



The correct thing to say is, "Thank you!"

The only other appropriate thing to ask during the checkout phase is:

"Do you need ...?"

Your cashiers need to know as well as your sales staff all the complimentary items that go with each item being purchased so that the cashier can make sure the customer has everything to Complete the Sale.



It is poor Customer Service on your part to let a customer go home without everything she needs to solve the problem she came to your store to solve. If she bought a coloring book in a toy store, you need to make sure she has enough crayons. If she bought a flat of annuals in a garden center, you need to make sure she has pots, soil, fertilizer, tools, etc. If she bought new boots, you need to make sure she has mink oil or boot polish or a suede brush.

#10 THE SIGNALS YOU SEND

Actions speak louder than words. If your staff starts counting the money in the drawers, washing the counters at the register, and turning off some



of the electric displays at 5:55pm, your store isn't open until the 6pm it says on your window.

If your staff isn't ready to go with the cash drawers installed, all the lights on, and everyone at their stations at 10am, your store doesn't open at 10am like it says in your window.



Not being open for the first customer or closing the store before closing time around the last customer is a common deal-killer. You don't notice it because you've always done it this way, but your customers noticed and they won't show up for that last-second sale that would have otherwise made your day.

The extra it costs you in payroll keeping everyone later to close *after* closing time will win you more customers in the long run.

See? Easy mistakes that you can spot and correct to make your customers happier and your business more profitable.

"The money is not yours to keep until the customer is happy."

-Bob Negen

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*Toy House was named "One of the 25 Best Independent Stores in America" in the book **RETAIL SUPERSTARS** by famed retail consultant George Whalin (Penguin 2009).*

Phil takes what he has learned in a lifetime of high-level independent retail and helps other indie retailers and small businesses find their success.



*You can learn more about Phil and his programs, including links to other **FREE RESOURCES** at www.PhilsForum.com.*