The Fix

Julie’s not to blame here; she’s just following the (bad) policy of the owner. Little did she realize that I didn’t need the flowers for another three days. The shop ended up losing a big order — and my future business — simply because they were so hung up on following “the rules.” But they didn’t have to. Be flexible and be creative! Here are some guidelines:

Think Out of the Basket. I have been in thousands of flower shops, so I know that many don’t offer baskets at all because they don’t have the space to store the supplies. But if you want to position yourself as the go-to place for gifts, then you need to figure out how to say “yes” to requests such as this. I’ve seen some shops make this work by filling gift basket orders with 24-hour notice — and they get their baskets from another gift basket vendor (the grocery store, a wholesaler). Remember, customers are going to you because they don’t have the time to deal with it — the basket or the local delivery. Best part: These customers are usually willing to pay a premium for the service.

Get the Timeline: Just ask the customer, “When do you need this?” and then take it from there. There may not be a big rush, buying you a day or two to shop for the basket. Additionally, you can say, “Ideally, we like at least 24 hours to create your basket. We don’t stock any gift basket products in the store, because we personally shop just for you!”

Get the Theme: Here’s the chance to use your creativity. Take the customer’s idea and run with it. For example, Julie could have asked me, “OK, we can definitely buy some cigars for him. What about a cigar clipper? Does he drink, too? We could include some brandy snifters and a gift certificate to the local liquor store so he can choose his own brandy,” and on and on. Customers are eager for your ideas!

Get the Price Right: Don’t be afraid to charge for your time, and remember: you’re in this to make money! For example, if Julie paid $10 retail for a cigar she should have added it to the basket at $25. Yes, that’s a 2.5-times markup since it’s not just the cost of the item but the time to go and buy it.

Bottom Line

Never turn away a chance to impress customers — that’s what keeps them coming back.

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