Dear Tim...

I struggle with getting my staff to sell higher. They actually sound apologetic to customers about our prices and tell me that they don’t want to scare anyone away. I know customers will spend more, but how do I get my employees to understand that point? Help!  

Steve Bevis  |  Owner  |  Fancy Flowers  |  Mount Pearl, Newfoundland and Labrador

I can easily fix your problem with a lobster dinner. Let me explain. Your dilemma is not unique — my team and I encounter chronic underselling and apologizing for prices at every flower shop we visit. My theory on this epidemic is three-fold. First, most flower shop staff don’t earn a fortune themselves; hence, they “sell from their own pockets.” Second, our industry values design over sales skills. Many sales team members are never taught to sell properly. Finally, a surprising number of flower shop salespeople allow customers to haggle rather than simply moving them to other choices at lower price points.

Back to the Lobster Dinner
Picture a restaurant customer — a regular, who usually orders entrées in the $20 to $22 range — picking up a menu and asking the waiter on one special night, “What will change my life?” The waiter could leverage his knowledge of the customer’s typical dining habits (just as your team can use average sales data) and say, “Well, I know that you love our chicken pot pie, but you’ve never tried our lasagna. It’s wonderful, and priced at just $21.”

In all likelihood, the customer would take this recommendation and try the lasagna. Imagine instead, however, that the waiter responds to the opportunity the customer has created by saying, “Let me tell you about our wonderful new Lobster Dinner Special. We fly huge 2lb lobsters in every day directly from Maine and serve them with local dairy butter and (mentions delicious side dishes). That meal is $80.”

The waiter then waits for the customer’s decision. The waiter is unapologetic; he isn’t afraid that he has offended the customer by simply suggesting an item priced at four times what the customer normally spends. Why? Because the waiter, knows that it’s his job to offer diners new and exciting options — just as it is a florist’s job to offer his or her customers new and exciting options, even if they lie outside the customer’s typical or likely budget range. But when was the last time your staff offered a customer a (non-funeral) design at $125 or higher?

Note, too, that the waiter offered that lobster dinner option with full confidence. He knew that even if the customer decided not to spend that much money, he would still eat at the restaurant, even if he simply resorted to the tried-and-true chicken pot pie.

No One Leaves Hungry
Train your staff to have similar confidence. Ask them to count the number of times in the past six months they offered a customer an item at a higher price point and had the customer respond by simply slamming down the phone or storming out of the store. It didn’t happen, I promise.

The next step is to email me at contact@floralstrategies.com, so that my office can send you the illustration and talking points I’ve described here. Use them to have a chat with your staff, and to help them understand that customers will spend more. They want to hear about new options and prices. Most important, remind them that the worst response they will hear is “No.” They won’t lose the sale!

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

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.