HAVE THE PRESENCE OF MIND OVER MANIA AT THE HOLIDAYS

The march of winter holidays is on — led by Thanksgiving centerpieces, accelerating with Christmas orders and going into overdrive in February as Cupid brings up the parade of petals. If just reading that sentence had you reaching for the antacid or Advil, take a breath and some advice from other retailers.

Last year, I asked readers of my retail blog to share what actions they were going to take to have a successful holiday, and their suggestions are, well, a gift.

Following their lead will absolutely help you create an extraordinary holiday, whether you’re working late, slogging through the snow on a delivery or helping a harried holiday hostess find the right entryway arrangement.

Attitude Adjustments
You have to stay positive (and keep your eye rolls to a minimum). By far, the most powerful thing managers and owners can do for employee morale is to be upbeat — throughout the entire season.
- Not feeling chipper? Don’t focus on all the bad economic news, instead work to capitalize on the opportunity a challenging economic situation presents.
- Do nice, unexpected things for your staff to let them know they are appreciated. Then do nice, unexpected things for your customers to let them know they are appreciated.
- Show up positive each morning and share with your manager and staff all the good things that happened the day before. Then discuss the new opportunities and challenges for today.
- Remain energized and excited even if sales aren’t where you’d like.
- Hold weekly staff meetings to keep the energy flowing and everyone focused on making lemonade out of the lemons holidays tend to throw at a fast clip.
- To motivate and empower your staff, include everyone in the how and why things are done and in the decision process.

Sales Boosters
- Make sure everyone knows the top three add-ons to each sale (and where they are physically and virtually located) to make each transaction as efficient as possible.
- Greet and warmly welcome every customer who walks through the door or calls.
- Keep inventory organized. You can’t sell what customers can’t find.
- Track and update goals to avoid unexpectedly falling behind.
- Show value and importance of merchandise through your words, signage and displays.
- Engage every customer to make the store the place they want to shop because they are having fun and feel appreciated.

Event Makers
Parties, open houses, Black Friday frenzies, midnight-madness sales, gift exchanges — the holiday season is packed like a minivan on its way to grandma’s. Now is the time to resolve to make your events pay off and share your plan with your co-hosts: the staff.
- Plan and execute customer events without giving away profit. Focus on two or three in-store events and execute them to the fullest so customers and employees have renewed interest that can translate into a ringing register.
- Don’t make the staff an after-thought. Plan fun events with the staff that have a purpose. If they’re excited, the customers will be, too!

Management Moxie
Don’t let your administrative tasks and manager duties slack off just because you’re crazy busy. You’re still the boss. You’re still the leader. Act like it.
- Set the holiday schedule now so that employees get the time off needed and are focused on the customer when they are expected to be there.
- Be available to work the holiday schedule on the floor and lead by example.
- Your managers need time off, too. They also need to realize that they have to train employees and delegate so their absences won’t be sorely felt.
- Watch inventory so you can order the items that are moving and mark down the ones that are not.
- Be proactive with vendors. They are more likely to assist with markdowns and the availability of discounted goods if you don’t wait until it’s too late. (In other words, talk to your wholesaler now.)
- Don’t burn out. Go home earlier in the evenings so you are not a grouch and can enjoy the entire holiday season. And kiss your significant other before you pet the dog.

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