Dear Tim...

WHERE’S THE SPARKLE?

I am constantly reminding (ok, nagging) my staff to sound perkier and more engaging when they answer the phone and greet customers on the shop floor. Help!

VIRGINIA BELMORE | OWNER | FLOWERS ON MAIN | BURLINGTON, VERMONT

Yes, Virginia, there is a way to get your staff to sparkle when engaging customers. I preach the importance of good customer service and confident salesmanship every month, but we haven’t tackled the important precursor to those transactions: how to make that best first impression on customers.

First Impressions Count

When I make test calls to shops, I pay close attention to the greeting. Sometimes I hear, “Flower Shop …” barked at me in an angry tone. I think, “She must have hit some nasty traffic on the way to work today!” or I wonder, “Did all the wedding flowers come in wilted? Because he sounds ticked off!”

I completely understand what’s happening in many flower shops today: They have fewer people on staff and employees are pulled in many directions. Without malintent, they (and even you from time to time) may greet customers with a mindset of, “OK, let’s get through this quickly; I am in the middle of a funeral spray that has to be delivered by 10 am!”

Tell your employees on day one of training (and every day if you have to): You have the ability to make a customer feel either great or regretful about shopping with us. It’s your job to make them feel the former — it’s shop policy and we have a very specific way of doing this that must be followed on every call.

An opener that inspires confidence has four key components: greeting, flower shop name, your name and customer status:

Good morning, Flowers on Main, this is Virginia. Have you shopped with us before?

If the customer is new, thank her for choosing you and ask how she found out about you. If she’s a previous customer, ask for her name (and then pull her shopping history and better guide in her purchase).

When you overhear anything other than what’s above, remind the employee about the shop policy.

Go Beyond Perky: Think About TVs

For customers who come into the shop, a friendly and engaging greeting is just as important, but there are some other dynamics at play as well. I like to use the experience of shopping for a new TV to illustrate: You go to the local Big Box electronics store, walk into the TV department and stand staring at the 30 choices all lined up on the wall.

Scenario One: A young man walks up to you and asks, “Can I help you?”

Scenario Two: The same young man walks up, notices that you are scanning the wall of TVs, and cheerfully asks, “Are you looking for a plasma TV or an LCD?”

What a difference a few words and a change in tone can make! That opening statement in Scenario Two changes everything — you immediately feel like you are dealing with a confident expert. He mentions which TVs are best-sellers or his favorites. You follow his recommendation, spending a bit more than you had planned, and finish your shopping sooner than you had thought, feeling good about your purchase and appreciative that they took the time to train the staff to be engaging and knowledgeable. You’d want to shop at that store again and probably even recommend it to family and friends!

That’s the type of service you and your team should aspire to give every customer. In your shop, the question you ask the customer looking into the cooler might be: Are you shopping for yourself, or are you looking for a gift?

Whether you are on the phone or greeting someone on the floor, regardless of how busy you are (or how badly they messed up your order at Dunkin’ Donuts that morning!), you need to project a warm, inviting, professional and engaging demeanor to customers. That may seem like it will take longer, but the perky, engaging staff consistently finishes sales quicker (and gets right back to that standing spray order).

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.
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