

## Does Your Service Sell?

Smart business owners know that providing great service to their patrons is an essential ingredient to their overall success. They also recognize that without a certain level of revenue they will not stay in business. Unfortunately, many people think that selling and service are two distinct activities and mutually exclusive. So, where does the service part of the job end and where does selling begin in a retail store?

I believe that service and selling work hand-in-hand to create the entire experience for a customer. According to Webster's dictionary, one definition of service is "to be ready to help or be useful".

You can actually improve your service by applying a few customer-focused selling techniques because effective selling is an integral component of delivering great service. It's all in the approach you use.

First of all, recognize that many consumers anticipate sub-standard service from businesses. While this may appear discouraging, it actually gives you an excellent opportunity to distinguish yourself from many of your competitors. Here's a personal example;

I recently ventured into a medium-priced fashion retail store. I was greeted immediately by the two employees who were working, and as I browsed through the store, one of them approached me to make sure I was finding what I was looking for. At no time did she make me feel that I HAD to buy, she simply commented on some of the items I was considering. I eventually ended up spending several hundred dollars because of the attention I received in the store.

Personalized service is also a form of selling. An employee who shows interest in her customers is more likely to sell more and have a higher average dollar per transaction than her coworker who simply processes a customer's order. Creating a connection with people creates trust.

My wife and I once traveled to New Orleans for a one-week vacation and decided to dine at a restaurant owned by a well-known chef. During our conversation, the server learned that we were on holidays and made us feel extremely welcome. When the Chef arrived that evening she made arrangements for us to meet him and prompted me to buy one of his cookbooks so he could sign it. The service we received that night sold us on returning again before we left New Orleans. Although we had dozens of restaurants to choose from in the vicinity, we decided to go back to this one because we knew the service would be great. Now, many years later, my wife and I still talk about that restaurant and our experience.

There are a few local retail stores I visit regularly because they work at creating that connection with their customers. They make me feel important which prompts me to return.

Show interest in your customers. Strike up a conversation. Talk to them. Although it sounds simple, my experience has taught me that most retailers do not engage their customer and create a personalized experience.

Suggestive selling is not pushy. I remember shopping for cuff links a while back. I had selected a pair in a certain men's fashion store and was wandering around while I waited for my wife. At one point, I stopped in front of a mannequin that displayed a particularly unique tie. As I gazed at the tie the salesperson said, "I can get one for you if you'd like." His casual and comfortable approach made it easy for me to say "yes". He then asked, "Would you like a suit to go with that tie?" I laughed and told him that I had enough suits in my wardrobe. He nodded and said, "We have some new raincoats that will protect your suits. Would you be interested in seeing them?"

Even though it was evident he was trying to increase the size of the sale, the way he positioned it indicated that he was actually trying to help me. Plus, his casual, yet professional and polite approach encouraged me to buy more than I had originally intended.

In another situation in a completely different store, the sales person took the initiative to suggest a few additional items that complemented the ones I was considering purchasing. As a result, I ended up buying a few more items that I had budgeted for.

Professional selling is about helping people make educated buying decisions. Professional service is about creating a memorable experience for your customers. Combine the two and you can quickly entice people to return while increasing the amount they spend each time they frequent your business.

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