

Counter Intuitive: Smart sales and service tactics

By Tim Huckabee

I'd really like to do a discount here, but I noticed the card says "Happy Valentine's Day, 1978".



Ward Off Discount Diggers

The SCENARIO:

A customer comes in demanding a discount because she wasn't satisfied with an order she placed three months ago. Clearly, this is a case of return-policy abuse. How will you deal with the situation without making the customer more upset or losing profit on her purchase?

The REALITY:

I am always asked in my sales training at flower shops, "Why do we let customers get away with these things?" My answer is simple: because you let them! Successful retail stores (small or large) have a set return policy. Why don't you?

Educate the staff

Walk around your store and ask employees what the store return policy is. The various (and maybe contradictory) answers may surprise you. At your next store meeting,

review policies and procedures with the entire sales staff. If every salesperson gives a consistent answer, customers will get the message. Also, post your policy in plain sight, at registers and other heavy-traffic areas.

Educate the customer

The old adage is true: there is always an exception to the rule, however, that decision should be left to the discretion of the owner or manager, not the rank and file. If a customer is making an unreasonable request, I always default to the policy, explaining it as written law: "Mrs. Customer, I'm sorry you didn't like the flowers you sent your daughter three months ago, HOWEVER, our policy (point to the sign) clearly states that refunds or replacements are happily given within 24 hours of delivery (or whatever your policy is)!"

Reason with the customer

Whenever customers attempt to return or complain about a (perishable) item weeks or months later, I tell them, "Mrs. Customer, I am sorry the flowers did not last as long as you wanted, HOWEVER, if you had called us the following day, I would have replaced them for you. Also, we could have seen the flowers to understand if there was a problem with the shipment from the wholesaler or some other issue."

Bottom line: Run your flower shop like the high-end retail business that it is!

Tim Huckabee is president of Floral Strategies, a one-on-one sales and customer service training company exclusively for florists. Got a customer service challenge? Tell Tim and he'll tackle it in an upcoming column. E-mail tim@floralstrategies.com or call (800) 983-6184.

Just Browsing Online Sources for the Floral Industry

www.BusinessKnowHow.com

Need to brush up on your networking skills before SAF's annual convention, SAF Maui 2004, this month? Click on "tips and hints" on this site, in the left column under "departments." Scroll down for "networking tips," such as, ask open-ended questions and follow up with new peers via phone or e-mail. Don't forget other helpful information on the site, including how to improve sales calls and plan for last-minute meetings.

Don't Miss: The link on leveraging your voicemail. Catch callers' attention with a fun, engaging voicemail greeting.

www.BHG.com

Halloween is just around the corner – use the help of an expert, Better Homes and Gardens, to deck your store with ghosts and goblins. Click the "holidays" link at the top and choose "Halloween." Select "easy decorations" for ideas and instructions, such as how to make a "boo banner" or "sequin-striped pumpkin." Get your customers in the spooky spirit by placing "sparkling pumpkins" or "lollipops in disguise" near your register.

Don't Miss: The link for "fiendish fishbowls," with step-by-step instructions for making an eye-catching fishbowl flowerpot with decoupage.