

Dear Tim...

IT'S SHOWTIME!

My staff hides behind the counter, and when they do interact with customers on the floor, it's typically with a feeble, "How can I help you?" I know we can do better. Help! FRANK EGAN, ENCHANTED FLOWER BOUTIQUE, NEW ROCHELLE, NEW YORK

Why aren't we excitedly greeting customers who have come to give us their money? Have you walked into Walgreens lately? If you have, then you've noticed that the person behind the counter practically accosts you with a hearty, "Welcome to WALGREENS!!!" Why don't we see this more in the floral industry? I have my own theory: Our fear of engagement is a nasty manifestation of undervaluing what we do (apologizing for the prices we charge is another one).

We need to be at least half as engaging with customers as the clerks at Walgreens!

Go Full Frontal

Get out from behind that darned counter, let customers see all of you and work the floor! There is always something to be done in the shop, from watering and dead-heading plants to dusting and restocking, so stay on the floor and you'll be more readily accessible to customers as they enter.

When a customer walks into a business and sees the staff just lingering behind the counter, chatting, it sends the message, "Yeah, we're busy talking about what we're gonna order for lunch. Give a shout if you need any help." I remember visiting a doughnut shop where the manager (!) stood finishing a discussion about plans for the weekend with a staff member while I was going through caffeine withdrawal. I lost it and blurted out, "Sounds like fun, but I need a medium latte, stat!"

Just as bad: employees who are hypnotized by their cell phones instead of making eye contact with an incoming customer.

Doesn't matter if these conversations and texts are work-related — you need to be totally available to incoming traffic. Easy enough, right?

Be a Host With the Most

Your team may ask, "But what do we SAY?" Here are some of the lines I use to greet customers (feel free to massage these and make them your own).

What can I help you to celebrate today? Yes, to those of you whose vase is always half empty: occasionally customers will tell me that they need to order funeral flowers upon hearing this question, but I have never had anyone appear offended or walk out of the store.

Are you looking for birthday or anniversary flowers? I typically use that line on men. It's a great ice-breaker and leads to discovering if it's a milestone event — the perfect opportunity to offer a larger design/higher price point.

Are you shopping for yourself or looking for a gift? Usually reserved for women, this is a quick way to learn if your customer needs loose flowers, maybe for her own container, or an arranged design to take with her.

And remember: It's not just what you say, but also how you deliver the message; your tone and level of enthusiasm is critical. Make sure that you are conveying interest and professional confidence with your voice.

Once you have connected with the customer and have a grasp of what's brought her in today, you must direct her to the best item for their needs. Don't take the lazy way out and just point to

the cooler. Take control instead: "Let's look in the cooler so I can introduce you to a few designs that I think would be perfect for you!"

The bottom line: You can set the tone and pace for the entire sale based upon how quickly, eagerly and enthusiastically you greet shoppers. 🌸



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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.

