

CALL SERVICE INVESTIGATION

Tim Huckabee goes undercover to report the good, the bad and the “you better hope this wasn’t your shop.”

Tune in LIVE to a CSI Flower Shop Webinar on July 9, as Huckabee makes sympathy/funeral calls. www.safnow.org/webinars

The Call

- SHOP:** A florist in Boise, Idaho
- SCENARIO:** A customer calls late in the day for same-day delivery
- EMPLOYEE:** Good afternoon, ABC Flower Shop. My name is Adele.
- TIM:** Hi Adele. I need your help. Today’s my wedding anniversary and I forgot!
- EMPLOYEE:** Uh oh, you’re in trouble. Did you want to come and pick something up? We’re cut off for deliveries today.
- TIM:** I’m in Philadelphia on business and won’t be home in time, so I have to get flowers delivered tonight!
- EMPLOYEE:** We’ll I’m sorry, but we cannot take any more orders for today, we cut off at 2 p.m. and our driver has gone home.
- TIM:** I know that I’m late but I’m really in a bind. My wife loves your flowers and I really wanted to order from you. Is there ANYTHING you can do to help me out?
- EMPLOYEE:** I know, but we have a cut off at 2 p.m., it’s now 4 p.m. — you’re super, extra late.
- TIM:** Adele, I’m really in a bind. Can you ask your manager, please?
- EMPLOYEE:** (after placing me on hold) Well, maybe I can call a courier service, but it’s going to be an extra cost.
- TIM:** That would be great! Tell me what you can send my wife for \$200.

Adele finally took my delivery order and promised that my marriage would be saved!

The Analysis

- 👉 Adele had a perky personality, and she stated her name — among the easiest but often forgotten rules of good customer service.
- 👉 Adele’s “uh oh, you’re in trouble” remark and her comment that my “marriage would be saved” showed she connected with me and my situation.
- 👉 Adele told me what she could not do — three times — and mildly scolded me for calling so late, as if I should have known all of their rules and regulations.
- 👉 By overlooking the fact that I might be willing to pay extra to get flowers to my wife, Adele nearly chased me into the arms of a competitor.

The Fix

Too often I hear staff in flower shops almost relish telling customers that they’re too late to place an order, like they are punishing them for being naughty. Make no mistake: There are plenty of shops that would gladly bend their rules for an order, because it often means they’ve earned a customer for life. You should, too. Here are some alternate ways to handle this common situation:

Option One: Empathize

“Congratulations on your anniversary! Thanks so much for calling us for this special occasion. We have actually stopped taking orders for delivery today, but I understand how important it is to get our beautiful flowers to your wife. Tell me your home address and then I am going to place you on hold for a quick minute to come up with some options.”

At that point, Adele could have asked her manager for some solutions. She could have called a courier company or taxi to find out availability and pricing. Additionally, since she knew where the flowers were going, she could have offered to deliver them herself or send them home with a co-worker who lives closest to my home.

Option Two: Improvise

Now, let’s say you don’t have the product, a designer in the store or access to a courier service. Here’s a trick that I often use to save an order that might otherwise be lost.

“Congratulations on your anniversary! Thanks so much for calling us for this special occasion. I know how important this is for you, but I have no way of getting flowers to your address tonight. However, I have a great option. I will happily call your wife and explain that we have an order for beautiful anniversary flowers but are unable to get them delivered today. I’ll offer to read the card message —so she knows that you did not forget! — and then deliver the flowers tomorrow to her at work or home!”

This is a diplomatic way of letting a customer know the obstacles while at the same time expressing empathy for their situation and, most importantly, a solution. It’s also a gentle way of training him to order early the next time! This does not always work, but it’s far better than just kicking the customer to the curb!

Bottom line: Be flexible, be helpful and save those last minute orders!

Tim Huckabee, an international flower shop sales and customer service trainer, is founder and president of Floral Strategies LLC and the American Institute of Floral Sales Experts (AIFSE), a retail floral sales certification program. If you would like Tim to test-call your shop for this column, contact him at (800) 983-6184 or tim@floralstrategies.com.