



How's the Show in your Showroom?

By Daniel H. Chinitz

It took seven rings. Finally, a less than enthusiastic voice picked up the phone, muttering the name of the showroom as if I had just woken him up. "Hi, is Susan available?" I asked in an upbeat voice. There was a pause. "Nah, she's not here," was mumbled back. He didn't offer to help me or take a message.

This isn't the first time this has happened to me in our industry, so I did what I usually do in this situation; I said nothing. I like to see how long it will take the person on the other end of the phone to say something else. But before I could even count to three, he just hung up. If I were a customer, do you think I would be eager to do business with this place? Ever hear the phrase "You're as good as your weakest link?"

Now I know *your* phone is never answered this way but it is amazing how many are. Try calling a few or better yet, call your own place sometime to hear how you sound to the outside world. If the cashier at the fast food counter can be taught to offer apple pie before the sale is concluded, surely we can all be taught to answer our phones properly. Let's start with "ABC Bath Showroom, this is Susan, how may I help you?" That personal touch might make your customers feel more at home, don't you think? Stating the name also eliminates the embarrassment a repeat caller might feel if they recognize the voice but have forgotten the name.

Furthermore, it is probably a safe assumption that our customers call *other* businesses in *other* industries in the course of their day. Therefore, it is logical to conclude that we are constantly being compared. If Mrs. Smith just finished a phone conversation with another local business and was handled with courtesy and then calls your place and gets a "*whatta ya want*" attitude, you can probably move that potential client over to the loss column.

Like it or not, our businesses are constantly subject to these types of comparisons. One of my New York City clients was recently discussing how competitive things have gotten, Is there a place with more competition than the New York Metropolitan area? It's the land of selection, service and attitude; with lots of each. But this is also where you will see some of the greatest talent on earth perform...in all professions.

Take Broadway for example. A typical Broadway show is a good example of striving for perfection. Even if the play itself isn't that great, the talent behind it usually is. The competition to land a role is so fierce that only the best in the world might as well audition. The end result is that the acting is close to perfect night after night. It doesn't matter if they aren't feeling well or had a fight with their significant other. They show up for work and always perform professionally.

Perhaps it is not quite fair to compare your staff to world class Broadway talent, but there are certainly some parallels to draw here. If the showroom is your stage and that

customer walking in the door (or calling) is your audience, they won't care if your salesperson is having a bad day. They expect a good attitude and professional service; anything less will send them back out the door they just walked through. Conversely, showering them with kindness and a little knowledge will make that great first impression that keeps them glued to their seats. Everyone in the showroom must understand that they are going to be immediately judged.

Furthermore, just like professional actors who expertly deliver their lines, we need to know our products. Who has patience for a salesperson fumbling through catalogs not knowing the answer to a question? Can you imagine paying \$150 per ticket to watch ill prepared actors look at each other in confusion? That show will close faster than you can hand out the refunds. How long do you think your customers will hang around waiting for you to get your act together; especially when they plan on spending much more than \$150? They might start thinking about taking their chances with that website they checked out with the low prices.

And what about adapting to the customer's personality? A good actor becomes their character; sometimes to the point where they are so good at it we typecast them. Surely you can think of an actor who fit a role so well that it is hard to accept him or her playing another part. In sales, we need to perform; sometimes by modifying our presentation to suit the customer's personality. We have created our show and now have to act in it.

There is something to be said for that special salesperson with the ability to adjust their presentation *style* to fit the customer's profile. A quiet, dignified couple probably won't react well to a salesperson nicknamed "Crazy Eddie." They certainly will be more comfortable working with someone equally dignified and able to present useful information in a quiet and organized fashion. Yet the next customer up might be crazier than Crazy Eddie and get turned on by a salesperson running around the showroom pointing out all the cool products and neat benefits.

Is everyone on your sales staff prepared for the different types of personalities they will be facing? Do they understand the need to adapt in order to be effective? This begins by asking the right questions and then *listening* and *observing* how the customer answers. The *way* the customer answers can tell your salesperson almost as much as the answers themselves.

Your client's comfort level with your place of business begins and ends with the people representing the company. From that first phone call to the handshake signifying the creation of an order, when those lights go up, your staff needs to enter your stage knowing their lines (the products), understanding their audience (the customers) and prepared to give the best performance of their life.

Much like the one they just finished.

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