

IDEAS

Inside **IDEAS** > The Lesson Room Page 32 > Tech Beat Page 34

LESSONS LEARNED | BY GERSON ROSENBLOOM

THE EYE OF THE CUSTOMER

It's a simple truth — we humans are creatures of habit. If you watched a video of your daily activities from one day to the next, you'd probably be surprised that there are certain things that you do with uncanny repetitiveness. You probably pull the comb through your hair nearly the same number of times every day. The same shoe goes on first. You have a morning ritual that is likely a routine. And then you get to your store where you walk right past the same weeds growing through the sidewalk, in the doors and past the disorganized displays, dusty drum sets and stained floor. Do you do this because you don't care? Of course not. You do it because you're a creature of habit going through the same daily routine. In short, you pass these things by because you simply don't see them. But the thing is, your customers see them, and they make a bad impression.

I learned this many years ago when a friend of mine, John McMurray of McMurray Music in St. Louis, invited me to attend an annual sales event at his store. Since we both held similar sales, we visited one another and helped out. If you have a similar opportunity, do it. It's



'Some things just weren't that obvious because they became the norm for me and my staff.'

fun to work for someone else where you get to sell in another environment without the ultimate responsibility of running the business.

But the most amazing part is that we both saw things in the other person's store that we never saw on our own. He pointed out

glaring issues in my store that were hurting the customer experience. And fixing those problems paid dividends.

The next step for me was to take this isolated set of observations and leverage what I learned into an ongoing program to ensure that I was always putting my company's best foot forward. However, that's not as easy as it sounds. No matter how committed I was to making my store look its best, some things just weren't that obvious because they became the norm for me and my staff.

SECRET STAFF SHOPPERS

To give us the ability to look at the store with "customer eyes," I put a fun little exercise into place. Since my store was departmentalized, I had staffers "shop" other staffers' departments. So the keyboard folks critiqued the guitars, and the guitar folks looked at drums, etc. Since they rarely had reason to spend time in those departments, noticing things that weren't quite right was actually quite easy. To balance it, I asked them to report on truly outstanding things in the department, and then the problems that needed to be addressed.

I didn't want to make this too negative. So, to limit any bad feel-

ings, I did a couple of things. First and foremost, I created a safe environment that helped my staff to understand that these weren't personal attacks by co-workers. Instead, this was an opportunity to see the things that our customers would see and not like. In essence, this exercise was a business-building opportunity. Secondly, I limited the "shopping" time to just a few minutes. I wasn't looking for anyone to redesign someone's department — I just wanted the stuff that really jumped out. And finally, to make this as real as possible, these exercises were always surprise events. This way, what we got to see as we looked around was the real deal — just how the store would look to any customer showing up unannounced.

Even if your store is less departmentalized, and everyone does everything, it's still important to go through this exercise. In that case, consider bringing in friends and relatives to do this reporting for you. Either way, you'll be amazed at what you've been missing. **MI**

Gerson Rosenbloom is the vice president of strategic management at Sweetwater Sound, the former president of Medley Music and a past NAMM chairman. Email him at: gersonmusicinc@gmail.com.