

IDEAS

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INDEPENDENT RETAIL | BY TED ESCHLIMAN

SELLING IN 3-D

What can we do to make our stores compelling to customers?

Top-tier retail establishments go to great lengths to make their selling spaces physically attractive, sparing no expense and remodeling often. Some in our industry understandably cut corners on design, focusing on hiring musically literate staff who are friendly and trainable. Some focus resources on advertising, running high-energy sales events, community performances, or partnering with vendors and local music organizations.

These are nice broad-based tactics, but there are easier ways to make shopping more appealing. Sometimes, it's as elementary as your sales team's body language.

As the local independent warriors, the sharpest weapon we carry is an opportunity for intimacy and personal interaction with our customers. You can't offer this with a computer mouse or two-dimensional computer screen, and in a big-box retail model, it's a losing battle.

That said, there are three essential concerns we little guys



Three body language essentials for every salesperson

need to take into account in the day-to-day interactions with our clientele — and especially our first-visit patrons.

Incongruence. When a customer asks for a product located at the other end of the store, the worst thing a clerk can do is barely lift a finger and say, "Over there." If an item is more than 5 feet away, the employee needs

to express interest in helping the customer, not with a larger pointing motion but a show of physical support by walking with him to the product (best) or simply moving with him at least two physical steps (acceptable). The body demonstrates a sincerity that can't be communicated with the voice.

Gestures. On an intuitive level, we're aware that pointing directly at someone, even casually, serves as a warning. An extended finger is a sword, and we have to be careful what subliminal signals we send with our hands and faces. Folks can be offended by tiny body gestures.

Personal space. In the unspoken rules of space and touch, we dance a delicate choreography in balancing a sense of territory with the desire for intimacy.

In her book, *The Power Of Body Language: How To Succeed In Every Business And Social Encounter*, Tonya Reiman outlines four levels of the space sphere. There's the *public space* at 12 feet, in which one is free to move around with little interaction. Shoppers who simply want to browse demand you respect this. If they are "just looking," they expect you to keep a pal-

pable distance, especially when they're auditioning instruments. Then there's the *social space* at 4 feet where they may wish to ask questions. The access to closer *personal space* is something that must be earned, developed with a certain level of trust, one that can never be imposed on without permission. Violating this prematurely has damaging effects. The final sphere, *intimacy*, from 2 feet away to actual touching is reserved for deeper bond and will only occur when mutual respect and confidence is achieved over time. Without a doubt, it's always best to err on the greater distance.

Every person is different, and that makes this a challenge. Some salespeople achieve maximum informality immediately, and others are exposed as buffoons when they rush. In conversation, it's a bad enough mistake, but when you add physical contact, or even a violation of personal space, it has devastating results on a potential relationship. This is something worth investing time into observing. **MI**

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