

INDEPENDENT RETAIL | BY TED ESCHLIMAN

The Sleeper 'Sell'

In last February's issue of *Music Inc.*, I introduced the concept of 3-D selling, making a case that the independent retailer has an edge over its less-personal cyber and box retail competition. This dimensional advantage is also fraught with caveats — I stressed the importance of physical space, body language and gestures.

Now, let's look at the evolution of effective sales culture, the way staff approaches customers and strategizes how to make their lives better through the acquisition of our goods and services.



THE JUMP-THE-COUNTER APPROACH

The sale is too often conceptualized as a military action, taught for the last several decades as an aggressive frontal assault necessary to capture a decision to buy. I suggest that, though the individual components of this old-school strategy remain conceptually sound, a conquest mentality is usually counterproductive nowadays. Customers reject being sold or coerced. They're weary of Madison Avenue-hyped commercials and tired of junk mail and spam. News alert: They aren't coming to your store to be your commission. Arguably, they don't trust salespeople.

If the sale comes through a bait-and-switch or any kind of deceptive tactic, they'll be even less trusting of your store. Customers connected through social media and message boards will publicly have your head on a platter.

A more contemporary way to gain the advantage is to come from the side with a jump-the-counter approach. If you communicate, "I'm one of you," as someone partnered in the journey for the truth, you can go a long way in establishing, at minimum, a short-term professional relationship, if not a lifelong customer.

We do this when we participate in music together outside the store — if not directly, indirectly. You may not be in their church choir, but you might be in a choir. You may not be in their band, but maybe you're in, or were in, a band. These six degrees of separation make us effective as agents in a "sleeper cell." We can live as one of them for months, if not years, and one day, that golden opportunity arises. And through our con-

nections, they will unwittingly fall into our trap and succumb to our expertise.

A COUPLE TIPS

First, you can reduce the tension and the threat of space violation to a new customer by using props. If you walk toward strangers with nothing in your hands, they'll feel like a target. If you carry a tuner, instrument, piece of print music or empty box, it looks as if you're going about your duties, and your assistance is caring but prompt. This diversion goes down a lot easier when you initiate the preliminary inquisition.

Another proposition is the soft-core interrogation. Once they're talking, start listening, and only ask questions that can help you uncover their mission. Each question — how much, what features — is an invitation for a qualifying question on your part, such as, "Who recommended this instrument?" Or, "Where will you be playing this?" It's a conversation, not a conquest.

A sleeper cell can be within the microcosm of an individual sale or a personal community involvement. Whether in the moment or in the relationship, be one of them. **MI**

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Eliminate military-esque sales tactics and be 'one' with your customers