

# IDEAS

Inside **IDEAS** > The Lesson Room Page 34 > Lessons Learned Page 36 > The Retail Doctor Page 38

INDEPENDENT RETAIL | BY TED ESCHLIMAN

## DIAGNOSING PATIENCE

**N**obody likes to wait. Today's consumers have a shorter attention span and busier lifestyle. We go on shopping trips to "hunt" and "bag," and we increasingly execute the science of shopping and preparatory research online. That said, we also have to take into consideration what our brick-and-mortar stores offer that will never be available in the cyber experience: sights, sounds, smells and the primal caress of human interaction.

So, let's look at the three different customer profiles: the Mercenary, the Scout and the Explorer. This will help junior staff — and maybe even sales veterans — identify and meet the needs of your clients.

### THE MERCENARY

If you're dealing with a parent who's on a mission to pick up a box of reeds and get out of the store, the worst thing you can do is slow down the transaction. It's very bad form to use the clothing-store closing on the Mercenary customer. ("Need shoes? Shirts? How about a tie?")

Yes, you want to be friendly and answer inquiries compre-



### How to recognize and better serve the three major customer types

hensively. But if this person's in a hurry, don't squander his or her time. Be courteous and welcoming, but honor the customer's deadline and get him on his way. If you don't, he may never come back.

### THE SCOUT

Some folks require more care. You may have someone shop-

ping for not only an actual item but the best place to buy it. In looking for information, he may not even have the right questions.

Unlike the Mercenary, the Scout's visit isn't a task, per se. This distinction can be hard to detect, so you really need to listen and ask intelligent probing follow-up questions. "How did you determine you wanted a Bach Strad Trumpet?" "What inspired you to come here?" "What are the other kids playing?"

When you're allowed time to converse, you are in a much better position to meet this customer's needs. You also create a more pleasant, richly interactive shopping experience.

### THE EXPLORER

Understand, we sell fun. We sell the stuff to make fun. Our business is all about tangential experiences in pleasure. Sometimes, this comes from what we seek, other times from what we simply stumble across.

Unlike the Mercenary or the Scout, some of your customers don't know why they're visiting. They want to experience. Maybe it's the new line of guitar effects pedals they've read about, maybe it's a horn like

theirs but with a darker tone — it really doesn't matter. They want to explore, and they want the time and space to discover freely. These customers can be the most fun.

Here's the rub: Each of these customers requires a different approach, and not every salesperson is genetically equipped to make a diagnosis. The problem is worse when the store gets busy, but that's when the skill is even more critical.

In the days of one-click Internet shopping, the Mercenary might never come back if the sales transaction labors too long or if he has to wait too long in line while the Explorer gabs. The Scout might think the sales staff is rude if every effort is made to push customers out through the door. The Explorer may very well be content to hang for a while because you've intentionally created a shopping culture in your store that promotes exploration.

A busy store is like a hospital emergency room triage, so invest the time to train staff to diagnose "patience." **MI**

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