

IDEAS

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INDEPENDENT RETAIL | BY TED ESCHLIMAN

BEATING A SLUMP

“You can trust your car to the man who wears the star. The big bright Texaco star!”

If you were to spontaneously hum the above jingle’s melody it would betray your age. It was big in the 1960s, this major corporation’s image pitch was of unrestrained service onto a generation of motorist consumers. Snappy uniforms and sparkling metal equipment, overt and painstakingly honest technicians who went out of the way to assure your freshly fueled car worked not only in the station but many miles outside of it.

Earnest? Arguably. Nonetheless, it was a multi-million dollar ambition to romance us to Texaco’s turf. Really, it’s absurd for gas stations to stay that kind of clean. Wouldn’t you be more suspicious of a spotlessly uniformed mechanic over one greased from sleeve to cuff?

Things change. Today, there’s no employee at a station that is remotely an expert on car maintenance. Gas stations are now convenience stores minimally manned by dispassionate minimum wage clerks. Though we understand



Posture and friendliness are key to good customer service

it’s a different world, our hearts still long for that ’60s mythos.

Music stores have a whole different set of service expectations than gas stops. Our product is lifestyle — infinitely more aesthetic and complex. Really, those commercials are more fitting for us than the gas stop. When a customer enters, we have a deeply genuine opportunity to enhance lives through music. Though to-

day’s culture hardly expects a spotless uniform, we could still be neat and friendly (emphasize that last part). Most important, we need to register this with our body language and posture.

PHYSICALITY & FIRST CONTACT

Slumping is an avoidable body signal violation on the sales floor. Standing or sitting on a stool (even leaning on a counter) shoulders slumped, is an instinctually negative signal to broadcast to a customer. Throw the shoulders back and bring both the center of the chest and chin up — your impact is starkly different. This might not feel natural for many, but a conscious effort will have a visible impact on customers, especially in making a first impression. Managers, take heed. Never have stool behind the sales counter. Standing equals attention!

THREE’S A CROWD

Imagine a customer is allowed to slip through employees and roam through the store alone for several minutes. They almost have one foot out the door. You stop her and ask, “Did you find what you were looking for?” Her

response is she was looking for a very specific “mission” item. It turns out it is something you stock. You narrowly avoided missing that sale.

Customers don’t like “bothering” sales crew. They especially don’t want to ask an employee that’s busy or comfortable in conversation with a fellow employee.

Some might be bold enough to ask a single employee for help. If two workers are talking to each other, there’s a significantly less chance he will interrupt. If three are talking, the conversation is perceptively closed to “outsiders,” impossible to barge in on. It’s great to have social employees that like each other, but fraternizing must stop when a customer is in earshot.

It takes little more than eye contact, upright shoulders, and a smile to make folks feel welcome. Yes, dancing around like a vintage Texaco commercial today would be way overboard, but at minimum we need to make the drive to a brick-and-mortar an experience worth the gas. **MI**

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