

IDEAS

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INDEPENDENT RETAIL | BY TED ESCHLIMAN

YOU DON'T BRING ME FLOWERS

I have a confession to make — after almost three decades of marriage, I've recently learned something startling: wives like flowers.

My wife has simple taste. She's never been much for expensive jewelry or cars. I never felt compelled to go overboard with flowers, even on special occasions, but I'd splurge once in a while. On Valentines Day, I'd go with the herd and treat her to a nice bouquet. A couple years ago, I noticed she was adorning our kitchen counter with her own modest grocery florist arrangements.

Feeling a little guilty, I soon discovered that something I was blissfully ignorant of could completely brighten her day for a nominal investment with huge emotional dividends. How could I have been so clueless for so many years?

Relationships with our customers are so much like a marriage — easy to take for granted and we can be trapped in blissful ignorance of the simple actions we can take to show our appreciation for them. Sometimes it's modest, mindful steps that keep these bonds healthy.

Reboot. Often times, we're sadly naïve thinking we've done something special for our spouse



Relationships with customers can be easy to take for granted

or our customer afterwards. We remember giving that church committee a really good deal or loaning the hi-hat stand to an absent-minded weekend warrior drummer at the last minute or the time we stayed open a few extra minutes for Kelsey's mom to get the reeds she needed for her contest. We think we "own" them. However, we forget the what-have-you-done-for-me-lately human-default mode. Favors wear off, and they must be re-

peated and/or replaced. Don't think that one great thing you did for that customer grants you permanent loyalty. Those flowers wilt, and need to be replaced with fresh ones. Frequently.

Fill their needs. Our business is not just about moving inventory. We're here to meet needs. A good marriage looks out for what the partner needs, not what we can get. Yes, we need to turn a profit in our business, but we have to proactively wire our staff, our goods and our services to solve problems, adjust, and be attentive to shifting market tastes and desires.

Flatter. We should compliment our customers. A sincere note of congratulations on a well executed concert, an "atta boy!" after a good lesson or a public acknowledgement of an award reminds your customer you are tuned in to them. Airlines thank you at the end of each flight for choosing them over their competition. Do you thank your customer for stopping in (over the convenience of staying home and clicking a mouse) for a purchase?

Be transparent. There are things your store does well and things it can never do. We can't be all things to all people, espe-

cially in today's global economy of specialty retail. Know what you do well and brag about it, but don't try to be something you aren't. Be open enough to admit it. Great relationships demand everlasting candor.

Demonstrate an interest. Our customers typically are overt about their musical activities; they're dying to tell you about them. Take some time to listen. You never know when they might mention a need that involves you making a sale. You've probably feigned an interest in something your spouse wanted to talk about, right? Let your customer bare his/her soul in small doses.

"Like" things they like. We get entombed in our own tastes, and it can be hard to branch out. Music changes and so does the equipment that makes it. Get contemporary, be eclectic and even if it's not your thing, you could at least appreciate the fortitude it takes to perfect.

Do these seem trite? Some might say fresh flowers are too, but it's the unexpected and simple things that make the most impact on customer rapport. **MI**

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