

THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



948 What Customers Don't Need

Customers need a number of things from us. Attention, a good attitude, patience, and more. There are also things they don't need. We'll get into that, next, on The Extra Point.

If you're an old-timer to The Extra Point, you might recall that I once talked about a trip I took to the Seattle area, and my experiences while shopping. It wasn't pretty.

It began with a visit to a KMart store, where seven employees were huddled together on the side, near the entrance. They were giggling and chirping away at each other. At least two of them saw me, but did or said nothing.

I then interrupted them to ask if they had a specific item I was after, and the looks on their faces told me they didn't appreciate me breaking up the party.

One person stepped forward, and pointed to an area in the back of the store where the item might be, then turned back to the huddle. I didn't even get an aisle number, just a finger directing me to a general area of the store. They didn't have the item.

So, one thing customers don't need is to be ignored by your staff.

Later, I went to Lowe's, a national retailer like Home Depot. It was a huge store and a large team to handle the big customer flow they had.

I asked one worker for help on finding what I wanted, and was given the aisle number and the finger that pointed in the general direction. It wasn't there. I asked another employee, and was told it was another aisle on the other side of the store. Not there.

Two more employees, two more aisles, two more fruitless journeys. Here's the thing, in both of the last two of these encounters, I told the worker I had been sent to the wrong place.

Nobody offered to walk with me to make sure I found the item. That is, until I was about to leave. A lady asked me, "So, you couldn't find anything here that you need?" I took a breath, and explained what had happened. She apologized and walked me to the correct aisle. Unfortunately, the item was out of stock.

So, another thing your customers don't need is to be sent on wild goose chases. If you're directing me to a location, be absolutely sure what I want is there. Better yet, whenever it is possible, take me there.

I also stopped by a Subway shop to grab a sandwich. There were three workers and three customers in the store. The customers got more than sandwiches that day.

The three were babbling back and forth about their boss, that they didn't like the shifts they had been assigned, and then general yak about music, movies, and more. They were talking in a normal tone, and it was all clearly heard by everybody in line.

We were all sharing glances with each other, like "why are we hearing this?"

So, if people on your team face off with the public, it would be good to remind them that your customers don't need to hear rambling conversations from employees.

The three issues mentioned — being ignored by employees, being sent to the wrong location, and hearing employees chattering with each other about what they like and don't like, regularly show up in customer surveys.

I was reminded of all this in the past couple of weeks, when I experienced all three of those things.

(Con't.)

If a worker sees a customer looking around for assistance, help them. Employees who are doing nothing more than talking with each other — while a customer needs help — is a bad look for the organization.

If an employee is totally engaged in a task and unable to walk me to a specific aisle, I'm okay with directions. However, if they're not helping another customer or are otherwise occupied, or they can't leave their location — why not get a little exercise and escort me to the product?

Finally, remind everybody on the team to be careful with casual conversation. Save that for break time or off-work time.

While I'm sure there are folks who would like to know that someone hates their manager, or which singer or actor they think is smokin' hot, the majority of customers can probably do without that information.

That's the Extra Point. Be responsible and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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