

The Greeting

Greeting is the art and science of welcoming the customer to your store. This is the very first thing you should do -- and it's the most critical.

Why is greeting so critical?

A lot of things happen. They all take place within the first couple of minutes after a customer enters your store. They immediately do a visual assessment: How does the store look? Is the merchandise appealing? Is the store welcoming?

Does the customer feel like they "belong" in the store?

It is during this brief time period that the customer decides if they are going to buy from you. In a very short time the customer makes some really quick decisions -- and many of them are subconscious. They decide:

- If they feel comfortable and at ease in your store
- If it seems likely that your store has merchandise they like
- If they want to stay or turn around and walk out

Here are the things we can do to influence their decisions to stay and buy. Obviously there are visual merchandising techniques we can employ to positively affect the decision process. But this book is about selling, not visual merchandising.

The GREETING PHASE is comprised of four elements or steps. They are:

1. Your approach to the customer
2. Gathering free information
3. Engaging them in conversation
4. Building a bridge to the next phase

Greeting Phase Step 1: Your Approach to the Customer

From the moment your customer crosses the threshold and enters your store, you have less than a minute to greet them to make them feel welcome.

Some people think that when you first greet the customer you are not selling. Of course you are selling! And as we discussed previously, you are selling yourself first, the store second, the experience third, and the merchandise last. You want to get the customer feeling comfortable in the store. You don't want to pounce on them too soon, because you will only make them feel uncomfortable and seem too pushy.

Greet customers even if you're helping other customers. Every single person who sets foot into your store must be met with a smile and a friendly attitude.

The Worst Opening Lines in Retail Sales

Here is where the first confusion in retail selling occurs. I don't know how it came into being, or why anyone still uses it, but without a doubt, the worst opening line in retail selling is:

“Can I help you?”

I just want to know how it got so popular. It does not work!
It is always followed with “No thanks. I'm just looking.”

The second worst opening lines to use in retail sales greetings are:
“How are you today?” or “How are you feeling?”

I pity the poor store clerk who ever asks me how I am feeling, because I am going to tell them. I am going to tell them that I have a pain in my lower back, I have a cut on my leg, my vision is a little cloudy, I am not hearing very well, I have a terrible headache, and my stomach is upset, too. Get the point?

The #1 Most Effective Greeting in Retail Sales

Over the years, we've tried every greeting known to man. We've also made up a few more. But we keep coming back to one tried-and-true winner. It is so simple and it works every time. And yet I am amazed how few stores use it!

Do you know it?

Are you ready to learn it?

Here it is, the #1 most effective greeting in retail sales:

“Thanks for coming in!”

Think about it. Your customer has an infinite number of choices and a limited amount of time. They could have done anything. They could have gone to the movies, a museum, a baseball game or Disneyland. They could have decided to stay in and read astronomy textbooks.

But they decided to shop.

Even within that decision, they still have a limitless number of choices. They could have gone online and bought what they wanted without ever leaving their house. They could have gone to a flea market or a garage sale. They could have gone to the big box store down the street. They could have gone to the mall. They could have gone to your competition.

But they chose to come to your store.

Knowing how lucky you are that they decided to shop in your store, is there anything else you

could possibly say to them except, “Thanks for coming in”?

No, we don’t think so, either.

A RANDOM GREAT IDEA

Never stop greeting! If you pass customers in the store, make sure to acknowledge them with a friendly smile!

Five Things to Remember About Greeting:

1. The goal of greeting is to make the customer feel welcome and appreciated.
2. Make eye contact when greeting the customer.
3. Never address a customer from behind – that’s scary and creates unwanted pressure.
4. Address customers from a reasonable distance -- no shouting across the store.
5. Have a unique, memorable greeting.

Always greet and welcome a customer, even if you’re not the one who will be helping them. At this point, the customer is forming an impression of the entire store, so the actions you take now are going to influence their decision, not only for this visit, but for every subsequent visit they may make to your store.

Greeting Phase Step 2: Gathering Free Information

After your warm, inviting and professional greeting, you want to engage the customer in conversation. This is how we recommend you do it. You want to exchange names for the sake of personalizing the interaction.

This is an example of how this might sound at Uncle Bob’s:

“Hi! Thanks for coming in! My name is Bonnie, and you are? Nice to meet you! Is this your first time in our store?”

This welcome accomplishes a number of things:

It welcomes the customer and puts them at ease. It expresses gratitude for their presence. It is also a form of compliment, because you are complimenting the decision they have made in coming into the store. It provides the sales associate’s name. It collects the customer’s name, which can be used again throughout the sales process. This strengthens the relationship. There is nothing sweeter to the ears than hearing one’s own name.

But, the key aspect of the above exchange is asking the customer if they have been in the store before. That’s free information, and there’s more what that came from.

Gathering Free Information

Conventional wisdom says there's no such thing as a free lunch, and do you know what? Conventional wisdom is right. Free lunches are far and few between!

However, during this step of the greeting, your customer is providing all kinds of free information you can use during the upcoming conversation. You can use this free information to help you customize and personalize the offerings you make during the EXPERIMENTING PHASE (discussed in a later chapter).

Savvy sales professionals must be observant of the silent cues a customer provides.

Examples of Silent Cues

- Clothing preference/style (sports logos, band names, or brand symbols)
- Jewelry, tattoos, or other personal decoration
- The type of car, truck, motorcycle or other vehicle the customer arrived in
- Items carried (purse, briefcase, diaper bag, bags from other stores)
- Literature carried (sales flyers, pages from magazines, Consumer Reports)
- People they're shopping with (spouse, parent, small children, teen children, friends)
- Body language: do they seem nervous, in a hurry, irritated, tired, excited or cheerful?

You can use much of this information as a starting point for subsequent conversation, or use the data gathered here to help you make more appropriate suggestions during the EXPERIMENTING PHASE of the sale.

Be observant without being judgmental. You cannot determine how much money someone has, what their credit rating is, how likely they are to buy, or what their station in life is based solely on physical appearance -- or even all of these silent cues combined!