

## Basic Training Course in Hardware Retailing

### THE ELEMENTS OF GOOD SELLING

Whether you know it or not, every time you interact with customers you are selling. While many retail sales associates might have a negative impression of the selling process, selling is quite a natural activity that involves good listening skills, asking the right questions and providing simple and honest answers. In other words—good selling is about effectively communicating with customers.

#### It's All About Helping Customers

Keep in mind that customers come to your store because they have a problem that they need your help solving. That's why good selling requires the confidence that you are helping customers as well as the right attitude and interest level. Be optimistic and show interest and your selling skills will start to unfold.

### THE BASIC ELEMENTS OF GOOD SELLING

#### 1. Product Knowledge

The most important thing is to know your products and their uses. That's what this training course can provide. With new products coming out almost daily, you must work to keep up with these new products, how they are made, what they can do and how they will help your customers.

#### 2. Service

You must be eager and willing to help your customers solve their problems, whether it is helping them find something in the store or helping them with a special order. Help them decide what it is they are trying to do. Then help them figure out the best product or the best way to get the results they want.

#### 3. Listening

When you are working with your customers, listen carefully to what they are saying. If you are not sure you understand, state in your own words what you think they said and ask if that is correct. Listen to their entire question. Provide the best possible answer based on what you know. If you don't know the answer, don't be afraid to tell them so. Then get the answer from a store employee or manager who does know.

#### 4. Common Courtesy

Show every customer your appreciation for choosing your store. Always say "please" and "thank you," and don't forget to hold the door for customers and carry large packages to their car for them.

#### 5. Empathy

Always remember to treat customers the same way you would like to be treated if you were in their place.

#### 6. Develop Relationships

Over time you will start to develop relationships with your customers. You will become someone that your customers rely on for information and recommendations, and because of this respect, they will loyally return to you and your store.

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### FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Most customers want to be made to feel both welcome and important when they enter the store. Many also want to establish a friendly report with a representative of the store before the sales process begins. Instead of starting the process by asking the customers what they need, make an opening friendly comment instead, such as just saying "Hello," or "It's good to see you today."

#### Asking the Right Questions

The next step is to ask a question that solicits more than just a "yes" or "no" answer. For example, instead of asking "May I help you," which they can answer either "Yes" or "No," instead ask "How may I help you," or "What can I do for you today," which will start a conversation.

#### Use the Customer's Name

The last thing to remember is to use customers' names whenever appropriate to help develop a relationship and make them feel more welcome.

### WAYS TO CREATE A POSITIVE FIRST IMPRESSION

#### 1. A Smile

Your smile tells customers they are your top concern and that you are eager to help.

#### 2. Direct Eye Contact

The best way to let the customer know they have your attention is through direct eye contact. When you are looking around the store while talking to a customer, it sends the message that you are probably not listening to or thinking about what they are saying. There is also a level of credibility and trust developed when store employees make eye contact with customers.

#### 3. A Courteous Attitude

Everyone wants to be treated with common courtesy and respect. Courtesy is more than saying please and thank you. It also includes opening doors, allowing others to go first, picking up products and carrying products for the customer. Your willingness to stop what you are doing and to solve your customer's problem are demonstrated by the expression on your face, how you stand and how you move. All these examples tell your customer that you are truly glad they came into your store and that you are ready to help them.

## Basic Training Course in Hardware Retailing

### 4. Proper Dress

Many stores require employees to wear some type of uniform. This helps customers easily identify who is a store employee. Uniforms may range from a shirt with the store's logo on it to a vest or apron. No matter what your store's dress code is, it is important that your appearance be clean and neat.

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## DIFFERENT CUSTOMER TYPES

There are several different types of customers you will encounter when working at a hardware store or home center.

Understanding the differences can help you determine what is most important to them.

### Needs Are Constantly Changing

However, it is important to remember that customers change depending on the reason they are coming into the store. Sometimes customers may need more help than others. Other times the same customer may know what they need and be in a hurry to get back home and finish their project.

This is what makes working with customers so interesting. Every time the door opens, we need to figure out what types of shoppers are entering the store. Only then we can meet their needs effectively.

## DIFFERENT CUSTOMER TYPES

### 1. Do-It-Yourself Enthusiasts

Do-It-Yourself Enthusiasts spend more time in the store and are usually not in a hurry. They enjoy looking at new products. They like to ask questions and expect you to know the answers. This customer usually will not need assistance in finding needed products.

### 2. High-Convenience Customers

High-Convenience Customers want a hassle-free shopping experience. They do not want to wait in lines and they will be frustrated if they need help finding products. If they do need help finding something, they expect immediate help. This type of customer will stop coming to your store if you do not have what they want when they want it. Study the Delivering Customer Satisfaction section very carefully. Being an expert in this area will help you deal successfully with this type of customer.

### 3. Price-Driven Shoppers

Price-Driven Shoppers will do almost anything in order to get the best price. Price-driven shoppers may come into your store, get all the information they need and go somewhere else to make the purchase because of a lower price. These shoppers frequently ask about prices and special deals.

### 4. High-Touch Customers

High-Touch Customers usually need more help than other customers, especially with project information. They need help with product selection and information on how to use the product. Typically, once you have convinced high-touch customers that you can help, you will see them repeatedly.

### 5. Time-Pressed Customers

Time-Pressed Customers want to get in, find what they want and get back out again. Time-pressed customers expect you to have what they need and to have the quantities they need. This is generally someone with a special problem.

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## DELIVERING CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Customer service is many times an overused term that can be somewhat vague and hard to fully understand. What more accurately pinpoints what customers want is a satisfying shopping experience, which consists of different things that are outlined in this section.

### All Customers Have Basic Expectations

While different types of customers will place different levels of importance on the various aspects that make up their shopping experience, no matter which type of customer you're helping, all customers have

basic expectations that make up customer satisfaction.

A basic understanding of the elements of customer satisfaction will help you deliver these things to your customers when they visit your store. Remember, selling is nothing more than providing customers with a satisfying shopping experience that will keep them coming back.

## THE ELEMENTS OF CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

### 1. "Help Me Save Money"

For many customers, saving money is the primary factor in choosing where they shop. Since you have direct contact with customers, you are the one most likely to hear if a price seems unfair to your customers. If you keep hearing the same comments from different customers about a particular product or department, you need to pass this information along to your supervisor. However, never agree with customers that a price is too high. Simply let them know you will pass this information along to your supervisors. You can do this by saying something like, "Thank you for telling me about that. I will be sure to pass it along."

### 2. Make It Easy To Return Merchandise

Be sure to fully understand your store's return policy when a customer wants to return or exchange merchandise they previ-

## Basic Training Course in Hardware Retailing

ously purchased. If you don't have authority to take returns, quickly find someone who can. Customers returning merchandise may be angry and uneasy about the situation. Put them at ease by telling them you will make the situation right. This will go a long way toward alleviating their anxiety.

### 3. "Help Me Save Time"

Today's time-pressed customers are always looking to save time. This doesn't mean they want to be rushed while in the store. It means they want to complete their home improvement project in as little time as possible.

### 4. Make It Easy To Get Answers

When customers have a question, they will look for the closest employee. Ideally, you will be able to answer any customer's question on the spot. However, if you don't know the answer, be honest and let the customer know that you will get the answer. If another sales associate is readily available to help, you should enlist his or her help. Then stick around and listen to the answer so the next time the question comes up you will know the answer.

### 5. Make It Easy To Find Products

While a store's layout, design and signage are important elements in saving customers' time and making it easy to find products, don't underestimate your role in providing this. You help maintain these displays by stocking merchandise in its proper location.

Fronting products or pulling products to the front of the shelf makes it easier for your customers to see all of your products.

Turning products so the labels face the front is important as well. You also help by returning products that are out of place and not in their proper location. By knowing the departments and the categories within each aisle, you can escort customers quickly to the items they need.

### 6. "Help Me Understand My Project"

Customers want project information. Knowing what resources your store has available is essential. Common resources include how-to books and videos, manufacturer Websites, vendor product demonstrations, product displays, how-to brochures, product literature, magazines and, of course, your product and project knowledge. We will discuss project knowledge in more detail later in this section.

### 7. Provide One-Stop Shopping

Customers want to be able to make just one stop when shopping for home improvement products. Since you are in direct contact with customers every day, you know when someone comes in and asks for something that you don't have. You also know if they come in and buy up your entire stock of a particular product. Passing this information on to your supervisor can help your store deliver better customer satisfaction.

### 8. Make It Easy To Check Out

Customers hate waiting in line to checkout. While this isn't directly related to selling skills, do whatever you can to facilitate a speedy checkout process by making sure the correct bin tags are placed on products and replace bin tags or sale signage that has fallen or been removed.

### 9. Make Shopping Enjoyable

Customers want a clean, comfortable and relaxing shopping environment. This type of environment is provided when you keep the aisles clear and free of clutter and keep displays stocked, clean and organized.

### 10. Special Services

Customers want to be able to talk to knowledgeable employees who can provide special services quickly. These services might include delivery, cutting, installation, special order, product assembly and even rental. Be sure to know what special services your store offers and how to help customers take advantage of them.

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## ENGAGING THE CUSTOMER

When you first encounter the customer and ask them how you might help them you are likely to hear three common responses, including: "I know what I want," "I'm just looking" and "I'm not really sure." Each one

will require different actions on your part, which are outlined in this section.

### Asking the Right Questions

Throughout the entire selling process remember to ask plenty of questions that solicit more than just a "Yes" or "No" response. Good selling requires effectively communicating with customers. And before you can provide the answers your customers are looking for, you need to first ask plenty of questions. Even when customers don't seem like they want to be bothered with any help or they say they're just looking, it doesn't mean they won't eventually need your help.

### "I KNOW WHAT I WANT"

This customer will probably require three things from you, including:

**1. Product Location**—If your store has aisle markers, try to remember the aisles, the numbers and what products are located on what aisles. These customers will probably ask you the aisle where the product they are looking for is located. Remember that it is always best to go with the customer to where the product is located to make sure they find the product and answer any questions.

**2. Help Carrying Large Items**—If this customer has several items or bulky items, he will expect you to help him carry them to the register and maybe even to his car.

## Basic Training Course in Hardware Retailing

**3. Product Recommendations**—The customer may have decided on a particular product and will want your input on whether or not it is the best fit for his needs. You then need to be able to offer an alternative product that will do the job. For example, if your customer needs a cordless screwdriver for a deck project and picks up a 7-volt cordless power screwdriver that is on sale, he will be disappointed when it does not work well. By telling the customer that particular tool is great for small jobs around the house, but isn't the best choice for a deck project, you may be able to prevent the customer from making a buying mistake. This opens the door for further conversation about product alternatives.

### **"I'M JUST LOOKING"**

This customer will generally expect one thing from you—just enough attention. They will want to be left alone to look at the products, read labels or try to figure something out. However, if they have a question, they expect you to be available with an answer. You can best serve this customer by asking, "Is there something in particular you're looking for?" If they say yes, you can take them to the correct area and let them browse. If they say no, then you can recommend items that are on sale or new items in the store.

### **"I'M NOT REALLY SURE"**

The customer who gives this response will require the most help from you, including:

**1. Product Information**—They will expect you to come up with ideas and make product recommendations. They may be looking more for information and ideas than for products.

**2. Asking Questions**—The best way to help this customer is to ask questions and listen carefully to their responses. The first thing you want to find out is how much the customer already knows. A good question is, "Have you used this product or done this project before?" If so, they probably have a specific question or problem in mind. If not, then you know your explanation will need to be longer and more detailed. Another good question to use is "Have you looked at other products like this?" If they answer yes, follow this question with "What did you like or dislike about the other products?" Their answer will tell you if the problem is one of price or product features. Again, if they answer no, you will need to talk about what your product will do for them. Be sure to summarize their points before making your final recommendations.

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## **DEALING WITH CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS**

Eventually, you are going to encounter a customer who is upset. They may be upset because the product they bought did not do

they job they wanted or they did not receive the service they expected.

### **A Golden Opportunity**

As you encounter these customers, you need to realize that your actions and the way you handle the situation is extremely important. If you meet or exceed the customer's expectations it represents a golden opportunity to turn these people into loyal customers. If you don't resolve the situation to their satisfaction, remember that you might not only be losing this customer for good, but they will more than likely tell others about their bad experience which could cost you potential customers.

### **Returns**

The majority of customer complaints will involve a return. Many times customers will be upset with a product they purchased and they will want to return or exchange it. First you must know your store's policy.

Return policies can range from a no-hassle return on all products to an absolute no return policy. Your store's policy is based on the type of customers and the type of returns you have had in the past. It is designed to satisfy as many customers as possible and at the same time protect the store. It should be posted in the store where both you and your customers can read it if there is a question. However, you need to fully understand your

store's return policy. If you have any questions at all, ask your supervisor. If your customers have a problem, you want to be able to follow that policy with confidence.

### **Complaints**

While almost every store has a product return policy, not as many have a customer complaint policy. Customer complaints can be a very useful tool in helping your store deliver customer satisfaction. If your store has a policy be sure you know and understand it completely.

When a customer has a complaint, you must first know how much authority you have to handle their complaint. You might be expected to completely handle the situation or you might have them fill out a complaint form and take that to a supervisor. Whatever your level of authority, be sure you know your store's policy and stick to it. Never promise your customer more than you can deliver.

### **WHAT YOU NEED TO DO**

Whether you are handling a customer complaint or a return, there are basic guidelines you need to follow. The following points in this section provide suggestions for what to do in response to customer complaints.

**1. Thank the Customer and Apologize**  
To help diffuse the situation, the first thing you should do is thank your customers for

## Basic Training Course in Hardware Retailing

bringing this to your attention. You also want to apologize for the fact that the customer had a problem.

### **2. Avoid Embarrassment**

Remember that your customers are just as uncomfortable in this situation as you are. Treat them with courtesy and respect. Then politely ask them to move with you to an area away from other customers to discuss the situation. If there is a product involved, go to where the product is located or to a work area where you can lay the product down to look at it together. If there are forms to fill out, you might ask them to go to the service counter to take care of this.

### **3. Listen To the Customer's Problem**

Next, you want to ask your customers to thoroughly explain their problem. While your customers are talking, do not interrupt. As you listen, take notes on the important points of the complaint. These might include things like what the customer was expecting or trying to do, what product or service they were using and why they were disappointed. These notes serve two useful purposes. They make it less likely that you will have to ask the customer to repeat any part of the complaint. They also tell the customer that you are interested and paying attention to them and their problem.

### **4. Use Understanding Comments**

When listening to the customer's complaint

or explanation, use phrases like "I see" and "I understand." These phrases do not say the customer is right or wrong. They simply let the customers know that you are listening.

### **5. Examine the Product**

If the customer has the product with them, look at it together. Let the customer know that you see the points they made during their explanation. At the same time, point out anything that may be out of the ordinary. As you look at the product together, the problem may become less serious to customers. Most customers are reasonable. If they see that they might have caused the problem themselves, their expectations for resolving the problem are likely to change. If your customers do not have it with them, then you need to arrange for them to bring it to the store if possible. If they have already installed the product and it can't be brought in, someone may need to go see the problem. Be sure to talk to your supervisor and follow store procedures.

### **6. Summarize the Situation**

After the customer has explained their problem, summarize the important points of the complaint in your own words. This allows you and the customer to be sure you understand each other.

### **7. Ask the Customer's Opinion**

The last thing you should do before taking

action to correct the problem is to ask the customer what they think should be done to solve the problem. In many cases, customers expect less than you are prepared to offer. If your customers recognize that they caused the problem, they will often decide to pay for another product. If possible, a discount for their time and effort to come in and share their problem would be a nice gesture. Whatever you do, follow your store's policy. If there is a question, ask your supervisor.

## **PROVIDING PRODUCT KNOWLEDGE**

As the employee of a hardware store or home center, you have a unique opportunity to learn about things that will benefit you for the rest of your life.

You have the opportunity to learn about various home improvement projects and the products that are required to fix, maintain and improve a home. Homeownership is one of the most satisfying accomplishments in life and learning how to maintain a home is an extension of this satisfaction.

### **Helping Customers Solve Problems**

This training course is designed to provide you with extensive product knowledge information in regards to the product you sell because this is what your customers expect

from you. They want detailed product information, including the features and benefits, how it is used and or how it needs to be installed. But most importantly, they want to know how to solve a particular problem.

## **LEARN ABOUT THE PRODUCTS IN YOUR STORE**

Learning as much as you can about the products in your store will enable you to establish expertise and feel more comfortable interacting with customers. You can acquire product knowledge from the following sources:

### **1. From Other Employees**

One of the best ways is to listen to the people who already know about the product. If a customer asks a question and you don't know the answer, ask another store employee or your supervisor for help. Stick around for the complete explanation. Ask questions if there is something you don't understand. The next time that question comes up, you will be able to handle it on your own.

### **2. From Customers**

Another way to learn more about products sold in your store is to talk to your customers. Contractors, builders and homeowners have used a majority of the products in your store. They know from personal experience how well they work. If you see customers with a product you are not familiar

## Basic Training Course in Hardware Retailing

with, ask them if they have used it before. If they have, they will probably be willing to share their success stories with you. Generally, they will tell you what they liked and disliked and any trouble they might have had, which is valuable information.

### 3. From Manufacturer Representatives

These industry professionals are a wealth of knowledge about the products they sell, and many frequently visit stores to conduct clinics or to maintain their displays. They can tell you if a product sells well, how it is made and what this means to your customers. Watching their product demonstrations can help you help your customers.

### 4. From Product Packaging

Many of the product packages now contain information that can be useful to you and your customers. They contain information on how the product is made and how it should be used. Study product packaging carefully and learn as much as you can. Besides the packages, manufacturers often provide videos, catalogs and specification sheets on their products. In some cases, sharing these resources with your customers will make a big difference in their understanding of how the product is used.

### 5. From How-To Resources

Many stores now carry how-to pamphlets, books and videos to help customers with their

projects. While these resources are more project than product oriented, they can contain valuable product information. Many stores have even set up reference areas in the store for customer convenience. Take every opportunity to study as many of these resources as possible. At the very least, you should know where they are located in the store and the type of information each contains.

The North American Retail Hardware Association has 71 different project brochures available in the Customer Service section of this Education and Training Website. They can easily be printed out to give to customers for reference.

### Explain the Features and Benefits

The key to effective selling is to give customers the information they need to make an informed buying decision. What you don't want to do is confuse customers by giving them more information than they want or need. That's why it's best to concentrate on a product's features and benefits when selling to customers.

The features of a product are things like how it is made or what it is made from. The benefit is what the product will do for your customers or what it will help them accomplish.

### Example 1:

A plate in your housewares department is made of an unbreakable material. The unbreakable material is the feature. This unbreakable material resists chipping and breaking. That is the function of the unbreakable material. The benefit to the customer is that the plate will look better longer, will not have to be replaced as often and will save them money.

### Example 2:

A power tool is double insulated. The double insulation is the feature. The function of the double insulation is that it makes it almost impossible for electricity to travel from the tool to the user. The benefit to the user is that the tool is safer to use.

### Where to Find a Product's Features and Benefits

Some of the best sources of help regarding product features and benefits are manufacturer literature, product packaging and the product itself. Study these carefully to discover as much as you can about the product. Usually the manufacturer's literature will do a good job of describing product features. Look for words like metal, plastic, stamped and forged. By looking at the product, it should be easy to see some of its features.

Product literature normally does a good job of describing the product's functions.

Function statements usually contain words like lightweight, durable, unbreakable and resistant.

### SHOW AND TELL

Customers only remember about 10 percent of what they hear. However, they remember about 80 percent of what they see. Therefore you need to show them what they need to remember when considering purchasing a product.

### TACTICS FOR DEMONSTRATING THE PRODUCT:

#### 1. Take it Off the Shelf

If you are helping customers with small products, take two from the shelf and hand one to the customer. Let them have a moment to look at the product or the packaging before answering any specific questions they might have.

#### 2. Point it Out

If possible, point to the part of the product or the packaging that answers their question. If they don't have any questions, begin by talking about the product's benefits to them. If your customers ask questions such as, "What is it made of?" that means they want more information about the product. Go into detail about the product's features, functions and benefits. Whenever possible, refer your customers back to the product or the packaging.

## Basic Training Course in Hardware Retailing

### 3. Touching Leads to Buying

Besides helping your customers remember, the other advantage to placing the product in your customers' hands is that when they touch it they are more likely to buy it. Once the product is in their hands, they start to feel as if they own it.

### 4. Remove it From the Packaging

(If absolutely necessary and within reason). On occasion, your customers may ask if they can remove a product from the package. They might be trying to figure out whether it will fit, or trying to determine if it is made well. Generally, if your store policy allows, this is OK if you can remove the product without damaging the packaging. However, don't allow your customers to take the product out of the package themselves. Also, don't be surprised if your customers ask you to take a product out of the package and then want to buy the same product in an unopened package. Perhaps they are shipping the product or it is going to be given as a present. If removing the product from the packaging is not an option, explain this to the customer and they will probably understand.

### 5. Write it Down

If you are talking with customers about a product that is too large to hold, use resources such as a product brochure to help your selling efforts. But don't hand the brochure to the customer right away. It will

only shift their attention from you to the literature. Instead, hold the resource in your hands. If it is literature that you plan to give to your customers, use a pen or pencil to highlight important facts. Write your name and the store's telephone number on it as well so if the customer doesn't purchase the item on this trip, they will remember the product and your store.

## OVERCOMING OBJECTIONS/CLOSING THE SALE

If a customer expresses an objection to making a purchase, it often means they are very close to actually buying the product. But customers often fear making the wrong decision. So instead of asking more questions they make objections that are many times easily overcome.

Simply asking if a customer found everything they were looking for can many times help start the process to overcoming a customer's objection to making a purchase.

### Asking the Customer to Buy

This section will prepare you to overcome customers' objections and learn how to close the sale, which is a very important part of the sales process. Many times employees go through the entire sales presentation—presenting the product, answering questions and

overcome any objections—but they forget to ask the customer to take action to purchase the product. Overcoming this fear will enhance your selling skills dramatically.

## Overcoming Objections

### Acknowledge The Objection

Simply stating that you understand their concern or their objection, without agreeing with them, might help you start the process to saving the sale.

### Get to the Real Problem

If you allow your customers to give an objection and then simply leave, you will not have helped solve their problem and you will have lost a sale, which doesn't benefit your store or the customer. Take the initiative by asking several final questions before the customer leaves. Focus your questions on the things your customer liked about the product, and be as specific as possible. For example, you might say: "It's the right color," "It has the features you asked for" and "It's the right size." If the customer gives you anything but a positive response, you know that you have gotten to the real objection and where to focus your efforts. Give your customers enough time to respond and never interrupt them. Listen to their complete problem. Then, you need to work to solve their problem. You can do this by finding a product that more closely meets their requirements,

explaining the features differently or matching the color better—whatever it takes to satisfy your customers. If you are truly trying to help your customers, it is worth the effort.

## Overcoming Price Objections

If you still can't get to what a customer's objection to purchasing is after asking questions about a product's features, perhaps the problem is price. The following depicts two types of pricing objections.

### When The Customer Can't Afford It

No matter how well you explain the features, this fact will not change. However, most products come in a good, better or best assortment. If you have been talking about the better or best grade of a particular product, you can take one step down. Explain the differences between the two products. Your customers can consider the product to see if it meets their needs. If the customer still wants the more expensive product, maybe your store has a lay-away or payment plan that will solve the problem.

### When The Customer Doesn't Think A Product is Worth It

The other type of price objection is that your customers do not feel the product is worth the price. This is a question of value.

Customers see products advertised in the newspaper, on television, radio or even on the Internet. They will come into your store

## Basic Training Course in Hardware Retailing

with a product and a price in mind. If your price is higher, they will want to know why. This is where knowing what the competition is offering, especially sale items, can help you help your customers. This gives you the ability to match as closely as possible the product you have to offer with the competition's product. You can explain the features that make your product worth the price. It's always better to explain the positive features of your product. Customers may lose trust in you if you only try to discredit the competition's products.

At times, they may feel the price is just too high. In this instance, you have not established the value of your product. Restate the features, functions and most importantly the benefits. Ask your customers if there is something that your product does or does not do that they wanted. If so, solve their problem by offering alternatives or additional information. If there are any benefits you have not already mentioned, explain them at this time.

### Utilizing Store Services

At times, a customer's purchasing objection is related to something that may not be an issue at all. Perhaps the customer is considering purchasing a large item and doesn't have a way to get it home. If a product requires assembly, they may not feel comfortable putting it together themselves. Customers are often concerned about who will repair a

power tool. As a result, customers may tell you that the product is what they want or need, but that they are still not ready to buy. If your store offers any of these services, now is a good time to bring them up according to the situation.

### Helping Your Customer Make The Right Buying Decision

The right buying decision is determined by your customers' needs. Will the product do the job they need it to do? Can they afford it? Is it what they want? If the answer to these questions is yes, then you may have helped your customers find the right product. However, unless they feel comfortable with the purchase, you may not be able to sell them the product. Put yourself in their position. Try to realize how they feel. Then find out what is bothering them. Help them overcome their hesitations or objections to making a purchase and you will have helped both the customer and your store.

### Closing the Sale

The last and most important aspect of the sales process is closing the sale. Studies show that nearly half of all salespeople never ask the customer to make the final decision to purchase the product.

### Listen and Look For Buying Signals

Many times the customer will let you know

when they are ready for you to close the sale. They might say something like, "This is what I need," or their body language might suggest they are ready by nodding in agreement during your presentation of the product. While customers don't want to be pressured, nearly 8 out of 10 customers expect to be asked to make a purchase.

### Ask Closing Questions

After the product presentation or after you have overcome any objections, the right closing question can wrap everything up. This can be as simple as asking the customer, "Can you think of anything else you need to know before you make your final decision?" or "Can I carry the product to the cashier for you?" for smaller items or "Do you need any help getting this to your car?" for large or bulky items. This will either wrap up the sales presentation or allow the customer to ask any final questions before making the purchase.

### Be Prepared to Overcome Any Final Objections

If the customer asks more questions after you ask the closing question, it's time to once again summarize and review the reasons why you think this product is right for the customer. If the customer is still hesitant, then you might bring up your store's return policy if they decide they don't want the product after purchasing it.

## TELEPHONE SKILLS

As busy as people are today, they will often call ahead to see if you have a particular product or offer a particular service. They might be calling to see if a special order is ready. The fact is there are a number of reasons why customers call your store. Just because you are not standing face to face with the customer doesn't mean you aren't engaged in the selling process.

### It's Basically the Same as In-Person

In fact, you need to do many of the same things you do during the sales process, such as make a good first impression, speak professionally and extend common courtesy by being polite and saying "please" and "thank you."

Be sure to completely understand your store's phone policy and procedures for dealing with customers on the phone. The actions you take on the phone could help your sales efforts tremendously when the customer eventually comes to the store.

#### 1. Answer the Phone Quickly

The general rule is that you should answer the phone by the third ring. Beyond this customers can become irritated and might even make assumptions that they won't receive good service if they do come to the store.

## Basic Training Course in Hardware Retailing

Even worse, they might hang up and decide to go to a different store—without ever giving you a chance.

### **2. Answer the Phone Courteously**

When you do answer the phone always give the store's name first, followed by your name and "How may I help you." This gives the caller an immediate impression that you are ready to help them.

### **3. Write Everything Down**

Callers tend to get down to business on the phone and give most of their information in the first few seconds of the call. Don't be caught off guard. Have a pen and paper ready and write down their question or concern. If they are coming in to pick up merchandise, tell them when it will be ready and where it will be waiting for them. Then take the appropriate measures to make sure this happens.

### **4. Don't Leave Them Hanging**

If you need to put a caller on hold to locate who they want to speak with or to find an answer to their question, let them know it might take a few minutes to get back to them. Ask the caller if this is acceptable. If not, take down their name and number and call them back with an answer to their question or have the person they were calling return their call as soon as possible. If you

page someone using the store's intercom, monitor how long the call is on hold. After several attempts paging the intended individual, check back in with the caller and let them know the person they wish to speak with is currently unavailable and you will have them return their call as soon as possible.

### **5. Thank Them For Calling**

This is another example of common courtesy. Be sure before hanging up to thank them for calling the store and let them know if they have any other questions or concerns, they shouldn't hesitate to call back or come to the store for help.

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## **ADD-ON SELLING**

After the customer has decided to make a purchase, it's time to see if they have everything else they need for the project they are undertaking. While this is called add-on selling, it's also an element of providing customer satisfaction and helping them leave the store with everything they need to complete their project.

### **Product Knowledge Is Key**

To be successful at recommending additional products for particular projects, you need to know as much as possible about the various home improvement projects your customers are undertaking.

## **WHERE TO FIND PROJECT INFORMATION**

### **1. How-To Project Brochures**

In the Customer Service portion of this Education and Training Website, the North American Retail Hardware Association has made available 71 different online project brochures that include step-by-step instructions for the most common home improvement projects. At the end of each project brochure is a listing of all the necessary items needed to complete that particular project that you can go over with the customer before they leave the store. These online brochures can easily be printed out for customers needing more information about how to complete their project.

### **2. Home Improvement Books and Magazines**

There are many books and magazines that have been published detailing specific home improvement projects. Some stores even have them available for customers to purchase. At a minimum, your store should have a library of these resources available for store employees when customers ask about specific home improvement projects.

### **3. The Internet**

The Internet is an excellent resource for information on home improvement projects. Simply type a few key words or phrases into an Internet Search Engine and numerous

websites will come up, many with detailed information and step-by-step instructions.

### **4. Other Employees**

When the opportunity presents itself, listen to other store employees as they work with customers in determining what is needed for their specific project. Listen carefully to what items they recommend as add-on sales.

### **5. In Store Project Demonstrations/Clinics**

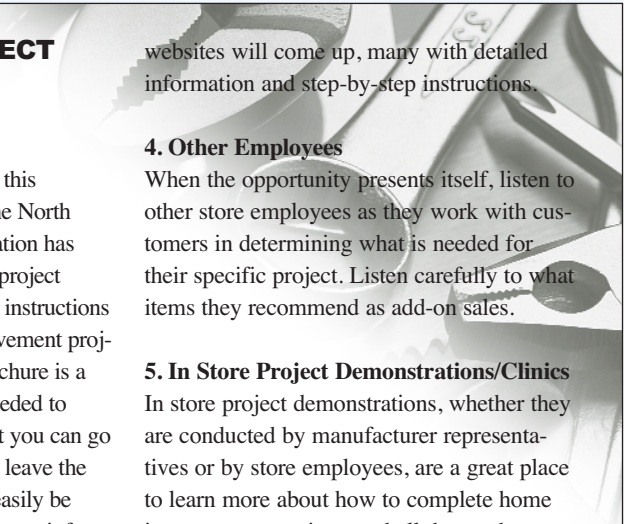
In store project demonstrations, whether they are conducted by manufacturer representatives or by store employees, are a great place to learn more about how to complete home improvement projects and all the products that are needed.

### **6. Your Own Do-It-Yourself Activity**

There's nothing quite like tackling a project yourself to fully understand how to not only explain it to customers, but to recommend all the products they will need to complete the job.

### **7. Product Packaging**

Many times product packaging will tell you what else is needed to assemble or install a particular product. For example, a light fixture might tell what type of light bulb is required. When using any of these project knowledge resources, be sure to make note of all the products required to complete the project—no matter how small or insignificant.



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### **Add-On Sales Techniques**

As you talk with your customers about the project they are undertaking, you need to listen for clues. Have your customers completed this type of project before? If so, how long ago? Maybe products and procedures have changed since then? If they have not done it before, how much information do they already have?

### **Make a List**

Listen to your customers as they tell you what they need. If it is a long list, ask to see it. If they do not have a list, pull out your note pad and write it down. After you have helped your customers with their items, look at their list again. Now think about or refer to your related items list. Is there a tool or product that will help them do the job better? Perhaps there is something they did not have listed that they may need. Start with products that are most likely to be used. Most importantly listen and watch your customers. They will tell you by their words or their actions if you have gone from being helpful to being annoying. With practice, you will learn how to stop before you have gone too far.

### **Anticipate Their Needs**

Sometimes your recommendations may not make sense to your customers. You will need to be able to explain yourself. For

example, if your customers are purchasing copper fittings think beyond the obvious related items such as solder and flux. While they may have a propane tank at home, how much fuel is left in the tank? Chances are your customer won't know for sure. And when they are in the crawl space or under the sink or in the basement is not a good time to find out it is empty. Power tool accessories like saw blades, screwdriver bits and drill bits fall into this category as well.

### **Focus on How Much They Are Saving By Doing it Themselves**

Many times the act of doing a project themselves will justify a major purchase to help customers get the job done easier and faster. For example, a new power tool might help them complete their project faster and more efficiently. The worst thing that can happen is not that they will bring the tool back if they don't need it. The worst thing is if they don't buy it and get home and realize they do need it and buy it somewhere else.

### **Remember You Are Providing Solutions**

Your customers have come to your store to help them solve a problem. They are the only ones who can decide whether you are selling products they really don't need or really trying to help them. If you are effective at helping your customers meet their needs, they will come back to your store and ask for your help again. Only quality

customer service and helping them get everything they need will help ensure their return.

