

“Just Looking”

Regardless of your work in retail, what type of store you manage, or operate, you’ve no doubt heard these two words more times that you care to remember. Over the years, I have come to understand just how much these words annoy, frustrate, and aggravate sales people. This frustration is magnified when situations like this occur: A customer enters your store, you greet them, and they respond with the standard “just looking”. Two or three seconds later they ask, “Do you have...?” You check yourself, containing your potentially caustic, sarcastic reply. Why is it that consumers say this?

First, it is a conditioned response. Years of shopping and dealing with sales people has caused consumers to say blurt out this phrase reflexively. We know from our experience that buyer will respond with this even when they’ve been asked a question such as “How’s the weather today?” We **must** understand and accept that this response is simply a conditioned response.

The second reason people say this is that until they actually buy something, they **are** just looking. They have not yet made a decision, they haven’t agreed to purchase anything, nor have they taken out their wallets and handed over their cash or credit card. *They are just looking!*

Here are two tips on how you can overcome the “just looking” response.

1. **Use humor.** When people enter our stores they are often apprehensive. If we can create an opportunity for them to smile or laugh we will help them become comfortable. It is physiologically impossible for someone to remain tense when they are smiling or laughing. Responses such as:

“You picked a great day to look. It’s 50% cheaper today than it was yesterday.”

“Feel free. It’s one of the few things that the government hasn’t been able to tax yet.”

When stated in a positive, non-condescending manner, these replies can disarm the customer’s natural tendency to be defensive. Using a humorous response can be the perfect icebreaker to help get the sale moving without making the customer feel threatened.

2. **Vary your greeting.** Let’s take a moment and view the shopping from the customer’s perspective for a moment. We’ve been in a busy mall shopping for several. We’ve been into countless stores and in most of them have been greeted in a similar fashion:

“Hi, how are you today?”

“Hi, how’s it going?”

Is it any wonder we receive a conditioned response? Vary your greetings with all of your customers, differentiate yourself from all the others stores in your mall, separate yourself from the competition.

“You look like you’re on a mission. What can I do to help?”

“That’s an amazing picture on that TV isn’t it?”

“These beds are great for having pillow fights!”

By varying your greeting when you first approach the customer you can give them reason not to respond with the conditioned response.

These two techniques are simple and easy to use. Yet, they are also very effective. They will help you to break out of the habitual greetings you generally use. Try them, work them into your natural style, and incorporate them into your presentation. And don't allow that conditioned response to distract you from the real issue at hand...taking care of your customer!

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